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Mompreneur Immunity: An Exploration of Meaning-Making and Relational Support of Self-Employed Women with Children

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Mompreneur Immunity: An Exploration of Meaning-Making and Relational Support of Self-Employed Women with Children

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Abstract

The 21st century has seen a substantial increase in female entrepreneurship. A large portion of these entrepreneurs are mothers who combine entrepreneurship with looking after their children, also known as "mompreneurs" (Collins English Dictionary, 2011). Given the current growth of women-owned businesses (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2018), it is especially important to examine the work-life experiences of women who are creating and sustaining entrepreneurial ventures while raising children. There are few studies that address mompreneurship (Ekinsmyth, 2011; Lewis, 2010; Nel, Maritz, & Thongprovati, 2010), leaving an empirical gap in understanding the experiences of mother entrepreneurs. This dissertation addresses the question of how women with dependent children thrive personally and professionally while growing businesses. The study aims to understand how these mompreneurs feel about their businesses, their families, and themselves as they navigate their personal and professional realms. It specifically explores how meaning-making of these mompreneurs' learning and personal development and relational support contribute to their success and sense of self. Using a qualitative, phenomenological research design, this study examines the experiences of twelve mother entrepreneurs through three theoretical frameworks: Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive developmental theory, Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, and relational cultural theory (Jordan, 2017; Miller, 1976). The study's findings reveal that there are two key components that enable mompreneurs to thrive: personal growth through learning and meaning-making, and supportive relationships. The study proposes a mompreneur immunity model to explain how mother entrepreneurs thrive and build immunity to the challenges faced in their journeys. This research extends the existing literature by highlighting the experiences and the voices of mother entrepreneurs, an understudied and overlooked population in empirical research.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my seven-year-old daughter Emerson. May your strength, your inner compass, your confidence and your relationships guide you in stepping into your highest path and your highest self in this life. May this little piece of work, even in the tiniest of ways, be an opening to help expand understanding and empower women in your generation and beyond to think freely and creatively about integrating work and family and joy. The most valuable and unexpected lesson illuminated to me as I reflected on this research and these women's stories was how becoming your mom has fueled such a huge source of my inner strength. Modeling to you a genuinely joyful, fulfilled, and empowered woman lights a fire in my being that fuels me to face my fears every single day, despite how scary life's unexpected twists and turns may be. Thank you for choosing me as your Mommy, Emerson. It has been the greatest honor, the most humbling lesson, and the most beautiful gift life has given me. Mommy loves you to the moon and back.

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patience with my grammar and APA struggles! You have seen me through the most difficult periods of my life, and I can't express how much it means to me that you never gave up on me when there were many times I was convinced I couldn't possibly keep going. I am also grateful for the privilege to work with my dissertation committee members, Dr. Pat Bentley from MIT Sloan and Dr. Amy Rutstein-Riley. Their contributions, feedback, and expertise has helped me to expand my thinking about this research, strengthen my role as a researcher, and put together a quality study that addresses a critical gap in the current research.

Although I am the only one in my family crazy enough to complete not only college, but a PhD, I owe it all to my parents, Linda and Craig. While you may not have always understood my insatiable thirst for learning since I was a child, you have always lovingly supported all of my ambitions in life and sacrificed your own time and resources and energy to do everything you could to see me reach as high as I could in life, including this PhD. Whether it was taking care of Emerson, or reminding me of my own self-care as I hit many dark, personal challenges in recent years, or providing me strength or a safe place to stay or a shoulder to cry on when my ground left my feet, I knew I could count on your support at any point. Thank you, mom and dad, I love you.

Thank you to my partner Julien for being such a beacon of light and support in my life these past few years. You are a rock in my life. There are no words that can truly express the lessons you've taught me, and the sacrifices you've made to support me and stand strong where others ran away. You are such a compassionate being with so much love to give and the day I said I'm giving up on this PhD in the midst of unimaginable life challenges, you held my hand and helped me stay the course. Every time I've felt lost, you've held a mirror to my inner strength and helped me find my way back to myself again, and this PhD was no exception.

Thank you for the love and light you shine on my life. I've always said that I've signed up for the path of truth versus the path of comfort in life, even if it is more uncertain, riskier, rockier and more uncomfortable. And I know this hasn't been an easy, fairytale ending for us. But it has been real and raw and full of truth and growth and I am constantly stretched outside my comfort zone to be a better, more compassionate, more genuine human being and I wouldn't want it any other way. I am grateful you exist.

And finally, thank you to God and the Universe and every friend, teacher, mentor, colleague, earth angel and heavenly angel placed on my path. I am grateful for my faith in a higher power, and the guidance and protection that I know has been here by my side even when the world felt turned against me. Thank you to everyone and everything that has helped this body of research come into existence and made these women's voices heard. I am grateful.

Felicia Newhouse

October 15, 2018

Chapter One: Introduction

In recent decades, a substantial increase in female entrepreneurship and how women define entrepreneurial roles around the world has transformed traditional career roles for women. Female business owners run one-third of all American businesses–a jump of 30% from 2007 to 2018 (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2018). Women are increasingly opting out of traditional career choices for entrepreneurship and this option can be an opportunity to redefine their career-life path on their own terms, combining authenticity, balance, and challenge (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Compared with traditionally employed women, women entrepreneurs reportedly experience "higher autonomy, self-development and satisfaction" (Bates, Denmark, Held, Helly, & York, 2005, p. 39).

A large portion of these women entrepreneurs are mothers who launch small home-based businesses, also known as "mompreneurs" (Cobe & Parlapiano, 2002). Mompreneurs are defined as mothers who choose to leave their roles as a full-time stay at home moms or full-time positions with employers in exchange for starting up their own business and are "balancing work and family responsibilities under one roof" (p. 5). Baebler and Galloway (2014) note that "when a woman puts the word mom in front of the word entrepreneur, it is a way of signifying where her priorities are. It won't work for her to become wildly successful at the expense of her family" (p. 8). As both mothers and entrepreneurs, mompreneurs often juggle multiple roles under one roof across childcare, household and business ownership (Rehman & Azam Roomi, 2012; Shelton, 2006).

Designing career paths on their own terms may be more attractive for women who seek to balance paid employment and mothering work, particularly for women in 'fast-track' careers who either suffer a motherhood penalty after a market re-entry (Weisshaar, 2018) or continue to

receive fewer promotions and less pay than their male counterparts in similar positions (Mason & Ekman, 2007). Given the current growth of women-owned businesses (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2018), it is especially important to examine the work-life experiences of women who are creating and sustaining entrepreneurial ventures while raising children. While a few studies address the concept of mompreneurship (Ekinsmyth, 2011; Lewis, 2010; Nel, Maritz, & Thongprovati, 2010), the topic for the most part is still in its infancy in the empirical realm, and statistics are lacking. This gap in the empirical literature combined with my own professional and personal experiences with mother entrepreneurs in the world is what drove me to pursue a doctoral education and to shed more light on this overlooked, but growing population.

This research study uses qualitative methodology to explore the phenomenon of mompreneurs growing a business while raising children, and the implications of their social support and meaning making structures. This study focuses on a diverse sample of twelve mompreneurs, ages 37 to 52, who have dependent children, are currently full-time entrepreneurs, and have started a new business in the past ten years. The study aims to understand how they feel about their businesses, their families, and themselves as they navigate their personal and professional realms. Chapter one provides an overview of the context and background that frames the study. Following this is the rationale, problem statement, and guiding research question. This chapter will conclude with a discussion about the research approach and the dissertation structure.

Research Context and Background

Women are increasingly opting out of traditional paid work for entrepreneurship and the U.S. Census Bureau (2015) showed that women-owned businesses in the U.S. generated $1.4

trillion, up 18.7% from 2007. Seventy-two percent of female entrepreneurs chose to have home-based businesses, compared to just 61% of men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015; U.S. Census Household Economic Studies, 2012). A large, but overlooked, portion of these women entrepreneurs are mothers who launch small home-based businesses, also known as "mompreneurs" (Cobe & Parlapiano, 2002).

Researchers have suggested that deeply embedded views about gender, such as ideal leader stereotypes and a bias towards men for promotions, combined with an unequal burden of childcare, household responsibilities, and spouse relocation, are the main drivers prompting women to transition out of traditional paid work (Cabrera, 2007; McIntosh, McQuaid, Munro, & Dabir-Alai, 2012; Nsiah, Debeaumont, & Ryerson, 2013). Belkin (2003) uses *opting out* as a term to describe educated professional women who have "scaled down or redefined their roles in the crucial career-building years" (p. 25). After decades of decline, trends now show that the percentage of stay-at-home mothers is expected to continue to rise, with a modern-era low of 23% in 1999 increasing to 29% in 2012 (Cohn, Livington, Wang, Creswell, & Oaks, 2013).

Studies show that childcare costs have skyrocketed and paying for two children in childcare now exceeds rent for over 80% of families in the U.S. (Economic Policy Institute, 2015). This forces many women into a position where they are paying to work, rather than working for pay. As such, opting out of work to care for their children becomes a financial requirement for many of today's mothers (Nsiah et al., 2013). Other women choose to opt out for part-time jobs, but studies show that women often report receiving boring roles as part of their flexible part-time work, possibly because employers believe they want less challenging work, therefore removing them from consideration for promotions (Ely, Stone, & Ammerman, 2014).

In addition to staying at home and taking on more flexible jobs, mothers are also increasingly opting out of traditional employment for entrepreneurship. There are a number of reasons why mothers may start a new business, with an often cited reason being the flexibility it offers them to pursue a career while taking care of children (Still & Walker, 2006). In addition to having the flexibility to care for their children, women also may start a new business due to personal health issues, family obligations such as caring for aging parents (Mattis, 2004), or other personal reasons such as death of a family member or divorce. For mothers searching for self-fulfillment outside of family care, entrepreneurship can be a complementary and financially rewarding addition to unpaid home labor, while also building a sense of self-worth and purpose (Moore & Buttner, 2001). A 2017 survey by 99 Designs reveals that 71% of mother entrepreneurs serve as the primary childcare provider and regularly put in a "second shift" after their children go to bed (Hochschild, 2012), and 69% cite flexibility as the top advantage of owning their own business.

The entrepreneurial literature to date has primarily examined the belonging and relational processes around how women engage with the entrepreneurship community (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Rotefoss & Kolvereid, 2005), how women start up a new business venture (Mallon & Cohen, 2001; Patterson & Mavin, 2009), and how they access entrepreneurial resources (Carter, Brush, Greene, Gatewood, & Hart, 2003; Foss, 2010). Grounded in everyday social interactions, the concept of belonging can help us connect the more formal areas of entrepreneurial business activities with more informal social practices. Relationships organically go in and out of periods of connection, disconnection, and reconnection (Miller, 1976) and therefore it can be important to understand how mother entrepreneurs are impacted by the various relationships in their lives.

The literature shows that for both women and men, personal and professional support while starting up a business is closely connected to overall confidence and business success (Hampton, Cooper, & McGowan, 2009; Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Patterson & Mavin, 2009). Hanlon and Saunders (2007) use social support theory to examine how male and female entrepreneurs have different social support needs and have different reactions to personal and professional support when it is offered. Relational cultural theory, or RCT, is based on the idea that interpersonal connection, rather than isolation, is the foundation for positive psychological development and growth (Jordan, 2017).

Bruin, Brush, and Welter (2007) suggest that an entrepreneur's intentions are shaped by a person's self-perception and societal support, and society still mainly defines women through family and household responsibilities, which may create self-imposed barriers and lower normative support for women creating new ventures. The literature shows that personal and professional support while starting up a business is closely connected to overall confidence and business success (Hampton et al., 2009; Hanlon & Saunders, 2007; Patterson & Mavin, 2009). Studies suggest that the extent to which women feel accepted and supported within the entrepreneurial community affects how their entrepreneurial identity develops and how successful they are in growing their ventures and accessing critical business resources (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Foss, 2010; Patterson & Mavin, 2009; Rotefoss & Kolvereid, 2005). Partners, career counselors, coworkers, and extended networks of friends and family create social support for entrepreneurs that is critical for confidence, learning, and information sharing that may affect business success or failure (Hampton et al., 2009; Schultheiss, 2005).

Little research has been done around relational processes and belonging in the lived experiences of mompreneurs. If a mother's entrepreneurial identity is constrained, then her

ability to develop a sense of belonging to a business or entrepreneurship community may be compromised. Conversely, if her entrepreneurial identity is nurtured by her relationships and support structures, then her sense of belonging may be more intact, thereby helping her thrive. Various types of relational support in a mother's life can build a solid emotional foundation and better equip her to deal the stress that may come with career development issues (Blustein, Prezioso, & Schultheiss, 1995; Motulsky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2009).

In addition to external support structures and relationships, a woman's ability to sustain a healthy level of confidence can also play an important role in the success of her business. Fielden, Davidson, Dawe, and Makin (2003) suggested that "a lack of confidence is perhaps the greatest barrier to women's progression into micro and small business ownership, which inhibits all aspects of their entry into business" (p. 162). Self-efficacy is typically described as a person's belief that he or she is capable of succeeding or successfully performing a certain task (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Developing higher levels of self-efficacy may sustain female entrepreneurs' efforts related to the challenging situations that occur as a result of uncovering new opportunities and in the balancing of work-life issues (Erdwins, Buffardi, Casper, & Brien, 2001). Self-efficacy can help build the strong foundation necessary for the development of self-management, thought processes, and the skills necessary for a successful career (Bandura, 1997). Positive relationships and support systems may help women entrepreneurs identify unhealthy emotional states and negative internal beliefs that prevent them from growing and gaining momentum in working towards their personal and professional goals. Little research to date has focused deeply on understanding women entrepreneurs and the role of self-efficacy, particularly for women who have children. This study can further empirical knowledge in the field by examining the role of

self-efficacy in mothers' entrepreneurial ventures, as well as the potential impact of outside

factors such as family, professional support, and educational programs.

Research Rationale

Seven years ago, I found myself raising a baby while burning out at a corporate job and

witnessed many mothers around me find greater personal and professional satisfaction with

entrepreneurial pursuits, I developed an interest in conducting research on mompreneurs. After

eventually making the leap myself from corporate work to entrepreneurship while also pursuing

my doctorate on the same subject, I quickly realized how much personal growth, development,

and change can happen in a short period of time, and how much support I needed to hold

everything together. As I got more involved in starting networking groups and non-profit work

for mother entrepreneurs in the United States and abroad, I witnessed many women from

different backgrounds struggle with confidence, loneliness, and an overall lack of support. I

wondered how I could explore, through an educational frame in my doctoral work, how these

women learn about themselves during their entrepreneurial journey, and how they could be better

supported in order to thrive.

The purpose of this study is to better understand and document the stories of

mompreneurs, and to provide educators, counselors and policymakers with empirical knowledge

on ways to support the growth and success of these women. Research on this population can

raise awareness of mompreneurs' personal experiences, which may, ultimately, provide

institutions and professionals further understanding on how to support them in their journeys.

Women entrepreneurs engage in a wide array of personal and professional identities, roles, and

social support spheres that are interdependent and interconnected in complex ways. This study

addresses gaps in the literature on how mompreneurs construct meaning of their experiences and

the role of support structures in their working and personal lives. Greater understanding of the experiences contained within the mother entrepreneur phenomenon may also lead to the creation of educational programs and systems to support this growing population.

Research on mompreneurs has the potential to educate and empower women to be advocates for themselves and become leaders in their work. The context of education can take on various forms with this population. Education may refer to educators, coaches and institutions who engage with the mompreneur population and seek to better understand them as students and clients. This research may expand understanding on how they learn, evolve and transform from their experiences as mothers and business owners. While this particular study focuses exclusively on women in the U.S., it may open doors for expanding literature on mother entrepreneurs globally. Research demonstrates that empowering women around the world increases economic productivity, improves quality of life for the next generation of children, and creates institutions and policies that are more inclusive of women (World Bank, 2012).

Research Question

This research project was designed to examine how self-employed women with children view social support and their own developing sense of self as they negotiate their various career-life roles, including mothering. The primary guiding and overarching question addressed in this research project is: How do women perceive themselves as they grow new businesses while raising children and particularly, how does their sense of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and their relational connections influence their meanings of self?

Research Paradigm

The overall purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore how women entrepreneurs experience support and a sense of self as they build businesses while raising

children. Qualitative research helps us make meaning of participants' experiences in their own

words (Merriam & Francisco, 2009) and phenomenology helps us identify common experiences

and themes that all participants have within a particular phenomenon (Creswell, Hanson, Plano,

& Morales, 2007). By framing this study within feminist and relational theories, this study can

explore the relational processes of women entrepreneurs and how they navigate feelings of

belonging within external and internal support structures. Feminist thought involves examining

women's structural subordination to men (Calas, Smircich, In, Clegg, & London, 1996) and

taking a social constructionist position within this frame allows for the recognition of women's

structural subordination to men and recognizes gender as a social construct (Calas et al., 1996;

Harding, 1987). Relational theory (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976) is based on women's

psychological development and socialization and provides a frame for this study to highlight the

unique dimensions around how mother entrepreneurs navigate the interwoven relational

complexities of both business ownership and parenting.

Using a qualitative research methodology and phenomenological research design, this

study explores the experiences of twelve mother entrepreneurs through three theoretical

frameworks: Kegan's (1982) constructive developmental theory, Bandura's (1977) social

cognitive theory, and relational cultural theory (Jordan, 2017; Miller, 1976). These theories

provide a lens to examine how mompreneurs make meaning of their experiences, and how social

support systems and sense of self develop during their journeys. This study also proposes a new

model to help frame the findings in this study, called the mompreneur immunity model. This

model explains how mother entrepreneurs thrive and build immunity to the challenges faced on

their journeys. This model underscores the importance of understanding how support and

meaning-making work in a collaborative manner to strengthen immunity to outside forces that

otherwise could erode sustainability and resiliency for the mompreneur, her family and her business. In addition to contributing to the field of education and adult learning, this contributes to the entrepreneurship literature, which to date has not analyzed mother entrepreneurs and their developing sense of self through this theoretical lens.

Organization of Dissertation

In this dissertation, I present my examination of the journeys of twelve women mompreneurs from a variety of backgrounds as they grow businesses while raising dependent children. In chapter two, I discuss the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks that frame the study including social cognitive theory, social support theory, feminist theory, relational cultural theory, and women's entrepreneurship literatures. Chapter three discusses the methodology and provides information on data collection methods and research design. In chapter four, I share narrative summaries of each mompreneur participant to provide insight into each individual's entrepreneurial journey before examining the emergent themes amongst the participants' collective experience. Chapter five consists of a detailed presentation of the findings; this is followed by a discussion of the findings and an introduction of the mompreneur immunity model in chapter six. In conclusion, chapter seven summarizes the key findings as well as discusses limitations, contributions to the field, and implications for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review lays the groundwork for understanding mother entrepreneurs and the social and environmental contexts that may affect their social support and sense of self while pursuing entrepreneurship. Three areas will be explored throughout the literature review: a) research on women entrepreneurs and mothers' career journeys while raising children; b) social contexts of this phenomenon; and c) the theoretical frameworks and relevant studies for my particular topic on mother entrepreneurs. This study's three theoretical frameworks are Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive developmental theory, Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, and relational cultural theory (Jordan, 2017; Miller, 1976). These theories provide a lens to examine how mompreneurs make meaning of their experiences, and how social support systems and a sense of self-efficacy develop during their journeys. Combined with literature on feminist perspectives and recent research conducted on women entrepreneurs, these frameworks allow for a comprehensive examination of the combined effects of entrepreneurship and mothering on women's personal and professional experiences.

Constructive development

Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive developmental theory(CDT) of human development explores the principles that individuals use to interpret and make meaning of their experiences, and how the construction of these experiences becomes more complex over time. An adult development theory rooted in Jean Piaget's (1977) work, CDT is "constructive" in that it frames an individual's meaning-making constructions, and it is "developmental" in that it frames how those meaning-making constructions grow more complex over time. CDT, therefore, is focused on understanding how an individual's sense of self and the world evolves over time, both as a natural unfolding as well as a reaction to challenges and limitations of the existing meaning-

making system. This perspective strives to understand how a "person's beliefs construct the reality in which he lives, and the way these beliefs can change or develop over time" (Kegan, Broderick, Drago-Severson, Helsing, Popp, & Portnow, 2001, p. 3). As individuals learn from and make sense of their life experiences through their own unique interpretive lens, their meaning-making systems may gradually evolve and grow more complex. Their interpretive lens filters the way they will absorb, organize, understand, and interpret their experiences and is central to the development of their identity.

CDT is based on the concept of "transformation" as an individual learns about themselves and their world and evolves through different stages of meaning-making (Kegan, 1982, 1994). Kegan et al. (2001) explains that transformation is not just about gaining new knowledge or skills, but also about shifting to entirely new meaning-making systems from which knowledge is seeded. Transformation to a more evolved and complex internal meaning-making system enables an individual to better deal with external conflicting demands and uncertainty. Kegan (2000) emphasizes that individuals can experience a wide range of transformations, including "one's fund of knowledge, one's confidence as a learner, one's self-perception as a learner, one's motives in learning, one's self esteem . . . all worthy of teachers' thinking about how to facilitate them" (p. 50).

In addition to transformation, self-authorship is a theoretical framework within CDT that provides a way of understanding the process through which individuals make meaning of their experiences. Named by Kegan (1994), self-authorship goes beyond critical thinking or problem solving and encompasses internal decision-making that relies on sophisticated and complex ways of seeing oneself and one's relations with others (Baxter Magolda, 2004). According to Baxter Magolda, a fully developed sense of self-authorship allows an individual to simultaneously

construct an internal identity separate from, but sensitive to, others' perspectives without being

consumed by them.

A constructive-developmental framework is important and relevant for this study on

mother entrepreneurs as it can allow for a deeper look at the underlying principles of each

mompreneur's belief system and how it shapes her experiences. By gaining a more

comprehensive understanding of these belief systems and the multifaceted ways women have

changed during their entrepreneurial journey, we can improve our understanding of the ways in

which mompreneurs learn about themselves, their developing entrepreneurial identity, and the

world around them. We gain a better understanding of what different mompreneurs need in order

to learn and thrive during their entrepreneurial endeavors. We also gain a better understanding of

how identity develops, and how it may continue to develop based on internal meaning-making

processes. The demanding social and entrepreneurial roles and responsibilities of mompreneurs

may require expanded capacities mentally and emotionally as well as quick learning processes to

navigate challenging terrain personally and professionally. According to Kegan et al. (2001), the

evolution from a simpler to a more complex way of knowing depends on the level of support,

challenges, and encouragement that surround an individual. Kegan's constructive-developmental

theory provides a frame to more fully understand the types of transformations contained within

mompreneurs' lived experiences.

CDT encompasses five distinct stages, or "orders of consciousness" or "ways of

knowing" that evolve over the human lifespan (Kegan, 1994). Each of the five orders of

consciousness has its own description of an independent meaning-making system that

symbolizes a logical way of making sense of the world. Since the first and second stages are

typically demonstrated in young children and adolescents, this study will focus on the third

through fifth orders of meaning-making that are relevant for the adult mother entrepreneurs in this study.

People making meaning at the third order of consciousness, also known as the socialized mind, may begin to transition during adolescence. However, this stage is mainly seen in adults. Kegan (1994) shows that 45% of adults aged 19 to 55 make meaning at the third order of consciousness. At the third order, an individual is capable of being guided by the norms of their meaning-making system, rather than by raw desire and impulse alone. Individuals at this stage are now able to internalize the ideas and emotions of others and are able to be guided by external ideologies, institutions, or people that are important to them. They are heavily influenced by what they believe others want to hear, particularly if others represent ideologies that are important to them. Kegan (1982) points out that the concept of self-esteem is inappropriate at this stage of consciousness because it requires an independently-constructed self to feel good. While they are able to commit to something greater than their own self-serving needs, third order individuals may struggle to develop a sense of self and identify with what they truly want when caught in decision-making between conflicting ideologies or people.

As an example of a third order individual, a mompreneur may have been raised to believe that it is important to be a committed, hands-on mother, and also believes it is important to be hard-working and dedicated in her career. However, she has trouble internally negotiating which ideal to choose during a situation where she is caught between attending her daughter's dance recital or an important, yet unexpected, client meeting. Turning to others to help resolve this internal conflict may result in further confusion if there is no clear external advice. Since she relies on the beliefs of others and what they want her to do, her sense of self is still completely reliant on others and she may feel "in over her head" much of the time as she navigates decisions

(Kegan, 1994). The demands of being a mother to young children and also growing a financially

viable business requires mompreneurs to navigate between different ideologies, institutions, and

key people in their lives. This may cause stress, but also transformation. Kegan points out that

being at the third order is not a personality flaw needing to be fixed—rather, it is a critical and

necessary point on the human developmental continuum.

An individual at the fourth order, also known as the self-authoring way of knowing, has

the ability to create and author her own internal belief system. She is now able to leverage her

own self-governing system to mediate between simultaneously conflicting rule-systems and

opinions to arrive at her own internalized truth. While she still honors and internalizes the ideas

of others, the fourth order individual is ultimately self-guided, self-motivated, self-evaluative and

self-correcting (Kegan, 1994). For example, in the earlier case of the mother torn between her

daughter and her client, at the fourth order she would look within herself to reflect rather than

placing her truth outside herself. She would not feel conflicted by different external opinions and

meaning-making systems because she would have her own system for decision making. Rather

than get stuck in one single role at odds with another role (business owner vs. mother), she could

coordinate all of the roles of her life (parent, partner, entrepreneur) into one whole self. Research

shows that between 18% and 34% of adults between 19 and 55 operate at the fourth order of

consciousness (Kegan, 1994).

Kegan (1994) claims that only 3% to 6% of adults aged 19-55 ever experience

consciousness at the fifth order, or self-transforming way of knowing, and it is rarely reached

before midlife. Individuals at the fifth order encompass the learning of all other stages, yet they

also have learned the limits of their own internal meaning-making system and do not fully

identify with any one meaning-making system. This type of belief system allows individuals to

make themselves vulnerable by seeing unity across a wide variety of meaning-making systems to identify the similarities that are hidden within what formerly was viewed as differences. Berger (2003) claims that at the fifth order of consciousness, individuals experience "the ground constantly shift and change, but rather than feeling such seismic changes as an earthquake, they expect them and lean into them the way one might lean into playful rapids on a river" (p. 57). The mompreneur at this order may shift her focus from the challenges and hardships that come from the demands of her multiple roles, and instead find peace and enjoyment in the transformative learning process through new experiences, connections and possibilities.

For a mompreneur, her daily experiences and evolving roles at home, with her family, with her business, in the community, and beyond, require her to transform her meaning-making system in order to successfully persist with growing her venture. Kegan's (1994) orders of consciousness provides a framework to understand how mompreneurs make meaning of their journey and learn about themselves and their world in new ways as they grow businesses while raising children. Combining constructive developmental theory with social cognitive theory and relational cultural theory provides a much more comprehensive understanding of how mompreneurs' social contexts and internal meaning-making systems impact how they navigate their entrepreneurial journeys.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory (SCT), which started in the 1960s as social learning theory by Albert Bandura (1986), focuses on how individuals learn from their life experiences, the behavior of others, and their interaction with their environment. SCT argues that human behavior is the result of learning in a social context with reciprocal interactions between people, environments, and behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1997) refers to this concept as

reciprocal determinism, where environments influence behavior, and behavior influences environments. Self-efficacy, a core building block of SCT, can be defined as a person's self-judgment of whether he or she is capable of succeeding or successfully performing a certain task (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Bandura (1997) suggests that there are three critical components of self-efficacy: a) level of task difficulty; b) generalizability across different tasks and circumstances; and c) strength of a belief that difficult tasks can be achieved. The central motivator that empowers people to conquer difficult tasks in challenging environments is "the core belief that one has the power to produce desired effects" (Bandura & Locke, 2003, p. 87).

A woman's level of confidence and whether she believes she can bring her business to profitability can play an important role in the success of her business. Fielden, Davidson, Dawe, and Makin (2003) suggested that "a lack of confidence is perhaps the greatest barrier to women's progression into micro and small business ownership, which inhibits all aspects of their entry into business" (p. 162). An individual's self-confidence is rooted in memories of past experiences related to certain activities and the beliefs one holds about his or her ability to achieve specific goals (Bong & Clark, 1999). In distinguishing between self-confidence and self-efficacy, Bandura (1997) notes:

> The construct of self-efficacy differs from the colloquial term "confidence." Confidence is a nondescript term that refers to strength of belief but does not necessarily specify what the certainty is about. I can be supremely confident that I will fail at an endeavor. Perceived self-efficacy refers to belief in one's agentive capabilities, that one can produce given levels of attainment. (p. 382)

Research suggests that individuals with positive self-views are more likely to overcome challenges and reach their goals, while individuals with lower self-esteem or negative self-views

are less likely to reach their fullest potential (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). Kirkwood (2009a) conducted a study on women entrepreneurs to understand how self-confidence impacts their decision to start a company as well as the sustainability of the enterprise. The findings highlighted that at all stages of business ownership, women entrepreneurs showed lower levels of confidence than their male counterparts. Women were also found to be less likely to call themselves entrepreneurs and, even after establishing a business, are more likely to struggle with confidence. Moore (2001) suggested that women have a greater tendency than men to avoid challenging situations until they feel they have the appropriate level of skills necessary to be successful in their business pursuit. Branden (1994) states that "self-esteem has profound consequences for every aspect of our existence" (p. 5), and, more specifically, that he "cannot think of a single psychological problem—from anxiety and depression, to fear of intimacy or of success—that is not traceable to the problem of low self-esteem" (p. 12). Therefore, developing higher levels of self-efficacy may shield a mother entrepreneur from psychological issues that could derail her from conquering challenging business situations and balancing work-life issues.

According to Lazear (2005), it is critical for entrepreneurs to develop the ability to identify new or unique business opportunities and develop the necessary resources that allow them to leverage those opportunities for their intended vision and set of goals. Perceived or real intrinsic or extrinsic barriers can pose significant roadblocks for entrepreneurs as they grow their business (Hatala, 2005). Bandura (1997) suggests that self-efficacy is a more complex concept than simply having faith in oneself, and includes major psychological processes that affect current and future behavior, including resiliency. For the mother entrepreneur, bouncing back after she is challenged may be important to be able to sustain her business. Researchers have

suggested that self-efficacy plays a central role in women's ability to effectively overcome work

and family challenges (Erdwins et al., 2001). Therefore, self-efficacy is a critical area for the

mother entrepreneur to develop within herself to bring greater balance to her work and home life

(Kephart & Schumacher, 2005). Perceived self-efficacy can also be influenced and developed

through social support, external validation, and modeling others, such as a mentor (Bandura,

1997). Therefore, in order to understand how mother entrepreneurs learn about themselves

through their business development, it is important to combine theoretical lenses such as

constructive development theory and social cognitive theory with the social support aspects of

relational cultural theory.

Relational cultural theory

Given the centrality of relationships within human development, this study uses relational

cultural theory (RCT) to examine mompreneurs' perceptions and experiences as they grow

businesses while raising children (Jordan, 2013). Many feminist theorists have studied how

mentors can cultivate supportive relationships for women that foster positive development and

sense of self (Brown & Gilligan, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, 2017; Miller, 1976). Miller

(1976) developed relational cultural theory to view women's psychological developments and

accomplishments within a relational frame. RCT was developed after Jean Baker Miller (1976)

published *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, and argued the core idea that women grow

through and toward connection. Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons and Salazer

(2008) described this relational movement as, "the process of moving through connections;

through disconnections; and back into new, transformative, and enhanced connections with

others" (p. 282). Gilligan's (2015) Listening Guide, a qualitative research method, aligns with

this theoretical approach as it carefully traces voices of disconnection and connection or

simultaneous voices representing multiple identities.

       In contrast to typical Western principles that promote self, autonomy and competition,

relational cultural theory argues that the sense of self is inherently relational and that authentic,

loving connection in relationship is a vital human need (Hinchman, 2003). Jordan (2017)

describes five core components of healthy relationships that encourage positive growth:

increased self-efficacy, fulfillment from connecting with another person, personal empowerment

in decision making, interpersonal insight, and aspiration for additional connections beyond a

relationship with a mentor. Miller (1987) points out that women who lack a feeling of belonging

through social support are at risk for experiencing loneliness, confusion, low self-worth,

decreased self-knowledge, and isolation.

       Grounded in everyday social interactions, the concept of relational belonging can help us

connect the most formal areas of entrepreneurial business activities with more informal social

practices. Bell (1999) observed that belonging is associated with a longing to feel part of a

specific group and May (2011) observed it is feeling included as part of a system and "being at

ease with one's surroundings" (p. 372). Marshall (2002) framed belonging as "a step beyond

membership" and "how we relate to, assimilate, become accepted, and included" (p. 82). In the

entrepreneurial literature to date, relational processes and belonging have primarily examined the

processes around how women engage with the entrepreneurship community (Duberley &

Carrigan, 2013; Rotefoss & Kolvereid, 2005), how women start up a new business venture

(Mallon & Cohen, 2001; Patterson & Mavin, 2009), and how they access entrepreneurial

resources (Carter et al., 2003; Foss, 2010). These studies encompass ways in which women gain

legitimacy and acceptance as entrepreneurs, how their entrepreneurial identity develops, and

social practices that might help facilitate their feelings of belonging to their personal and

professional communities. Baughn, Chua, and Neupert (2006) found that women's feelings of

acceptance and belonging within an entrepreneurial community involved negotiating various

levels of barriers socially that included gendered attitudes and assumptions. For example,

Patterson and Mavin (2009) found that even after transitioning from organizational to

entrepreneurial careers, women's sense of belonging continued to be affected by gendered

assumptions around women playing supportive rather than leadership roles.

West and Zimmerman (2009) showed that rather than tied to biological sex, gender is

socially constructed and deeply embedded in cultural assumptions that affect the processes

behind women's belonging attempts. Motulsky (2010) highlighted that without proper relational

support, gender issues can play an especially detrimental role in a woman's career during times

of transition and change. Motulsky called for further research to develop a deeper understanding

around how relational processes affect both identity and career decisions for women. When it

comes to women business owners, gaining and claiming entrepreneurial legitimacy can be

challenging and often requires deep identity work and deconstructing embedded gender

assumptions about the nature of the ideal entrepreneur (Marlow & McAdam, 2012).

May (2011) illustrated how it is common for women to be immersed in a familiar work

environment daily, yet at the same time feel out of place or like they do not belong. Fortier

(2000) and May (2011) highlighted how understanding belonging can aid in the exploration of

how gendered power relations negatively or positively affect women's entrepreneurial processes

and identity. Marlow and Patton (2005) described gendered attitudes as the "values attached to

gendered characterizations of feminine and masculine stereotypes" (p. 34). Martin (2001)

showed how gendered attitudes play out in the family and in non-family businesses where

women are rarely viewed as business successors, despite their ability and experience to do so. Male family members are often considered the default heirs and natural successors and are often rewarded with the management of and stakes in the business.

The literature also showcases sociocultural expectations, gender norms, and values that shape the processes behind women's perceived sense of belonging (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004). Duberley and Carrigan (2013) highlighted how many mother entrepreneurs experienced identity conflicts between their role as a mother and that of an entrepreneur. Experiencing a trade-off between business building and maintenance with attending to childcare, the women in their study struggled with fragile entrepreneurial identities and a perception of not being seen by others as "proper business people" (p. 642). If a woman's entrepreneurial identity is constrained, then her ability to feel a sense of belonging to a business or entrepreneurship community may be compromised. When personal and professional relational support for the woman entrepreneur is limited, identity growth is likely to suffer.

Social Support Frameworks

The idea that social support is healthy and beneficial for well-being is not a new concept. While social support was a term coined relatively recently in the second half of the 20th century, its essence has been written about and reflected upon by humans for centuries. Darwin (1859) wrote extensively about the benefits humans experience from being a social animal, and how being part of a close-knit group provides protection from predators that encourages the evolution of our species. Darwin also discussed the importance of human emotions such as love, joy and empathy that reinforce the social animal within us. When referring to sympathy in particular, Darwin argued, "Those communities which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring" (p. 309).

Theoretical perspectives on social support are typically rooted in fields like sociology or social psychology and are often used to explain mental health issues or outcomes, and to broadly measure how a person experiences the feeling of being loved, cared for, and helped by people in their close circles (Cobb, 1976; House, 1981; House, Kahn, McLeod, & Williams, 1985). Cobb (1976) described social support as "information that leads a person to believe that he or she is cared for and loved, esteemed and valued, and a member of a network of mutual obligations" (p. 300). Gottlieb (1983) defined social support as "verbal and non-verbal information or advice, tangible aid, or action that is proffered by social intimates or inferred by their presence and has beneficial emotional or behavioral effects on the recipients" (p. 28).

The work and family spheres are often considered the most critical areas of a person's social support network, and individuals invest more energetic resources in these realms than any other in their lives (Mari, Poggesi, & De Vita, 2016). Time and energy tend to be limited in today's world, and balancing the conflicting demands of work and family, particularly for mothers, can breed stress, tension, and conflict. Research highlights the negative impact that work-family role conflicts can have on mental health (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Weigel, Weigel, Berger, Cook, & DelCampo, 1995). For example, one study found that the transfer of emotional well-being between the domains of family and work had positive correlations to entrepreneurial success and satisfaction for women entrepreneurs but not for men (Powell & Eddleston, 2013). Powell & Eddelston (2013) found that positive support from their spouse, family, and children positively impacted female entrepreneurs' business performance, employee relationships, and overall work satisfaction.

The literature highlights the three types of family support that aid entrepreneurs the most as financial support, emotional support, and instrumental support (Mari, Poggesi, & De Vita,

2016; Welsh, Memili, & Kaciak, 2016). Sufficient finances to fund an entrepreneur's cost of

living and business costs are a critical resource in the early growth stages of a new

venture. Matzek, Gudmuson, and Danes (2010) suggest that spouses tend to make some of the

most important direct and indirect financial contributions and decisions that impact their

partners' ventures. Direct financial capital is when a spouse chooses to contribute some of the

family's finances to the entrepreneurial spouse to encourage business growth, while indirect

financial capital is when a spouse's employment provides income stability as well as additional

health or educational benefits while the business grows towards greater stability and profitability.

Spouses and family members can provide critical emotional support in the form of loving

attention and encouragement that inspires her to reach her goals, as well as encouraging her to

maintain tenaciousness and optimism despite business challenges (Mari et al., 2016; Van Auken

& Werbel, 2006). Research argues that emotional support is one of the most critical factors for

women entrepreneurs and their overall business success (Ramadani, Fayolle, Gërguri-Rashiti, &

Aliu, 2015; Vadnjal & Vadnjal, 2013).

Relational support from a variety of sources in a woman's life can build a solid emotional

foundation and better equip her to deal with the stress that often accompanies career

development (Blustein, Prezioso, & Schultheiss, 1995). When examining intersections between

work and family life, Schultheiss (2006) noted that "those individuals who have the benefits of

consistent, accessible, and reliable others are better equipped to negotiate challenges and manage

the anxiety that sometimes accompanies facing the overlapping demands of life's domains" (p.

339). Schultheiss went on to highlight how women often rely on others, and how their family

relationships and expectations can have a large influence on their work decisions and career

development. In addition to family support, researchers suggested that career counselors,

coworkers, and friends may also help create a supportive relational environment that helps with positive career growth and development (Motulsky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2005). Schultheiss (2003) suggested that a healthy sense of self is developed through positive relationships with others and ultimately informs constructive career decision making. From a social constructionist perspective, knowledge is created through relationships and reflective inquiry; therefore, connecting supportive family relationships with career development can positively affect one's personal and professional identity (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004).

When it comes to relationships with their partners and children, Cinamon and Rich (2002) found that women typically have a higher investment than men in caring for their children and household responsibilities, and that it is less acceptable for them to have work-life clashes. For women entrepreneurs, relationship conflict tends to occur during the demanding startup phase when excess time is required of the new venture (Shelton, 2006), and when partners or children have unreasonable expectations or demonstrate a lack of support for the time investment required of the business (Ufuk & Özgen, 2001). Ortqvist and Wincent (2006) blame role overload as the primary trigger that creates the highest levels of stress for women entrepreneurs. Too much stress can not only negatively affect a woman's business, but also her psyche, physiology, and behavior (Elmuti, Kathawala, & Wayland, 1993; Ortqvist & Wincent, 2006). According to Rahim (2006), individuals who struggle with chronic levels of stress may exhibit behaviors such as "lashing out at others, criticizing others in a prompt manner, becoming easily annoyed, displaying exasperation, or exhibiting forgetfulness" (p. 252). Therefore, women entrepreneurs who experience high-stress levels may suffer with their personal relationships, support systems, and their business ventures. Further research around stress triggers and coping techniques for women entrepreneurs may be helpful in expanding support and education.

Grasping the ways women operate within their family relationships is critical to understanding how they develop careers and feel supported moving through transitions and starting up a new business (Blustein, 2001; Savickas, 2002). Demo and Acock (1996) studied the effect that family relations can have on a mother's overall well-being including self-esteem, depression, and personal fulfillment. Results indicated that children's well-being, marital satisfaction, and low levels of marital discord were the strongest predictors of a mother's overall sense of well-being. Of women who are married, results showed that the highest well-being scores were women married to partners who shared equally in household duties and child rearing, and were involved, supportive, nurturing, and affectionate (Demo & Acock, 1996). While no studies could be found on single women who do not have partners, this emphasizes the importance of close adult relational support at home for many working women, particularly those who are juggling child rearing and entrepreneurship. An unsupportive partner could lead to a feeling of being overwhelmed and be detrimental to a woman's self-esteem and sense of self as an entrepreneur, ultimately leading to trouble personally and professionally. Further research could explore specific ways family relationships and support can affect the sustainability and profitability of women's business ventures.

The level of social support in a mother's life has also been shown to have a critical influence on her overall state of health and well-being (M. A. Brown, 1986), postpartum marital adjustment (Rankin, Campbell, & Soeken, 1985; Tietjen & Bradley, 1985), perception of children (Crnic & Booth, 1991; Priel & Besser, 2002), and perception of self (Crnic & Booth, 1991; Reece, 1993). The role support plays on overall well-being, health, and stress are well documented. According to Lakey and Cohen (2000), social support theory makes the assumption that "support contributes to health by protecting people from adverse effects of stress" (p. 29).

Social support can help shield against major health problems as it eases the way in which people react to negative thoughts during stressful experiences (Corey, Haase, Azzouz, & Monahan, 2008). Therefore, individuals who already benefit from support (such as receiving childcare), or who know they can easily access support in times of need (such as having a pool of trusted family members for go to for emotional support and safety), show stronger coping abilities and lower perceived stress (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). Consequently, a richer understanding of social support on mompreneurs can help foster better programs and support services to support women entrepreneurs.

Research shows that formal and informal support networks play a critical role in an individual's social capital, a valuable resource of social support that encourages stronger health outcomes (Goodwin, Costa, & Adonu, 2004). A key component of entrepreneurial networks, social capital refers to resources that contribute to an entrepreneur's goals and are accessed through mutually beneficial personal relationships (Coleman, 2000; De Carolis & Saparito, 2006). Social capital is defined as ''the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 14). Social capital is a critical ingredient for mompreneurs as it empowers them to tap into personal relationships to supplement their own capabilities and deficiencies (Aldrich, Zimmer, & Jones, 1986; Greve & Salaff, 2003).

Similar to relational cultural theory literature, social capital literature describes the importance of viewing individuals as members of a collective societal system rather than in isolation from one another (Pearson, Carr, & Shaw, 2008). For example, entrepreneurs benefit from their participation in social systems of friends, families, coworkers, networking groups, and

relevant industries (Monsen & Wayne Boss, 2009; Pearson et al., 2008). By extracting benefits

from their relationships, entrepreneurs can leverage social capital to build strategic business

partnerships, relationships, intellectual capital, and competitive advantage (Pearson et al., 2008).

        Relational cultural theory, social support theory, and social capital frameworks are

valuable in this research to allow for a deeper exploration of how connected or disconnected

relationships may influence a mompreneur's journey, including her relationship with herself, her

partner, her children, her friends, her colleagues, and even her business. Relationships can often

be a source of connection and disconnection, as well as painful challenges, but can also present

opportunities for growth, learning and strengthening depending on how a mompreneur chooses

to navigate them (Jordan, 2017). Exploring the complex entrepreneurial journeys of

mompreneurs through multiple theoretical lenses provides this study with a more holistic

understanding of respondents' lived experiences, sense of self, and negotiation of interpersonal

relationships. Relational cultural theory combined with Kegan's and Bandura's learning

development theory allow for a multi-faceted approach that recognizes the many aspects of

making meaning, adult learning, personal development, and social and relational support that

mompreneurs may experience. These frameworks also speak to the multiple identities that

mompreneurs embody, including mother, wife, entrepreneur, community builder as well as many

other social and cultural roles.

Feminist Thought

        Feminist thought and the influence of gender are inherently woven throughout this study

to examine their role and influence on the mompreneur journey. Feminist thought attempts to

shed light on women's experiences and perspectives and use them as a learning tool for self-

discovery and resilience (Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1993). Feminist thought can help address power

relations that are relevant to understanding women as both mothers and entrepreneurs within family, work and society. When analyzing the drivers behind women's departures from corporate work into entrepreneurship, having a background on feminist theoretical frameworks can help shed light on how women's subordination to men plays a role in today's workplace. Feminism is vital as it provides a critical perspective on patriarchy, proof of its existence, and space to discuss it collectively. Without feminism as a framework, society could fall into the perspective that patriarchy is an imaginary myth and that women are not represented in leadership positions simply because they choose not to be or lack ambition to do so (Ahl, 2006). Without feminist frameworks, women can also get easily sidelined by power structures that discredit the work they do in various domains. For example, Richardson (2012) highlights that since the realms of work and family have been influenced by prevailing ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism, unpaid care work is dismissed and seen as being less valuable than paid work. Richardson argues that as long as we continue to think of the word "work" exclusively in relation to paid employment, the power structure of work will not be disrupted and women who disproportionately dominate the home care realm will continue to be disempowered.

Jaggar & Rothenberg (1993) note "Feminist theory assumes that the oppression of women is part of the way the structure of the world is organized, and one task of feminist theory is to explain how and why this structure evolved" (p. 81). Feminist frameworks help us see how and why subordination exists in the workplace and what new solutions and perspectives might help us shift into a new paradigm. When understanding why mothers opt out of corporate work for entrepreneurship, feminist frameworks can help us understand the ways in which entrenched patriarchal norms affect nearly all aspects of women's lives. Feminism not only gives us the language to talk about the sexism we see, but also the tools to analyze and understand it. Johnson

(2005) suggests that by "focusing on how we participate in the patriarchal gender order, feminism challenges us to live in new ways, to question assumptions about gender and human nature, and to confront the everyday realities of male privilege and the oppression of women" (p. 42).

Ahl (2006) suggests that gender is embedded in everyday action and that it is "continually produced and reproduced through social interaction as something that is done" (p. 612). Everyday assumptions, behaviors, and social expectations are shaped and informed by gender (Marlow & McAdam, 2012). Henry, Foss and Ahl (2016) argue that "gender is accomplished" (p. 37) through structures and processes such as belonging and corresponding social effects. Researchers have observed the complex role of gender in entrepreneurship and have shown that women face unique challenges in their identification as entrepreneurs as well as how they are recognized and accepted as entrepreneurs socially (Kepler & Shane, 2007; Marlow & McAdam, 2012; Syed & Murray, 2008). Social feminist theory suggests that differences between men and women develop early and affect how people see the world, gather knowledge, and analyze information (DeTienne & Chandler, 2007).

Due to the embedded gender assumptions and social and cultural constraints that are placed upon women entrepreneurs, research suggests that the way women experience entrepreneurship cannot be researched using the same variables as men (Bruin, Brush, & Welter, 2007). Gender plays an important role in the distinctions of how female entrepreneurs vary from males in many ways. From the type of business that is chosen to the motivations for starting one, the domain for women's entrepreneurship is transforming quickly with innovative women evolving businesses in a variety of new areas (Ahl, 2006; Buttner, 1993; Lee-Gosselin & Grisé, 1990).

Women and Entrepreneurship

Female led businesses contribute to employment, innovation, and wealth creation, and are among the fastest growing ventures in the world (Brush, 2006). While the academic literature contains a variety of definitions of what an entrepreneur is, entrepreneurs are widely viewed as aggressive change agents who recognize opportunities within the marketplace. Bolton and Thompson (2013) define an entrepreneur as "a person who habitually creates and innovates to build something of recognized value around perceived opportunities" (p. 3). According to Onuoha (2007), entrepreneurship is "the practice of starting a new organization or revitalizing mature organizations particularly new businesses generally in response to identified opportunities" (p.7). Although fifty years apart in their research, Knight (1921) and Drucker (1970) both define entrepreneurship as "taking a risk."

The ideal prototypical entrepreneur focuses primarily on growth and profit. They are innovative, strategic, put the business first and have little time and energy left for family or social life (Carland, Hoy, Boulton, & Carland, 1984; Essers & Benschop, 2007). Lewis (2010) points out that correlating masculinity with entrepreneurship is "not simply something which is biological, material or essential, but something complex, historical and cultural in form…it can be expressed in bodily terms with appropriately masculine individuals or females can be encouraged to sublimate their femininity so that they look like they belong in the world of business" (p. 21). From selling fruit to tailoring clothes, women have participated in business trade for centuries, often to make money to feed their children. Yet research continues to show that womanhood and entrepreneurship are often in conflict as women 're-do' gender while 'acting' within the entrepreneurial prototype (Ahl, 2004; Warren, 2004). Helene Ahl (2006) uses discourse analysis to demonstrate that throughout much of the literature on entrepreneurship the

concept of entrepreneurship and the ideal prototypical entrepreneur is generally associated with males and masculinity. The prototypical entrepreneur throughout the literature not only does not sound female, it does not sound like a mother and it does not sound like an individual faced with the desire or priority for work-family balance.

Some literature on female entrepreneurs continues to frame them as the prototypical male entrepreneurial ideal. Schwartz (1976) claims that female entrepreneurs often underestimate the cost of business operations and marketing their products. Lee-Gosselin & Grise (1990) argue that the extent to which women lack realism in business "is striking." Scherer, Brodzinski, and Wieber (1990) conclude that although women have aspirations to become entrepreneurs, "men have a higher preference for entrepreneurship than females" (p. 41). In addition, Scherer et al. (1990) state that women possess lower self-efficacy because they lack "the necessary personal and vocational resources" (p. 42) for successful ventures. Today, more recent research suggests that women-founded ventures may be defying these claims and make up over one third of all businesses in the United States, hire 7.9 million employees annually, generate $1.5 trillion in annual sales, and are launching at a rate double that of men (National Association of Women Business Owners, 2017). Studies show that women in business are pressured to construct an identity that is adaptable to the existing male dominated entrepreneurial systems already set into place (Welter & Diaz, 2011). Mompreneurs often juggle a combination of roles including woman, mother and entrepreneur, and therefore may need to draw on experience beyond cultural norms to create their own unique identity.

Motherhood and Entrepreneurship

Recent research suggests that an emerging movement of women entrepreneurs is redefining their various roles and impacting the nature of entrepreneurship on the whole

(Ekinsmyth, 2011). From this movement, the mompreneur sub-category of entrepreneurship has

been gaining traction in the literature and the media. The term *mompreneur* is defined in the

Collins English Dictionary (2011) as "a mother who combines running a business enterprise with

looking after her children." Furthermore, mompreneurship has been identified as a social,

economic, and political phenomena by scholars (Harris, Morrison, Ho, & Lewis, 2008; Jean &

Forbes, 2012; Nel, Maritz, & Thongprovati, 2010), authors (Ballon, Boterell, & Reuber, 2011;

Cobe & Parlapiano, 2002), mainstream media (*Time Magazine, Entrepreneur Magazine, US

News and World Report)*, and websites (www.themompreneur.com). The rapid growth and

interest in this movement illustrates the importance and relevance of this current phenomenon.

The number of women pursuing entrepreneurship is growing and it has been reported "there are

nearly 5,000,000 Mompreneurs in US and this number is growing by 7% a year" (Froger, 2010,

p. 32).

Despite the growing trend, little academic research exists on the topic of mompreneurs.

While a large volume of research continues to focus on women's career-life paths, there is a

small, but growing, research base in the area of women's entrepreneurship (Brush, 2006;

Hughes, Jennings, Brush, Carter, & Welter, 2012). However, the lack of rigorous academic

research on the population is evident. Jennings and McDougald (2007) noted that theory-based,

peer-reviewed research on entrepreneurs' work-family experiences is also markedly absent.

Little empirical research explores the journeys and perspectives of women who combine

mothering and entrepreneurship, contributing to an existing gap around mothering work in

women's career development literature (Schultheiss, 2009).

Of this small body of literature, Ekinsmyth (2011), Lewis (2010), Korsgaard (2007), and

Duberly & Carrigan (2013) identify the growth of global mompreneur phenomenon, but they do

not focus in depth on the mompreneur journey. Many aspects of mompreneurship have yet to be

examined, including how they make meaning of their entrepreneurial experiences and sense of

self. The definition and concept of mompreneurship has yet to be clearly and consistently

articulated as it is still in its infancy, although several studies describe the movement

(Ekinsmyth, 2011; Lewis, 2010; Nel et al., 2010). For example, Korsgaard (2007) describes

mompreneurship as "an emergent phenomenon, which has yet to settle on a widely accepted

definition or be researched from a social scientific point of view" (p. 43). Richomme-Huet, Vial,

and d'Andria (2013) more narrowly link business opportunity to the experience of having

children, and define mompreneurship as "the creation of a new business venture by a woman

who identifies as both a mother and a business woman, is motivated primarily by achieving

work-life balance, and picks an opportunity linked to the particular experience of having

children" (p. 255). Richomme-Huet et al. (2013) identifies three characteristics of mompreneurs

as: "identity orientation (that blurs the boundary between the roles of mother and business

woman), motivation (and the desire to achieve work-life harmony), and opportunity recognition

(opportunities identified by the experience of pregnancy or having children)" (p. 257). These

descriptions suggest that mompreneurs are merging together aspects of professional skills,

personal motivation, and push/pull factors to develop a new concept of entrepreneurship.

     The concepts of push and pull are typically used when describing the influences that lead

women to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career option (Buttner & Moore, 1997;

Kirkwood, 2009b; Walker & Webster, 2007). Mothers who make the decision to enter

entrepreneurship may be influenced by a number of factors including multiple life roles, the

evolution of their career-lives over their lifespans, and their relational experiences. Push factors

include external motivators such as a layoff at work or career stagnation, while pull factors

include internal motivators such as the desire to have flexibility or career autonomy. When it

comes to mothers opting out of traditional employment to stay home, a growing body of

evidence suggests that the action of opting out is a gendered process involving the oppression of

mothers in the workforce (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Weisshaar, 2018). Research argues

that workplace biases against mothers such as lower perceived value and difficulty sustaining

their value after breaks in employment push many mothers out of the workplace (Weisshaar,

2018). Studies also suggests that these stereotypes may force mothers into staying home or

pursuing alternative career opportunities because of the perception of their lower dedication and

value due to the demands of having children (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Ridgeway &

Correll, 2004).

Loscocco and Smith-Hunter (2004) conducted research on women choosing to build

home-based businesses and found that while their jobs were less economically successful, they

also experienced less work-family conflict in the home. One study measured the impact of

mothers' home-based businesses on their children (Schindehutte, Morris, & Brennan, 2003). In

the study, teenage and adult children reflected that the overall experience of having an

entrepreneurial mom was valuable and positive, despite some interruptions to the home life.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the relevant literature and intersection of constructive

development, social cognitive theory, and relational cultural theory to provide greater insight into

the experiences of mothers who choose to build a business while raising children. It is important

to apply these three theory in collaboration, as each uniquely reveals an important

developmental, social or relational lens on the mompreneur journey. The chapter also explored

relevant literature on women and entrepreneurship, and highlighted the gap that exists around

mompreneurship. While very little academic literature deeply examines mompreneurs and their experiences, some preliminary research has explored the phenomenon and recognized it as an increasingly popular solution for managing work and family (Kephart & Schumacher, 2005). Although some studies have explored the experiences of women with and without children in the workplace (Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008; McKay, 2001; Winn, 2004), as well as home-based businesses (Loscocco & Smith-Hunter, 2004), there remains a need to deeply understand the unique experiences of women who are creatively constructing a home-based career to combine mothering work with entrepreneurship.

As more women struggle to manage careers and family, many find themselves looking for creative career alternatives. This study aims to address the gap on mompreneurship in the literature. To my knowledge, no other studies have specifically explored the lived experiences of mompreneurs and their developing sense of self, self-efficacy and social and relational support as they raise children and grow businesses. By exploring how mompreneurs make meaning of their experiences, honoring their voices, and validating their experiences, this study can provide valuable insight to inform future efforts to educate and support the success of mother entrepreneurs.

Chapter Three: Methods

This study uses a phenomenological approach as the central method of inquiry in order to examine the individual experiences of mother entrepreneurs who are running businesses while raising children. The research design includes a demographic questionnaire and in-depth interviews ranging from 30 to 90 minutes with a diverse population of 12 mompreneurs. This chapter discusses the research methodology through the following sections: (a) rationale for research approach, (b) role of the researcher, (c) design overview, (d) description of the research sample, (e) methods and procedures for data collection, (f) methods and procedures for analysis, (g) limitations of the study, and (h) ethical considerations. Finally, the chapter closes with a brief summary.

Research Question

The overarching research question in this study is: How do women perceive themselves as they grow new businesses while raising children and particularly, how does their sense of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and their relational connections influence their meanings of self? This particular research question helps frame the study around gaps seen in the current academic research around meaning-making, self-efficacy, and relational connections of mompreneurs.

Rationale for a Qualitative Research Approach

Reviewing the existing literature on social, developmental, and relational theory, along with literature on women in entrepreneurship and mother entrepreneurs in particular, it became apparent that a qualitative approach to the study would allow for a nuanced, in-depth exploration of the topic. Addressing the gap in the literature on mompreneurship is valuable, as it adds to the existing research while complementing existing theory. Narrative, phenomenological, and voice-

centered research methods all offered potentially effective ways to approach the questions proposed for the research. The identification of an appropriate fit between the research problem, questions, method, and data, also known as methodological congruence, is critical in order to have the highest quality outcome on a research study (Morse & Richards, 2002). Selecting an appropriate method to address the research question, having a clear research strategy, and developing procedures for data collection and analysis were essential in this respect.

The rationale for using a qualitative, phenomenological approach to this study is to describe, in depth, the women's lived experiences of raising children and growing businesses. This study provides detailed, rich descriptions of the participants' experiences during their business growth process. Blustein, Kenna, Murphy, DeVoy, and DeWine (2005) note that qualitative research methods have gained increasing popularity in counseling and vocational psychology and are particularly useful when examining phenomena where there is a gap in scholarly knowledge, such as mompreneurship. While a number of entrepreneurship studies have adopted quantitative approaches, a qualitative approach on mompreneurs allows for a more detailed and in-depth examination to uncover meanings and themes across participants (Blustein et al., 2005; Neergaard & Ulhøi, 2007). Given the call for deep qualitative research to explore new areas in entrepreneurship through an experiential lens (Neergaard & Ulhøi, 2007), an interpretive qualitative approach was chosen for this study. Research suggests that for interview-based studies, the focus should be depth over breadth, with a careful selection process of information-rich cases, sampling procedures, interview data and the researcher's analytical capabilities in order to achieve quality and trustworthiness in qualitative data (Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017).

The Role of Researcher

As I approached the data collection and analysis process, it was crucial to openly reflect on my assumptions and reactions to my participants' stories, particularly with regard to emotionally fueled content, so I could bracket my own biases and experiences. The concept of bracketing, or intentionally acknowledging and setting aside my own experiences, is an important component of the phenomenological method to ensure complete focus on participants' voices and experiences (Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson, & McSpadden, 2011). Through extensive memo recordings, journaling, and the Voice-Centered Relational Method (Gilligan, 2015), I focused more intently on the unique voices and stories of my participants, listening to them rather than to myself. This provided greater awareness of the ways in which my own journey could cloud my understanding of what is true for my participants.

As a middle-class, white, American divorced mother of a six-year-old and founder of a business that supports other mother entrepreneurs, I have my own experience defining what it means to be a mompreneur. Four years ago, I found myself exhausted by life as a business executive and single mom and made the decision to slowly transition out of the corporate world into entrepreneurship. At work, I noticed how many of my female colleagues with children were struggling to balance work and family. I saw women take maternity leave from work only to return and find that there was no longer a place for their position. I saw women whose positions were downgraded or were passed over multiple times for well-deserved promotions because of their conflicting commitments to work and family. Eventually, I noticed an emerging trend among women in my community. In my corporate workplace, in my daughter's play groups, in my networking groups, and in the news, working moms and stay-at-home moms were building up home-based side businesses and gaining autonomy in their personal and professional lives.

The media were calling these women "mompreneurs," and I later discovered that women owned businesses grew drastically by 68% in the last decade, with more 11.6 million businesses opening in the U.S. in 2017, launching at double the rate of male-run businesses (American Express OPEN, 2017). In an effort to learn more, I started an online mother's playgroup, which quickly grew to a couple hundred mother entrepreneurs, a portion of whom would meet weekly, and I listened to their stories with great interest. What I discovered was that many of the mothers, regardless of their background, all desired greater support and resources, and many struggled with debilitating confidence issues. Many mothers expressed stories to me about how they see the opportunities that lie within their entrepreneurial idea, but feel they lack the time, business skills, support and community to start a business and thus, feel isolated and overwhelmed before they even attempt to start.

As a member of the population I am studying, I understand that my position and personal experiences may provide a simultaneous privilege and bias in the relationship with the mompreneur participants. I am aware of the potential challenges that could arise from being an insider while conducting this research and acknowledge the importance of transparency (Tuval-Mashiach, 2017) around how my journey affects my understanding of what is true for my participants. According to Kanuha (2000), an insider researcher brings a deeper and broader understanding of participant experiences that could be inaccessible to a nonnative scientist, yet concerns about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity could occur if one is too closely emotionally linked to the research project or too similar to research participants. Serrant-Green (2002) points out that there are as many arguments for insider research as there are against it and Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue that being an insider does not necessarily make one a more or less effective researcher, but simply a different type of researcher. Being part of the mompreneur

population may have provided me easier access to my study population, with a built in level of

trust and openness that may otherwise not have been achieved. With a shared set of personal and

professional experiences, my participants might have been more willing to share experiences

with someone who already understands them and has walked a similar path. However the flip

side to this coin is that the participant could assume the researcher understands them and

therefore avoids sharing otherwise valuable parts of their story in an interview. As an insider

researcher I am also more at risk for my perceptions to be clouded by my own personal

experiences as a mompreneur and as a member of the population, I could encounter difficulty

separating my personal emotional experiences from those of my participants. The risk is that the

interviews and corresponding analyses could be molded by the central themes in my own

experience and not the participant's. In order to mitigate these risks, I employed disciplined

bracketing and detailed reflection with a close awareness of my personal biases through memos

and journaling throughout the interview process. While there may be many shared experiences

in our personal and professional life circumstances, culture, career, parenting, and gender

identities, there were also many differences in our individual life journeys, educational

backgrounds, racial identities, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, class, and perceptions. I

also recognize my position as a White woman in American society is one of privilege; therefore,

I hold the responsibility to be aware of unintentional biases, exclusion or discrimination toward

my participants. While I cannot eliminate bias, I can be conscious of it throughout all stages of

the research process.

        Since the qualitative research process is inherently subjective, I addressed my

responsibility as a researcher by employing strategies throughout the process to validate the

reoccurring themes, consistent patterns, and meanings. According to Morrow (2005) credibility

is a trustworthiness concept that generally corresponds to internal validity and assesses to what extent the data collected accurately reflect the multiple realities of the phenomenon studied. In this study, note taking along with peer debriefs allowed for greater validity of the data. Notes were taken during each interview, immediately after each interview, and while listening to playbacks of the audio recordings. According to Patton (2002), reviewing notes immediately after an interview adds validity because it is a critical time of reflection and quality control to ensure reliable and authentic data collection. Another factor supporting validity of this study is my former completion of two smaller and similar pilot studies. The first pilot study included interviews with five mother entrepreneurs, and the second pilot study included interviews with ten mother entrepreneurs. The studies both interviewed women 25 to 45 years old who had transitioned from full employment to entrepreneurship and currently had dependent children in their care. The focus was to understand how each mother entrepreneur learned about herself through her transition into entrepreneurship, as well as the motivators for why the women chose entrepreneurship as a career path. This provided an opportunity to gain greater knowledge of mother entrepreneurs, to become familiar with the most appropriate study sites, and to gain new insights into the population.

Thanks to my roles as a researcher, mother, and entrepreneur, I found it easy to establish rapport and trust with my research participants. At the end of many interviews, participants expressed enthusiastic support of this research project and felt very few people aimed to understand their unique positions. A few even expressed how they would love to give back to other mompreneurs and hoped that this research would ultimately lead to strong educational and support systems for women on similar journeys.

Overview of Research Design

A qualitative, phenomenological design allowed for the prioritization of depth over breadth, along with a more detailed understanding of the mompreneur phenomenon, and gave voice to the women's personal narrative experiences (Merriam & Francisco, 2009; Patton & Oaks, 2002). Using a phenomenological research design allowed for extraction of shared experiences and allowed me to "work much more from the participants' specific experiences rather than abstracting from their statements to construct a model from the researcher's interpretations" (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 252). Phenomenological studies are designed to describe the meaning-making through the individual's lived experiences of a particular phenomenon (Morse & Richards, 2002). Bentz and Shapiro (1998) noted that phenomenological inquiry "involves listening to, watching, and generally engaging in empathic understanding of another person" (p. 99). By exploring the experiences of mothering work and entrepreneurship for self-employed women with children through a phenomenological approach, there is the possibility for emergent theory to be discovered, shedding light on the experiences of these unique entrepreneurs.

Narrative research is defined as "a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (Czarniawska & Oaks, 2004, p. 17). Utilizing a narrative research design allowed me to ask story-oriented questions that explored the life experiences of mother entrepreneurs and how their stories unfolded as they grew their business (Creswell et al., 2007). Complementing this with a phenomenological research design helped me explore the essence of what mother entrepreneurs in my study experienced and how they talked about their lived experiences (Creswell et al., 2007). My focus during these qualitative interviews was to understand how each woman perceives the development of her sense of self, and her connectedness to and support from others during her

entrepreneurial journey. While these factors may have impacted her success, it was more important to focus on the role these variables played in her experiences rather than focus on specific quantifiable outcomes they may produce. This study highlights the different constructions and meanings that mompreneurs place on their experiences as mothers, entrepreneurs, partners, etc.

This study used in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews to gather information from a diverse selection of twelve women who were at least one year into starting their business and were currently caring for dependent children under the age of 18. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 90 minutes and were conducted via Skype. According to Morgan, Fischhoff, Bostrom, & Atman (2002), the first five to six in-depth interviews produce the majority of new data, and 92% of concepts are identified within the first 10 interviews.

Research participants were recruited through online entrepreneurship groups, professional entrepreneurship networks, entrepreneurship education programs, and nonprofits aiming to help women entrepreneurs grow their business. In order to encourage diversity within the study, groups and organizations that work with minority groups such as African Americans, Latinas, single mothers, or women entrepreneurs who also belong to LGBTQ communities were targeted during the marketing outreach for the study. Managers, directors, and organizers of these organizations were contacted via emails and phone calls and asked to disperse information about the study to their groups. This included email blasts via their online newsletters, announcements at group meetings, flyers, and posts to online blogs or Facebook group pages.

After conversing via email and phone with a number of leaders of these organizations, I sent them a detailed flier for distribution to their email lists or directly to anyone they felt might meet the criteria. I described the purpose of the study as well as the age, race, gender and

entrepreneurship experience requirements (see Appendix A for the recruitment flier). I met with

ten organization leaders to discuss the study, and in total, approximately 2,300 women were

reached via email or social media platform. I received responses via email from about 150

mompreneurs, which led to 32 interested women. From there, conversations were held via email

or phone to assess their fit for the study and to gauge their own interest. Many felt they were

ultimately too busy, some fell off and never responded, and others were very responsive,

interested, had time to contribute, and met the study criteria. Due to the overwhelming response

which continued throughout this process, the recruitment process including discussions and

information sharing was extremely time consuming.

    After conducting screening emails, I identified 12 women who fit the study's criteria and

who had the bandwidth in their schedule to participate. The remaining women were too busy to

participate because of their work and family demands or they did not meet the criteria of having

dependent children, the length of time spent on their business, or being a full-time entrepreneur

(many were working a corporate job while starting a hobby business on the side which was not a

qualifying situation). I emailed the 12 eligible women an informed consent form (see Appendix

B) and the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) to gather additional information for the

study. Once these forms were completed and returned to me, we used an online scheduling

system to confirm our interview time together.

    Detailed characteristics of the participating women are included in Table 1 below with each

of their pseudonyms. The age range of the sample at the time of the interviews was 37 to 52

years of age and the years since starting a business ranged from 1 to 13 years. Eight women were

white, two women were African American, one woman was Asian American and one woman

was Latina. Eleven women were heterosexual, one woman was bisexual, eight women were

married, and four women were divorced or single parents. Three women were in a low income

range and nine women were in a mid or high income range. Business industries encompassed a

wide array of sectors and skill sets, and five of the women relied completely on their business as

the main form of household income.

Table 1

Characteristics of Mompreneur Participants

Pseudonym	Age at Interview	Number of years since starting business	# of dependent children	Ages of dependent children	Type of business	Marital Status/Sexual Orientation	Primary income? Y/N	Household Income Range	Race
Amina	48	3	4	28, 16, 11, 10	Racial Equity Consulting	Divorced, Heterosexual	Y	$20,000−39,999	African American
Gretta	39	1	2	twin boy and girl, 9	Lice removal services	Single, Heterosexual	Y	$20,000−39,999	White
Anastasia	38	3	1	2	Corporate Wellness Programs	Married, Heterosexual	N	$80,000-$99,999	White
Marie	37	2	2	5,3	Nonprofit Consulting Firm	Married, Heterosexual	N	$100,000 - $119,000	White
Clara	38	5	2	9, 7	Business Marketing Coaching	Married, Heterosexual	N	$140,000-$159,999	White
Nina	49	4	2	12,10	Parenting Coach	Married, Heterosexual	N	$120,000-$139,999	White
Juliet	52	2	2	12,15	Birth Doula	Married, Heterosexual	N	$120,000-$139,999	White
Christy	48	10	1	13	Corporate coaching	Married, Heterosexual	N	$200,000 +	White
Raymonde	41	7	4	18, 15, 12, 10	Chiropractor	Divorced, bisexual	Y	$20,000−39,999	White
Chloe	40	4	1	16	Consulting/ Public speaking	Divorced, Heterosexual	Y	$40,000 - 60,000	African American, Hispanic
Anna	44	1	2	twin boys, 9 years old	Wellness & Nutrition Coaching	Married, Heterosexual	N	$160,000 - $179,999	Hispanic
Zoila	38	3	4	15, 5, 4 (twins)	Boutique public relations agency	Married, Heterosexual	Y	$80,000-$99,999	Filipino & Spanish

Methods and Procedures for Data Collection

Data collection began after I received approval for both my qualifying papers as well as from

the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Lesley University. Each participant received an

Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B) that explained the purpose and methods of the study,

their rights as a research participant, and contact information for me and my advisor. All

interviews were conducted via Skype and lasted between 30 minutes and 90 minutes. Some

women summarized their entrepreneurial journey quickly, and others were much more reflective

about their experience, voluntarily expanding their stories of their experiences. During

interviews, further prompts were used to help obtain a comprehensive answer to this research

question. These included:

- Can you tell me the story of your transition into entrepreneurship up to where you are

    today, from beginning to end?

- Can you share with me a high point (or feeling of satisfaction or accomplishment) in this

    transition and a low point or time of difficulty or challenge?

- In what ways do you feel supported as a mother entrepreneur? In what ways do you feel

    unsupported?

- Tell me about your sense of self, how you view and understand yourself as a mother, and

    also as an entrepreneur. Has this shifted since the time you thought about starting a

    business?

- Looking back from where you are now and knowing what you know now—what would

    you do differently if you were to start a business again?

- What advice would you have for other women going through this transition?

    The study focused on exploring the stories of the mothers' experiences through family

and entrepreneurship, how they made meaning of those experiences, and how they viewed

themselves and their social support structures during the journey (see Appendix D) for interview

protocol). Each interview began with an introduction of the study, a review of their rights and

expectations as a research participant, as well as my own role as a researcher. Some women

wanted to ask me questions about my personal story, which I saved until the end so that it did not

affect the data collection process. After our initial introduction, I practiced active listening with each story while interjecting with appropriate probing questions if someone got off track from the topic, if clarification was needed, or if there was an opportunity to expand on relevant and useful information contained within their story. The rapport that I was able to establish with most participants allowed for easy-going conversations, and the majority of women opened up and shared their stories and answered my questions with ease, reflection, honesty, and vulnerability. Out of the twelve women, two women struggled with opening up during the interviews, and expressed a greater deal of negativity, frustration, angst and discomfort with their current situation personally and professionally.

Before and after each interview, I conducted data collection by maintaining field memos on my expectations and initial reactions. As time went on through the data collection process and interviewing, I found that it became much easier to spot themes, and recognize openings during the interview to ask probing questions that would help expand on the story in an appropriate way. In addition to these field notes recorded for each interview, each participant was audiotaped using a computer based recorder and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. In an effort to ensure confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were chosen by the participants and then attached to interview texts, summaries, memos, and field notes. In addition, password protected files were created in which the study data were stored on the computer. Hard copies of the interview transcripts, Demographic Questionnaire, and memo notes were kept in a locked box in my home.

Methods and Procedures for Analysis

In addition to exploring common themes throughout the data, this study also sought to shed light on the narratives and layers of meaning for the individual participants. I therefore

decided to choose thematic coding, and this section describes the detailed process I used for each type of data collected.

Immediately upon the collection of initial data from the participant interviews, I transcribed interview data as soon as possible in order to ensure accurate transcription and to facilitate ongoing data analysis. While this study uses a phenomenological approach as a methodology as well as traditional coding for analysis, it also uses aspects of the voice-centered relational method (Gilligan, 2015; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003) to more deeply explore the rich narratives and meaning-making of mompreneurs' journeys through entrepreneurship. While traditional thematic coding provided the core structure of data analysis for this study, the voice-centered relational approach provided an additional methodological lens through which I could read my transcripts and look at my interviews. The voice-centered relational method places emphasis on the multiple layers within the voices of the research participants and views them as being embedded in a complex web of transformative social relations (L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992). The voice- centered method is based on the premise that research participants may experience a variety of contradictory ways of understanding themselves and their life situations. In this type of framework, how a participant speaks (or does not speak) about themselves, others, and their own experiences sheds light on their perceptions (L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992) A research participant's voice is potentially silenced and influenced by the societal and cultural contexts that surround them (L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1991). The creators of the guide emphasized that relationships are ever changing (L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992) and in response, developed a research listening method that explores interpersonal relationships and can be "both responsive to others' voices and yet resistant to the

dominant voices, the cultural overlays that serve to drown out, mute, or distort the voices of those with less power or authority" (p. 15).

I believe the feminist qualities of the Listening Guide shed light on mother entrepreneurs who may experience the devaluation, exploitation, costs and privileges inherent within the masculinity and patriarchy of society, or may have their voices overpowered by others in their story. I used some elements of the voice-centered method to highlight the women's voices about self through two of my coding categories. When reading the transcripts after my interviews with mompreneurs, I listened for two contrapuntal voices: a voice of confidence and a voice of doubt. The idea of contrapuntal voices within the voice-centered method was instrumental to attending to the voices of doubt and confidence in the woman's stories. This resulted in two coding categories, and helped frame my transcripts and think about the major findings from a different lens. For example, the voice of doubt represented areas of the story where a mompreneur felt despair, fear, nervousness, or confusion, and a voice of confidence was represented by how she spoke with a sense of self-assurance, trust within herself, her business, and a feeling of moving forward with certainty. Actively listening for these two potentially conflicting yet interlacing voices within the individual stories shed light on themes within the multiple layers of mompreneur self-efficacy. Given the gendered lens of this study and the potentially marginalized experiences of mother entrepreneurs, the voice-centered method was an appropriate method to give voice to those stories that may have been hidden or oppressed. I used different colors to highlight and trace words with specific reference to these terms. It was important during this coding process to consider not only the answer provided to each question, but also the context, phrasing, and interconnection with other possible voices to understand the multiplicity of meanings. Given that my research question centers on how the women experience social support

and sense of self during their mompreneur journey, I was also interested in listening to how the participants spoke about, or avoided speaking about, any relationships with others that may have influenced them.

In addition to the listenings derived from the voice-centered relational method, I also coded transcripts from each participant based on themes that emerged from the literature, the theoretical frameworks of this study, and the interview responses (Patton, 2002). Line-by-line, open coding was used to identify meaningful pieces of data (Bowen, 2008) and words that summarized or distinguished individual pieces of data were used to further categorize segments as well as identify where there were gaps in the data (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I used NVivo, a qualitative analysis software to help organize transcripts, and to assist in reviewing coded excerpts across interview transcripts. NVivo provides tools to organize the most frequent codes with examples of data categorized within, in order to help expand the understanding of qualitative data.

After the initial coding process was completed, I combined the data into larger groups and identified recurring themes to better understand and frame the mompreneur experience. In phenomenological research, the identification of themes helps the researcher organize data for a deeper analysis (Wertz et al., 2011). Some of the recurring themes included confidence growing over time, freedom and flexibility, mothering demands, intimate partnerships and relational connections and disconnections, which will be presented in chapter five. This data analysis process allowed an interconnection of experiences with revealed themes, intersecting theoretical frameworks and meaning-making.

Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the IRB process set forth by Lesley University, all interviews and data collection strictly adhered to the guidelines regarding the treatment of human subjects. I provided support documents including the recruitment flyer and an informed consent form. Qualitative research can be highly personal and interviews may evoke strong emotional experiences and therefore, it is critical to weigh ethical considerations of all studies throughout the research process (Patton, 2002).

Participants were advised in writing of my research objectives and of the voluntary nature of their participation through an informational sheet on the study, the consent form itself, and a verbal reminder immediately prior to the interview. They were informed that at any time during the interview they were allowed to refuse to answer questions and were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. When decisions were made regarding the data, the participant's rights, interests, and desires were always considered first. To ensure data collection met ethical guidelines, access to participant data is limited to myself and my doctoral committee.

Trustworthiness

To ensure that my field notes and interpretations are trustworthy, I worked to maintain a high degree of awareness and responsibility around my biases (Morrow, 2005). By writing both before and after my interviews, and writing in a self-reflective research journal, I worked at better addressing my biases, becoming more aware of my pre-conceived opinions, and reflecting on subjectivity. Also by capturing thick descriptions, or detailed accounts of my experiences with participants, I was able to identify social and cultural patterns and put them into context (Holloway & London, 1997). Entering my research with an attitude of continual alertness to my own biases helped me produce more trustworthy interpretations. As Glesne (2006) suggests,

"Reflect upon how what you notice is shaped by the research setting and participants in their reactions to you. What is it that research participants want you to see and why?" (p. 167). Receiving feedback on my dissertation topic and questions from peers, as well as my advisor and committee, provided me with external reflection and input on my work (Merriam & Francisco, 2009). Since a narrative and phenomenological design were used in this study, my data consisted of stories that I tried to bring to life as accurately as possible (Glesne, 2006).

Chapter Summary

Chapter three provided detailed overviews of this study's research design and methodologies. Aspects of phenomenology, narrative research and the voice-centered method were integrated into this study to examine the narratives of 12 carefully selected mompreneurs who started businesses while raising dependent children. A demographic questionnaire, in-depth individual interviews, and reflective memos were used to collect data about the women's perceptions and experiences. The remaining chapters in this dissertation investigate the meaning-making processes and experiences of these adult learners as they navigated key transitional moments of their mompreneur journeys.

Chapter Four: Mompreneur Narratives

In chapter four, I will present narratives of twelve mompreneurs living in various locations around the United States who share their journey of starting a business while raising children. The age, entrepreneurial experiences, and backgrounds of these women are highly diverse; however, they all share in the phenomena of being mothers of dependent children who are also growing their own business. Each narrative begins with an introduction highlighting important aspects of each woman's background and story, using pseudonyms to conceal their identity. This includes their age, ethnicity, number of children, type of business, marital status, and income. Gaining this preliminary insight into the story behind each mompreneur's personal and professional journey can provide valuable background information to inform the data analysis in subsequent chapters. This study's three theoretical frameworks (Kegan's constructive developmental theory, 1982; Bandura's social cognitive theory, 1977; and relational cultural theory, Jordan, 2017, Miller, 1976) guide the development of the mompreneurs' narrative summaries. Each narrative includes the following areas of focus:

- Inner strength, self-efficacy, and confidence: how the mompreneur views her journey, from where she draws strength, and how her identity evolves over time;

- Influence of external support and relationships: how the role of relationships with family, friends, and external support networks affect her journey;

- Meaning-making of the journey: reflection on learning or growth from the journey.

The following pages contain a summary for each of the twelve mother entrepreneurs, in the order in which they were interviewed.

Mompreneur Amina

Amina is a 48-year-old African-American mother of four children and owner of a racial equity consulting business. She is divorced, and her children are 28, 16, 11, and 10 years of age. She has been running her current business for about three years, following a number of years of entrepreneurial positions across a host of industries. Amina spent much of her life in poverty, as the sole financial provider for her children, supplemented by limited child support and government assistance. From hair braiding to house cleaning to financial advising, Amina started a variety of entrepreneurial ventures as a means of survival to escape homelessness and provide for her children, one of whom suffers from epilepsy.

Identity, inner strength, self-efficacy, and confidence. After getting pregnant as a teenager, Amina began learning a number of entrepreneurial activities such as hair braiding, house cleaning, Mary Kay, and financial advising. After years in a troubled marriage, she left her alcoholic husband, applied for governmental assistance, left an apartment she couldn't afford, and moved in with friends to escape homelessness. Amina recounts, "I became an entrepreneur out of necessity, like literal necessity. I was struggling and there were times when...I mean, I was homeless. I just happened to have a friend who would allow me to move in with her. So, I really did what I did out of necessity and my success never really felt like success because I was hustling, and there was never any time to rest or even understand the accomplishment that I was making."

Amina expressed how grateful she was for the food she received through food stamps and how this difficult time taught her humility. Her son suffered from epilepsy, so she couldn't put him in traditional daycare and get a job during daytime hours. She stayed confident in her ability to find ways to make money while caring for her son full time. She learned negotiation skills and

helped run a mortgage broker business, where she shared childcare duties with other mothers in a

small office. She was deeply committed to learning the industry to make ends meet. She

remembers saying, "I'm going to do this real estate thing. If it kills me, I'm going to figure out a

way." In the face of adversity, she began taking better care of her health. She started exercising

and found joy in mortgage brokering. She was creative with her approach and designed

workshops for homebuyers. Over time, her business and income grew and eventually, she moved

into a new home and was able to fully financially support her family. Today she continues to run

several businesses as she raises her younger children.

　　　　While it is clear that Amina believes in her ability to persist through difficult

circumstances, she feels that she is "always constantly struggling with a feeling of inadequacy"

and has learned to fake confidence as an entrepreneur. She discussed her insecurity regarding her

lack of formal education, of often being the only Black woman in the room, and maintaining a

healthy lifestyle. Amina expressed that her children help her learn confidence and develop

herself as a more whole person. She was emotional as she shared how proud she is to have been

able to teach her children life skills such as self-acceptance and confidence since she did not

have the opportunity to develop those skills as a child. Motherhood has given her confidence,

and her children look up to her as a role model. She feels proud of who they are and that gives

her confidence in her life skills as a mother and teacher. Watching her children successfully

navigate the world gave her the confidence to say,

　　　　You know what, I've gotten this far and whether I have that PhD or not, I've really been

　　　　able to impact people's lives in a way that nobody else could, and I believe that that was

　　　　more than just coincidence. I have to remind myself that the reason why I get hired to

　　　　consult and speak is not because of my degrees, but because of the expertise that I have

developed in life due to my struggles. I have to remind myself to be able to sit within
that.

Influence of external support and relationships. From the mother who cared for her
son during her early days of entrepreneurship to her friend who took her in so she and her
children would not be homeless, Amina expressed many times the deep gratitude she has for the
support she received from others as she grew her businesses. She could have gotten a normal
desk job and worked for someone else, but that wouldn't have provided the flexibility she needed
to care for her children and her epileptic son. Entrepreneurship allowed her to properly care for
her children while also financially providing for them. While Amina's relationships with her
children's father, her friends, and her extended family provided her with much needed emotional
support, she expressed that she has often felt lonely and isolated for most of her journey,
particularly during times of divorce or financial and/or entrepreneurial hardship. She is also
regarded as a leader in her community by many, acting as a mentor to younger people. However,
these one-way relationships do not always feel reciprocal. Amina described how she often works
alone, and her work involves a lot of self-containment and self-reflection. Much of her
confidence and motivation is self-driven. Rather than investing into social relationships, much of
her energy over the years was invested into ensuring the safety and wellbeing of her children so
that they would not be "poisoned by the hardship" that they were living through.

Meaning-making of the journey. When reflecting on her journey, Amina says that the
skills she has developed as a mother have directly impacted her ability to start and successfully
grow businesses. While she did not receive any kind of formal business training, Amina learned
how to apply the life skills she developed through challenging circumstances to her business. She
has come to recognize that the skills she performs naturally and routinely on a daily basis can be

leveraged for a financial benefit. She believes that anyone who is a mom already has the necessary skills to build a successful business. Amina's personal and professional experiences, as both a mother and entrepreneur, taught her strength, tenacity, and resilience. She is still learning how to build her confidence and support system on her journey. While Amina has admittedly struggled, it is clear that she has chosen to maintain a positive attitude about her ability to overcome personal and professional hardship.

Mompreneur Gretta

Gretta is a White, 39-year-old single mother of nine-year-old boy and girl twins. Her lice removal business is her primary form of income and it has grown rapidly since she started it a year ago. She has had limited financial means throughout her mothering journey and after discovering a high demand for lice removal services in her area, she started a mobile business. Parenting twins, running a household, and growing a new business required a lot of energy but has provided her with the flexibility she needs to juggle her responsibilities. Starting her own business has allowed Gretta to feel financially independent. It was important to her to be in control of her own finances, and she did not want to make money for someone else. She wanted to make money for herself while having the flexibility to pick up her children from school without scrambling for childcare. She believed that working for someone else would use her talent and skills for someone else's benefit, cost her money for childcare, and let someone else dictate her working hours. Meanwhile, starting her own business allowed her to set her own working hours and afforded her increased flexibility. However, she acknowledged that it also came with a lot of stress.

Identity, inner strength, self-efficacy, and confidence. Gretta always pictured herself as an entrepreneur and viewed herself as very creative and capable of coming up with new

business ideas. When Gretta found herself struggling with finances and raising twins alone, she identified a market opportunity to help families with lice infestations. While her friends tried to talk her out of going into business on her own, she believed in herself and persisted: "I decided then and there, I wasn't going to listen to anybody and opened the business" and she told herself, "I can do this. There's no doubt in my mind I can make this work." While demonstrating self-confidence, she also noted the challenges that accompanied the daily grind requiring strength, grit, and persistence. She said she has a lot of belief in herself. Gretta discussed her experiences as an entrepreneur including feelings of depression, of beating herself up, of not trying hard enough, and contemplating shutting down the business when things got tough:

> There's a range of emotions from low to high…of really sad, doubtful emotions like, should I close up the business, should I not, and then you get mad at yourself because you didn't do what you should've done. And the highs are definitely the opposite. When you have a great month, and it's just so reassuring and you're so happy you made the decision to start the business, and you're thinking about opening more shops and taking it across the country and across the world and there's no stopping you! (laughter). And then you go through a slow week and it starts again.

Gretta explained that when it comes to confidence, she can simultaneously feel good about herself and be hard on herself. She often denies herself feelings of fulfillment or gratification until she achieves a certain goal. She also explained how the nature of her business in dealing with lice makes her feel somewhat self-conscious about how she might be perceived when talking with prospective clients, or socially such as when she goes on a date with someone new. She finds herself reluctant to share that she removes lice from people's heads and sometimes feels embarrassed due to social stigma, even though she expresses deep down she

feels confident and proud of all the work she has done to get to where she is. When she looked back on what she has accomplished, such as building a business as a single mother, waking up at 4am to finish her Master's degree while working full time and raising twins, she admitted, "I am such a badass" and "my journey just to get to where I am is definitely a confidence booster."

Influence of external support and relationships. Gretta talked about how the most difficult part of her journey was not having more support, and specifically some kind of mentor.

> I have nobody...I just don't have a consistent somebody that I can just go to and say, 'I think I really messed up with this decision.' Or, 'Hey, guess what? I just had an awesome day and I think that this decision that I made is really getting out there.' I just don't have that network of people...and I just lack the time to go outside of me to find it. So when times are really tough, there's like no sound business advice. I really was alone along the way, and there's times where you just like shut down and feel depressed."

She discussed professional networking organizations and online support groups but found them too time consuming or limited by the online messaging component that doesn't allow for a deep enough support exchange. She wishes she could start her own support group but lacks the time. "I feel like having a mentorship group would be the difference of taking my business to the next level faster or the right way, because I wasted a lot of time and energy in stuff that now I know doesn't work." She expressed how valuable a business coach would be and believes that if she had one, she would be 10 years ahead of where she is now. However, she also admitted that hiring a business coach is unaffordable, as her funds need to go back into the business to keep her afloat.

Gretta also finds it difficult to run a business and support a family, due to the inconsistent nature of client walk-ins which require her to be available at all times of the day. Furthermore,

her parents are in poor health and she doesn't have friends nearby to help with childcare, so her children have, for the most part, learned to stay home on their own and call her at the office during emergencies.

Meaning-making of the journey. Gretta noted that since becoming an entrepreneur, she has learned a lot about herself and has grown stronger and more self-aware. She said it is in those moments where you come face to face with yourself and say, "Oh my God, business is so slow. Am I going to be able to make rent this month?" is where the true learning has come in for her. Looking back, Gretta said she would have rather have had a job while doing the business on the side, instead of going at it full time. Still, she learned a lot about finances and managing and weighing risk with entrepreneurship. She also learned to be more patient and take things a bit slower with more calculated risk. However, she also discovered that no matter what, she'll always be a bit of a risk taker and jokes that she "was born without the cautious gene." She admitted that a large part of her struggle was due to a lack of emotional and financial support, and expressed how hard it was starting a business without a husband and the dual income, emotional support and co-parenting that comes with partnership. She is still learning about the value of support, particularly networking and forming coalitions with other like-minded entrepreneurs. Gretta regrets not investing more time earlier in her journey on networking and seeking a mentor. However, she admitted, "Being a mompreneur, how much time do we really have? It is this catch-22 that you want to go and network but then you have all your responsibilities of your children at home."

Mompreneur Anastasia

Anastasia is a White, 38-year-old mother of a two-year-old girl, married to her husband who is the family breadwinner. She has a moderate household income, mostly provided by her

husband's job. She is a certified health and wellness coach and juggles growing her three-year-old business with staying home with her daughter. Before she started her business, Anastasia was working a corporate job when she realized she was unintentionally health coaching her colleagues and decided it was a viable business idea. She found herself stepping back and asking, "How is there a way that I can take what I've done, what I love and what I have really seen change people's life to incorporate wellness in their everyday life? How can I make that into like a career or a business?" Unlike her former corporate job, one of the biggest appeals of health coaching was the flexibility, which she knew would be helpful when she and her husband started a family. Anastasia's husband played an active role in helping her strategize her next steps, including how to finance the business and identifying what types of certifications would be needed. While her health coaching business is small, she understands the limitations of how fast she can grow given her multitasking motherhood. She spends a lot of time focused on recruiting new clients and developing partnerships to expand the reach of her business. At the time of the interview, she operated the business at a slight loss, but her husband's income supports both her business and the household comfortably.

       Identity, inner strength, self-efficacy and confidence. Anastasia explained that she has a passion for her health coaching business, and it provides a sense of fulfillment as well as a sense of community with her clients. She even took a shortened maternity leave because she was excited to return to the business and helping her clients. She referred to her business as "a real extension of myself" and compared it to having her daughter, as she felt a total merging as mother and child with little separation. She said that since starting her business, "defining my sense of self, my career and interests have finally merged and I think I've been holding on to that since [my daughter] has been born so that I do not lose myself." However, she discussed feeling

a split identity between mom and business owner and struggles to shift gears between nurturing her daughter and building a business.

Overall, Anastasia said her confidence increased since starting her business, but she often second guesses her abilities, particularly when comparing herself to other coaches in her industry. Anastasia gains confidence from her interactions with clients and the positive feedback she receives regarding suggestions toward their health. She also feels a boost in confidence when she learns new information she can share with her clients to help them meet their fitness goals. However, she often finds herself doubting her ability to sustain her business growth and noted, "Sometimes I wonder if I'm really just fooling myself. Like am I just playing like I've got a little entrepreneurship business or is this something that's real? Some days it's like, 'Oh, this is going nowhere. This is just kid's play' and 'This is all going to be for nothing' and, 'Okay, back to the 9 to 5 grind.'"

Influence of external support and relationships. Anastasia expressed she feels quite supported by her husband, family, and friends. She noted the unique support of a local mom's co-op group, where mothers help each other by sharing childcare responsibilities. Anastasia commented, "Just the other day I put out a note saying, 'I need help. I have a consultation, and my husband's traveling,' and a woman came over. So being a mom and having other moms who are in my situation is really so supportive and so helpful." She also has a mentor and a few friends she meets with regularly that provide support. Her health coaching support consists of men and women whom she describes as "extremely supportive" and "very networking minded."

She emphasized how grateful she is for her husband's support toward her venture, but wishes he would proactively offer to take care of their daughter more on the weekends so she could work on the business, and sometimes she struggles to express her needs to him. She

remarked, "I just hate that I feel like I need to ask for help and that he doesn't offer it."

Sometimes Anastasia feels like she is walking on eggshells with her husband, as he is investing

both time and money into the business. She commented, "He's supportive when it doesn't have

too much of an impact on him."

       Meaning-making of the journey. When reflecting back on her journey, Anastasia said

she learned the importance of patience and factoring in more time than expected to get things

done as both a business owner and a mom. She admitted that she wishes she had started her

business at least two years before giving birth to her daughter and didn't anticipate how

demanding parenthood was going to be. She also learned to stop procrastinating and said she has

adopted an "as soon as you're thinking of it, do it" type of mentality. She learned the value of a

support system, how to master time management skills, and to set realistic expectations to

prevent disappointment or burnout. She has also learned to communicate with her clients about

her work-life balance by having open discussions about her limited time as a mom. This manages

their expectations so they are more respectful and compassionate to her circumstances.

       Anastasia discussed how she learned a tremendous number of life skills as a mom and

those skills prepared her more than expected as she became an entrepreneur. She said, "being a

mom is basically being an entrepreneur. You're in the business of raising your child. If you want

one of the most time-managed efficient employees, get a mom." She said becoming an

entrepreneur was a very helpful and healthy way to give her a sense of purpose and identity

outside of being a mother. As her children get older, she wants to be able to model to them that

she has done something for herself and society outside of parenting.

       At the end of her interview, Anastasia's daughter wakes up from a nap and crawls in her

lap crying and seeking attention. In between consoling her daughter's bursts of tears, Anastasia

gets in one last thought before we stop recording, "Being a mompreneur, I've learned to be ten times more efficient. As soon as she goes down for a nap, boom! There is no Facebook, there is no chatting with friends. It's just getting my stuff done. I know I have limited time before the ticking time bomb wakes up."

Mompreneur Marie

Marie is a White, 37-year-old married mother of a four-year-old and a two-year-old. She has been running a nonprofit consulting business for two years. She has a moderate household income that both she and her husband equally contribute toward. Her entrepreneurial story began when she found herself with a two-year-old with a broken leg in a toe to hip cast who had to be carried everywhere. Furthermore, it was one of the worst winters on record, and her commute into work was taking four to five hours round trip. When her employer refused to allow her to work from home due to her extreme circumstances, she felt she had no choice but to resign. She used six weeks of paid vacation time to help fund her business, which was essentially the same as what she was doing for her employer, but now with her own clients. At the time, her husband's salary could not cover all of their household costs, so she worked quickly to transfer old clients to her new firm. Marie considers her entrance into entrepreneurship relatively easy because she was doing the same thing she had done her whole career and described it as, "I wasn't changing what I was doing in terms of my work. I was changing who I am."

Identity, inner strength, self-efficacy and confidence. Marie confidently dove into her new business, and she said, "I took on projects not knowing what life was going to throw me." At first, she wasn't sure if she believed that she was actually capable of creating a "real" sustainable business. She was a bit insecure about selling herself in the industry on her own and unsure if people would find value in her services without a company behind her. Marie reflected,

"When I started to see those contracts getting signed and those dollars falling in from people who came to my business instead of my old firm, saying they wanted to work with me, it was kind of that reinforcement, like, 'Hey, this is real.'" She said many people in her industry don't have the risk tolerance to do what she has done.

Marie explained that her evolving identity as an entrepreneur can be confusing. She struggles to identify the line between being a consultant and a business-owner, and doesn't know how to label herself. She remarked, "I kind of hate the word solo-preneur. I kind of hate freelance. I kind of hate gig because a lot of that feels like something you do outside of a nine-to-five job. I also don't like wearing my mommy label so clearly, so I don't embrace terms like mommy-preneur or mom-preneur or anything like that. It's just not me."

Marie struggles with time management and balancing her business and her family. She admitted, "I feel like the lack of time degrades my ability to build confidence in either realm. So, I feel like. . .a failure sometimes. I feel like a failure as a mom. I feel like a failure as a wife. I feel like a failure as a daughter." These feelings of guilt and inadequacy weigh heavily on her. She said she can point to tangible external "successes" but often finds herself falling into feelings of despair.

Influence of external support and relationships. Marie said that through it all, her husband has remained supportive of the business and the resulting flexibility for the family. However, she said sometimes it is a struggle because her husband parachutes in and out of her business financials with emotional reactions. For example, he gets excited by the revenue and dismayed by expenses without having a full understanding of the day to day operations. She feels pressured by his criticism regarding her business decisions and explained that it is a strain on her marriage to ask him for permission for every business expense. Marie said, "He keeps getting

kind of caught up in it. I feel like it's hard because I could use the confidant. I could use the thinking partner. I could use the person to bounce things off of. But instead I'm getting overwhelmed by all his reactions."

Marie also discussed the support she receives from her parents. When her mother retired, she asked Marie how she could help. Now her parents are active in the family life, bringing her kids to preschool, running her daughter to physical therapy appointments, and providing last minute childcare when necessary. Marie discussed how she feels blessed that she never has to worry about the safety of her children and that they are loved by her parents. On the flip side, Marie explained that her grandparents are aging and need care, which sandwiches her parents between caring for their grandchildren and caring for their elderly parents. This is an increasing concern for Marie as it will likely affect her support system for childcare in the years to come. She remarked, "I live a life of waiting for the shoe to drop and knowing that my child care could evaporate on a moment's notice, temporarily or permanently."

Marie discussed how she feels she is missing a broader support network of friends and likeminded business owners. Marie admitted, "I'm so unbelievably lonely. I really wish I knew more entrepreneurs at similar life cycle stages." She explained that the women around her are mostly stay at home moms and she struggles to relate to them. She doesn't like online Facebook groups because she feels they are impersonal, and she does not enjoy laying her personal struggles out in a public forum. She would love to have more feedback, advice, and a safe place to discuss the ups and downs of running a business. She laughed as she shared, "I tried joining my local chambers but they're all men in their 70's with like white hair, who don't understand me, you know?"

Marie said she has an ongoing relationship with a life coach who has helped her reflect on how to support herself through entrepreneurship. She wishes she could afford to see her on a more regular basis because it propels her forward and helps her stay positive and draw boundaries in her life and work. Marie said, "I don't need advice about running the business. What I'm struggling with is that intersection of work and life. I didn't start a business to work seven days a week. I didn't start a business to never see my kids. Almost every day it feels like that work-life balance is just getting wildly out of control."

Meaning-making of the journey. Marie reflected on her journey and described how she is learning the importance of pausing to celebrate her small successes more often, rather than just surviving through chaos. She also emphasized the importance of having other likeminded people in her life to celebrate those successes with, without feelings of jealousy or envy. Marie wishes she had put more money aside to invest in operating expenses, networking, support groups, and a business coach. When reflecting on her journey, Marie also said she thinks that having a paid job during the early stages of parenthood was a relief, and she's happy she started her business when they were a bit older, as she was not unbelievably sleep deprived and did not have to learn a whole new field. She explained how she met pregnant women who wanted to start a new business, and always advised them to have something more secure with maternity leave in the early stages. She also advised them to know a specific field in more depth before throwing themselves into entrepreneurship during such a demanding phase of life.

Marie also reflected on how life threw many unexpected curveballs her way, from her children's health and developmental issues to sickness and death in her family. These challenges have taken a toll on her. As soon as she feels like she is regaining stability, more things come around the corner. It is clear that she is learning how to be grateful for what she has, even though

she feels it has been hard. Marie said, "I look at entrepreneurs and I think that the road is hard. Being a mom is hard. And being both is hard. And all of the obvious places that I think about turning for like the chamber, end up being like a hairball pit. But I don't know how I could have done all of it if I wasn't an entrepreneur." Overall Marie feels grateful for the flexibility of entrepreneurship to help her be more available for her family during all the hard times throughout her journey.

Mompreneur Zoila

Zoila is a 38-year-old Filipino mother of four boys: a 15-year-old stepson, a five-year-old, and four-year-old twins. She is married and has been running her boutique public relations agency for about three years, which is the primary source of their moderate household income. She said that because of the closeness in age of her children, at one point she found herself feeding four people through her body, including herself, since her unexpected twins are only 14 months younger than her other son. She spent most of her employed career in fashion merchandising, which eventually led to working with Filipino musicians, artists, and activists in her local community. While she enjoyed representing these Filipino artists in the industry, she found her firm was disrespecting them in different ways and not allowing her the flexibility to represent them in a way that was aligned with her values. After experiencing many toxic and disrespectful situations in this job, including sexual harassment, she finally said, "You know what, I want to start my own business, so I can support and respect the clients I want and not have someone dictate who I should be promoting and doing PR for." She quit her job and intentionally decided over the course of the next few years to maintain some easy day jobs while growing her business on the side and taking on more private PR clients.

However, the road to entrepreneurship was rockier than expected. After Zoila got married and gave birth to her first son, she unexpectedly got pregnant with twins just six months later. Zoila immediately shut down her business and she and her husband moved in with her retired father who helped the family. They filed for bankruptcy and quickly decided Zoila would need to get a corporate job to help them afford to move into their own house while her husband maintained his flexible teaching job. Six months later when Zoila was laid off, she made a promise to herself to not rely on a company ever again and was determined to make her business succeed so she could support her family. She reconnected with her old clients and successfully started her business back up, and it has been growing strong for the past three years.

Identity, inner strength, self-efficacy and confidence. Zoila said that the high point in her entrepreneurial journey was growing into believing in herself and feeling confident in knowing that she can be there when her kids need her. She said that even though corporate employment can provide more financial security than entrepreneurship, that security is actually false because she got laid off and felt out of control over her own career. She said, "at least now I'm controlling the ship."

Zoila said that she considers herself to have a high degree of self-confidence. She said that the challenges life has thrown at her has forced her to do hard work in growing herself. She reads a lot of self-help books, listens to inspiring podcasts, and regularly reflects on her weaknesses and what she could be improving. She said her spiritual outlook on life has helped her believe in herself, meditate regularly, and count her blessings. She said a huge part of her journey in her own learning and development has been finding the space for self-reflection and tapping into her purpose. At the time of the interview, she was actively working on shifting the negative beliefs she attaches to her ability to make money. She was doing this by reading books

and learning how to shift the energy she attaches to money and abundance. She said she gains a lot of confidence from the success of her clients and seeing them thrive. She enjoys helping empower other people.

       Influence of external support and relationships. Zoila said that, hands down, her biggest support is her husband. She said that with regard to the house and childcare, everything she does, he does-–from diapers, to lunches, and bath time-–and he has sacrificed just as much as her to make it all work. She credits their team mentality in sharing in the burdens of work and life as the reason why she has been able to grow her business. Over the past five years, they spent over $100,000 on daycare and preschool. Zoila's husband decided the bankruptcy would be filed in his name so she could maintain good credit for her business. She said,

> I think the split of household duties with my husband has been key in all of this: not only the financial support, but the emotional support-- he's my cheerleader. I definitely would not have made this leap into doing my business a hundred percent if it wasn't for him, because he's really pushed me and he's like, 'No, you're amazing. You can do this. People are going to want you.

She said he has been a huge part of her maintaining a confident mindset on her entrepreneurial journey. She also said having a best friend who is an entrepreneur, plus being inspired by all of her entrepreneurial PR clients, has helped. Zoila also works with a business coach on a regular basis and she believes every entrepreneur should have one to help keep them going. She said, "having this outside perspective and someone pushing you to do bigger and better and look at things differently is really key in growing your business."

       Her parents live close by and help with the children. But for the most part, childcare is up to her and her husband. Zoila explains that because her children are so close in age, it is difficult

to ask friends or family to watch all of the children at once and admits that sometimes it has even been too much for her and her husband to handle. Zoila is hopeful that it will get easier as the children get older and are potty-trained. She remarked,

> I'm starting to go out a little bit more to networking things and just being out and about, being seen. You can imagine being a publicist and then not going out: it's not really ideal, so I really felt like a hermit crab. But I'm usually so exhausted, I don't want to go out, I just want to be at home.

Zoila said that while she is part of several online groups for support, and is also part of a co-op of local families, she finds that a lot of groups feel very White to her and she doesn't feel very connected to the members. She said, "As you get older, it's like, 'I don't want to make new friends.' It feels like work having to be part of those kinds of groups. My husband and I have just really secluded ourselves, even from professional opportunities because of that."

She has a team of people working on her business and much of her time is spent delegating tasks to other people. She said hiring contractors has helped her avoid working late at night so she can focus more on being a mom and taking days off for field trips or sick kids at home.

Meaning-making of the journey. Looking back on her journey, Zoila said that she has learned to take action instead of overanalyzing things and allowing herself to get paralyzed by fear. She said that it was not until she fully committed to her business full time that she could be present and bring the business to the level it needed to support her family. She said that prior to that, she grew the business while juggling other jobs and side gigs, and spent time exploring and researching too much in its early stages. She said this distraction kept her from fully "going for it" and "getting shit moving quickly." Zoila learned to be more of a risk taker, to put things on

her credit card, and to let go of the fear of investing in herself and investing in the business. She learned that if she invests money in the business, she feels confident it will come back around as long as smart decisions are made. She also learned to put her family ahead of her business, and to trust that she is always capable to coming back to her business if her children need to take priority during certain times. Zoila said,

> I think a lot of women don't become parents because they want to focus on their career; I think that is actually a mistake. I know a lot of people who put off having a family because of their career and they regret it later. Being an entrepreneur can be a life-long project that is always changing and coming and going, whereas becoming a parent, you have this small window in life to make that happen. I've always prioritized raising a family over my career in entrepreneurship and starting a business.

Mompreneur Nina

Nina is a White 49-year-old, married mother of two children, ages 10 and 12. She has been running a parent coaching business for the past four years, and her attorney husband is the main financial contributor to their high household income. When her children reached five and seven years of age, she found herself in a new house managing renovation projects. At that time, she quit her corporate tax policy job because she wanted a break to focus on her home life. Reflecting on her corporate career, she said,

> I was tired of all the rushing and stressing and having no idea what I was going to make for dinner that night, and just the chaos of having to get out the door every morning. I felt like what was the point of having kids if I was going to be gone so much. And also leaving my kids in daycare for up to 10 hours per day while I worked just seemed a little crazy.

After she quit her job, she made her family her priority. However, Nina still found herself wanting to fill the six hours of the day when her children were in school with something fulfilling. After some reflective soul searching, Nina found herself excited and passionate about a transformational parenting course she took and felt that empowering other parents was something she wanted to do. From there, she started getting involved in workshops and volunteer opportunities.

Identity, inner strength, self-efficacy and confidence. Nina said that she did not set out to start a business and becoming an entrepreneur was a slow, incremental process: "It wasn't like I went out and was immediately an entrepreneur or a business owner; in fact, I never thought of myself as an entrepreneur. I remember seeing what entrepreneurs did and I remember thinking that is so not me. And I would never want to promote myself like that or hustle and stress like that." Nina said she always viewed herself as more of a "worker bee"-–the type of person who gets a job, works hard and collects a paycheck. She saw entrepreneurs as passionate risk takers and aggressive sales people who invested all of their energy into a startup. Other than being passionate, Nina doesn't identify with any of those traits. She said, "I just felt like I should be a good girl and not bring attention to myself. The idea of having to market anything or try to convince people, ugh, like God forbid if people aren't interested in your stuff, you don't want to push it on them." As time went on, Nina found confidence and enjoyment through running workshops for parents and seeing their transformations. She received positive feedback and over time, she found herself renting workspace and getting insurance, even though she never intended to start a business. She reflected, "I basically was like building a plane as I was flying it and I had to figure a lot out as I went. I had to figure out all this stuff around like if people don't come, how do I charge? I learned a lot."

Nina shared that she now makes as much money from her business as she did when she was working full time. This makes her feel confident in her ability to take on something she did not think she was designed to do. She said it feels really good to be able to financially support her family and to know that if anything happened to her husband, she has a way to support her children. Nina expressed, "I really am an 'unexpected entrepreneur'; I never really thought about or imagined myself as an entrepreneur. But I have to say I'm really proud of myself. It feels good." Nina loves how flexible her life is now. She loves being able to put work on hold to pick up a child, have lunch on a weekday with a friend, or get some exercise in for herself. However, she said the big drawback of her life as an entrepreneur is always having her business on her mind and struggling to be present. She said her work with her employer didn't cross into her personal life like it does now and she is still learning how to be present with her family. When it comes to confidence in selling herself and her business, she said she struggles, "I still struggle with selling myself and my services and intentionally putting myself in the spotlight in order to sell my business. It feels like I have to always compliment myself and tell people why they need to pick me. It has gotten easier but I still have a long way to go." Nina said her identity has completely changed since starting her business,

> Now I have an identity that is very different from earlier on. Now I am a mother business owner, now I do networking meetings, I am actively identifying with my local mother entrepreneur community in a way that I didn't in my first three years. Just in the last year I've become so much more in the identity of an entrepreneur now that I am networking with other women entrepreneurs like me and sharing stories and collaborating. I'm really coming into my identity in a way I wasn't before.

She said that she still focuses on the needs of her children, and her flexible work allows her to do that. Nina joked that her kids don't even know that she works that much or that she is an entrepreneur. She said she is a completely different mom from when she worked a normal job; she is more relaxed and does not have to rush off to work and struggle without work flexibility.

Influence of external support and relationships. Nina said that she is grateful for her husband's financial support, as she probably would not be an entrepreneur if he was not sharing his income. However, she referred to her husband as a "mixed bag" with regard to emotional support, as he does not help much with taking care of the kids or the home. She said,

> On one hand he is very supportive and feels proud of me, but on the other hand he thinks
> of himself as a breadwinner and diminishes what I'm doing. For example, when two
> people work, theoretically you should share equally in the domestic stuff. But his
> perception of my work is that it is not really work and I'm not an equal work partner to
> him and that I should be doing more of the domestic stuff in the end. I feel somewhat
> unsupported by him.

She said she often feels lonely as an entrepreneur and misses being in an office and laughing with her colleagues. However, she has joined several support groups with other mother entrepreneurs, which helps her feel connected and energized. Nina feels frustrated that 80% of her time goes into running her business and marketing it, and only 20% is spent on running the workshops. She was working to solve this by enlisting the external support of hired contractors to run other parts of her business that she is less knowledgeable about or does not enjoy. Nina sees a therapist regularly and would like to see a business coach. However, she cannot justify the high cost.

Meaning-making of the journey. When Nina reflected on her journey, she said being an accidental entrepreneur may have saved her from feeling the fear or pressure typical of new business owners. She said that since she did not feel the pressure of "this is my job so I need to make it work," she had a lot of room to play, to have fun, and to experiment. She said, "I wasn't in that intense mental state. Even when I got my website up, it wasn't about whether or not it was great or not, but just that it was up at all. I was like, hey look at me I have a website!"

Most importantly, Nina learned the critical value in having support from other mother entrepreneurs. She believes she could have accelerated her process if she had started even earlier. She learned to anticipate down time and prepare for stress. Some lessons she would share with other mompreneurs include keeping in mind how valuable a financially stable partner can be, as well as considering holding off on starting a business until one's children are a little older and less demanding. The last thing Nina said was, "I would say the most important thing I've learned is just believing in myself and believing that I was a worthy business owner and not some half-assed in-between working person. I give myself more credit now."

Mompreneur Juliet

Juliet is a 52-year-old, White mother of two children, ages 12 and 15. She has been managing her own business as a doula and providing women birth support for the past few years. Her husband works full time and provides a majority of their high household income. She spent most of her career in a corporate marketing job in New York City. She had just given birth to her first son, was pumping breast milk, paying nannies and dog walkers to take care of everything at home while she and her husband worked long hours. One day they realized that they were paying other people to live their life at home and decided to give their lifestyle a complete makeover and move somewhere more affordable. They sold their home in NYC and moved to their hometown

in Ohio. During this time, Juliet discovered her passion for doula work and worked as a

contractor for local hospitals, building up her name and relationships. However, when her

husband suddenly had to move to Chicago for a new job, she found herself having to start over.

This is when she began to take business courses and set up a formal business.

> **Identity, inner strength, self-efficacy and confidence.** Juliet said that she felt more

confident as a business owner than most of her doula colleagues because of her extensive

background in corporate marketing management. She found confidence in her abilities and she

believed in her skills of selling herself and marketing her business. As she reflected back on the

bosses that used to aggravate her, Juliet feels happy to not have to report to anybody. She said,

"Sometimes it's a challenge to be a real self–starter. Sometimes it's a challenge to have difficult

conversations with people. But, I much prefer that it's my job to do well or to do poorly -

ultimately it's my choice. And that makes me happy." Juliet finds joy, fulfillment, and self-

confidence in working with women and helping them bring babies into the world. She is shifting

her business focus to serving women in underprivileged communities where there are higher

infant mortality rates. She expressed a lot of excitement in being given the opportunity to

channel her passion into a business that serves women who cannot afford a doula. Juliet

expressed that sometimes her confidence dips when she finds herself comparing herself to others

in her same industry. She said sometimes she has thoughts like, "I'm never going to succeed.

There's always going to be something that stops me. There's just something wrong inside of me."

She is still learning how to navigate new technology, social media, and the internet, and feels

behind when she compares herself to others in this realm.

> She talked a lot about her identity as a mother, and how it is important to her to provide

her kids with presence and a home base as they enter their teenage years. She said college is right

around the corner, and even though her kids do not always admit it, she believes they want her support, to be around her after school and spend time at home.

Influence of external support and relationships. Juliet explained that she wishes she had more support with childcare while building her business, as she had to manage much of the household and childcare responsibilities on her own. However, she said her husband was very supportive both personally and professionally:

My husband is really a huge fan of my work. If I'm gone for two days with a birth, he comes home early from work and takes care of the kids. He says things like, 'These women are so lucky to have you. You make such a huge difference. You're doing God's work.' It's really great. I could not do this without him.

Juliet feels very supported by her community and has learned the importance of networking and support groups. When discussing the power of networking among women entrepreneurs, she said,

Networking with other women entrepreneurs is so enormously helpful. I think that women entrepreneurs in particular know how to network in such a way that it's not just like, 'Oh, here's my business card and blah, blah, blah.' No, they know how to work with other women in ways that are really helpful. Rather than coming from this very competitive, scarcity mindset, women entrepreneurs know that by working together, we can all do great things.

Meaning making of the journey. Juliet said that although working a regular job would provide more consistency and predictability, it would not provide the transformational fulfillment of her entrepreneurial path. She said that being an entrepreneur has allowed her to grow in ways she did not expect, and positioned her to give back to society. She said,

I got on the Board of Directors for a birthing association and my eyes have been opened in enormous ways. The board I'm on is very diverse and it has exposed me to women of color, gender queer people and things like that. Understanding their challenges has opened my eyes enormously and I would not have done any of that if I hadn't jumped into entrepreneurship. I'm doing good work, and I'm helping people, and I'm thinking we get enough money with this. We can buy Christmas presents for our kids.

She also emphasized how being a business owner sets an example for her kids by modeling to them that they can do whatever they want with their lives.

Mompreneur Raymonde

Raymonde is a 41-year-old, divorced, White mother of four children ages 18, 15, 12 and 10, and is originally from Canada. She is the sole financial provider to her low to moderate household income and started her chiropractor business about seven years ago. Entrepreneurship started for Raymonde after the birth of her second son. At that time, she tried to go back to work for two days a week, but she found that her children were needy, wanting to nurse all of the time, and this made it difficult for her to go to her job. She decided that the best way to make money and take care of her family while working from home was to open up her own chiropractor office. She started a business with her former husband. However, when they got divorced, the business shut down and she decided to start another business herself.

Identity, inner strength, self-efficacy and confidence. Raymonde described how scary it was for her to start her own practice, especially as a single mom and sole financial provider for four children. She was also still emotionally healing from her divorce. She described the fear of moving on and creating her own practice, of whether her patients would follow her, and whether she could book a schedule that was full enough to make her rent each month. When her children

were at school or with their father, Raymonde worked hard to get the business off the ground.

She reflected,

> I started to find that when I had the fear of losing patients, what happened is more
>
> patients came. There was more energy around me being on my own - more people started
>
> asking and people started coming back and seeing me. So there was actually an increase
>
> when I started my own practice and that allowed for me to start gaining more self-
>
> confidence, more personal satisfaction in my being and it really allowed me to be
>
> emotionally available for my children in a big way.

When Raymonde is feeling down or doubting herself, her positive self-talk and

confidence kick in and she is able to reframe the negative story playing out in her mind. She

talked about shifting her mindset, "If I leave behind my victim mentality and shift from, 'I'm so

alone and when is this going to stop being so hard?' to 'Wow, it is in my. . .I have the tools. I

have the power to see myself as a creator that can create my business and ask for help and be a

facilitator as well and facilitate other people to come and help along the way."

She described her kids getting excited to go see "mom's office" and feeling like they had

a space they could come to. If a child was sick, Raymonde could bring them into work with her.

Over the years, her children have felt involved in her work and that brings Raymonde

satisfaction.

Influence of external support and relationships. Raymonde described the vulnerability

of an entrepreneurial single mom when something unexpected happens. She recalled feeling

alone and unsupported during a time she was unexpectedly very sick and had to juggle kids and

skipping clients. She struggled knowing that she wasn't able to pull in any income until her body

recovered. She said, "After that low moment of realizing how vulnerable I am to either sickness

or an injury, it really. . .it stirred something inside me. So, it precipitated some changes of

internal responsibility and internal acknowledging that there are some things that I can do to help

support myself better." Raymonde put together a stronger support system, she hired a

receptionist, and she shifted her diet so that her body was stronger and healthier. She hired

someone to help clean her home and cook healthy meals for her and her children. She also

learned to take care of herself better emotionally and spiritually.

Raymonde said that her ex-husband plays an important role of support in childcare. She

has also learned that supporting herself in her business requires her supporting her children the

right way so they can support her back. Raymonde explained:

> As a mom, I've come to see myself as more of a facilitator, a helper to my children, as a
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> teacher. I see my role more as teaching them and helping them by helping me first, so
>
> they can see what it looks like to take care of myself first. Before, it was, 'Oh my God, I
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> have to take care of everybody. It's all up to me. When is somebody going to help me?
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> How am I going to get all this done?' Now my focus is more about helping them help
>
> themselves, so I can be closer to them in a way where I have less clutter in my mind and
>
> in my emotions. Now I'm more in charge of myself. I'm more in charge of the family
>
> unit. I facilitate them cooking meals at night, cleaning up from dinner, doing the laundry,
>
> and I have the room to facilitate what their interests and sports are as well.

Meaning making of the journey. When reflecting on her journey, Raymonde said that

the biggest transformation is seeing herself as more of a creator instead of a poor person who is

alone, working to make everybody happy. She learned the hard way that if she cannot make

herself happy and take care of herself first, then she cannot go out and take care of patients, or

take care of her children. This is both a mindset and lifestyle shift for her. She learned to truly

care for herself to avoid burnout. Raymonde explained that her spiritual journey and faith in the

divine have been her most powerful transformation:

> Whether it's meditation, yoga, breathing exercises, writing, creative writing, anything that
>
> can help you connect to yourself, your heart, will help you be more connected to the
>
> universe, connected to your own purpose. Once you're in alignment with your own
>
> purpose, life happens. It's much easier and life becomes bright. Ever since I got more
>
> connected to myself, connected and aligned to my real purpose here, I've learned to be
>
> the best healer I can be, the best sibling, daughter, partner and entrepreneur I can be.

Mompreneur Anna

Anna is a Latina 44-year-old mother of twin 9-year-old boys, and is originally from

Venezuela. She is a few years into starting up a nutrition coaching business while her husband

works full time, bringing in a high income. Anna spent many years as a corporate attorney in

Venezuela. When she received her green card in the U.S., she was required to take the bar exam

so she quit her job to prepare. She started to feel unsatisfied in her career and wanted to do

something more meaningful that had a direct positive impact on people. Since she watched her

father save lives as a doctor while she was growing up, she guiltily remarked, "I had emergencies

at my corporate job, but I was not saving any lives." While preparing for the bar exam, Anna

discovered she was unexpectedly pregnant with twins. She decided to leave her career behind.

Her twins were premature and one had health issues, so she said it would have been too stressful

to do focus on anything but parenting at that time. She said her time as a stay at home mom was

amazing, and reflected, "I loved being able to see my kids grow and to have been able to be with

them when they first started riding a bike, when they first smiled…all their firsts. So, it was

amazing." As her children got a bit older, Anna realized that the parenting knowledge she

accumulated around health and nutrition could be shared with others, so she switched gears and became a certified trainer and started to slowly build a nutrition coaching business.

Identity, inner strength, self-efficacy and confidence. Anna described how marketing and selling herself has been challenging for her. She described herself as an introvert, but she is gaining confidence as she tries new things. For example, she was insecure about publishing a video on social media, but once she did it, she felt empowered and confident. Anna demonstrated that although she feels afraid to do certain things, she maintains a positive attitude. She said, "If I don't do something I'm afraid of, then I probably won't progress. I have faith that this is just a phase and I do believe in what I do. I think if we talk three years from now, I'm going to be excited I did the right thing but it is still challenging in the meantime." Anna expressed that starting her own business encouraged her to slowly start coming out of her shell and build more confidence in her abilities. She said, "I feel more empowered to do things. I feel more confident in myself as a woman, and I feel more confident as a person and even as a parent." She attributed this to being forced to constantly step outside her comfort zone and make decisions about things she cannot predict the outcome for. It requires risk and total faith in oneself and builds trust in her ability to learn new things and make smart choices. Anna mentioned a few other areas of discomfort for her including her accent as a non-native English speaker, particular when speaking with large audiences, as well as being in a new profession where she has to do a lot of selling and educating in a new industry. Overall, Anna expressed that her entrepreneurial journey made her feel stronger in who she is and what she is capable of, and this has made her a better and happier mother.

Influence of external support and relationships. Since Anna got certified through a coaching program, she has access a number of support resources. She has an accountability

partner who is also a coach and they work next to each other and hold each other accountable to their daily work goals. She also has a business coach with whom she meets to stay structured and organized. While Anna is working on her business, she has the support of a nanny who shops, cleans, cooks, and drives her children from school to activities. Anna also said her husband fully supports her venture and his financial means allowed her to start her business with little pressure. She said the only time she feels unsupported is if her nanny and kids are all sick at the same time and then she doesn't have family nearby on backup.

Meaning making of the journey. Anna reflected on her entrepreneurial journey and remembers all of the fear and anxiety and insecurity she had in the beginning. She experienced a lot of worrying. She remembers switching careers and wanting it to all be perfect and beating herself up if she made mistakes. Over time, Anna learned to keep going no matter what, to be positive and kind to herself. She also learned to explore and give herself breaks, and to try to follow her instincts. Anna said, "Starting a business is a journey. It is challenging, and it has its ups and downs. But I've learned to just enjoy it. I'm just going to enjoy the process and little by little, things are going to get better. If it doesn't work, it's an experience."

Mompreneur Christy

Christy is a White, 48-year-old mother of one child, a 13-year-old boy. She has been working at growing her corporate coaching business for the past ten years. She is married to her husband, a doctor who provides most of their high household income. Christy spent most of her career in the consulting business, but after she got married and had trouble conceiving, she decided to work part time. She found a much better balance of time off with the intensity of her work and finally got pregnant. However, her path to partnership from her firm was clearly cut off, as they did not take her seriously when she was working part time. With a high-risk

pregnancy and a clear loss of a path up the corporate ladder, Christy and her husband decided together that she would quit her career and stay home. She said they had worked too hard to have her son and she wanted to be a hands on, available mother. She discovered that coaching and consulting on her own would allow her to make a bit of "bonus money" on top of her husband's salary and work a few hours per day while her son was at daycare.

Identity, inner strength, self-efficacy and confidence. Christy described how she was confident her ability as an entrepreneur to lead teams and grow her business. She was also grateful that she had flexibility in day to day business operations and overall career trajectory. For example, she managed a move to a new city for her husband's job and was able to take a break from her work when her parents were ill. After her parents recovered and she settled back into a more stable life routine, Christy started marketing for her business. However, her priority is fully on her son and she only works on the business in bits and pieces. She said,

> When kids are in preschool, they just need love. But now in middle school and high school the conversations that we have in that window after school feel really important. From how he dealt with his teachers, how he dealt with his friends, how he dealt with conflict. I want to be the one influencing that. So, I'm doing this method, trying to keep the business part time. But my mindset is that my son is my most important client.

In addition to finding fulfillment in her mothering role, Christy draws confidence from the teams she consults with, and the influence she is able to make on their progress and helping them resolve conflict. She also found confidence in setting boundaries with clients. Sometimes her clients have a different work ethic than her, but she works to not let it cross the line into her personal life. She recalled, "There were times where I felt bad for not being able to be full time for clients. I felt bad that I wasn't pushing myself harder. And so, it really called me to look at

what are the choices I'm making and what are the choices I want to be making, and do I really want to be making the choice. I don't want to live that life. It's not the family life at all that I pictured or that I signed up for." She's watchful of boundaries, setting expectations, and keeping her son and his needs the front of her mind.

Christy said that when she gets frustrated or hits any internal resistance, her strategy is to shift her mindset into curiosity and say, "Oh, it's the next thing to learn." She said over her years of experience working with teams, she has gotten stronger in her ability to see the patterns and be okay with lots of different "right" answers.

Influence of external support and relationships. Christy described her husband as her biggest cheerleader and "extraordinarily supportive" throughout her journey with his patience, love, and financial support. In fact, Christy said,

> He's the one who pushed me out the door in the first place. So I'm home with the baby, and he starts to pick up that I was feeling a little restless, and he's the one who said, 'Hey, let's put the baby in a long daycare.' I'm not sure I would have done that on my own. It wasn't pressure, it was like, 'What do you want to do with that other part of your brain for a while?

He wants her to reach the professional goals that she sets for herself and is very appreciative of all she does at home to keep the household running. They are clear in their relationship roles, with her happily taking on most of the household duties so he can focus on his career. She wishes her parents were able to support her more, but their age and physical condition prevent it.

Christy said that she has been working with her own business coach since starting her venture, which has helped her be her own boss, stay in touch with what she really wants, and be

in control of the choices she is making personally and professionally. She is involved in some professional organizations and networking groups that have been critical to growing her business.

Meaning making of the journey. Reflecting back on her journey, Christy said her confidence has soared since she started her business ten years ago. She said she is a completely different person, and she feels like she has truly mastered her skills at what she does. She is also confident, after many stops and starts, that her lifestyle business is working for her, her family, and for their lives. She said,

> We live in a culture where we bathe in the idea that if you're not growing, you're not going. We have this idea that you've got to work all the time or you won't be successful, and I think that's not true. That way of thinking can be a source of worry. I don't feel like I have to get to a million dollars every year and I don't need to work 70 hours a week to be successful because I was very successful without doing that.

Instead, Christy has learned to balance her priorities for her family life and her business. She has learned to not be afraid to be small, and to put her family first through it all.

Mompreneur Chloe

Chloe is an African-American and Hispanic 40-year-old woman of one 16-year-old boy. She is divorced and her three-year-old public speaking business is her main form of income. She had been in corporate sales her whole career, but she felt drawn to start her business to ensure that she has something for the next chapter of her life that she can grow into after her son goes off to college.

Identity, inner strength, self-efficacy and confidence. Chloe has been told her whole life that she is entrepreneurial, and she has always looked up to her mother who is a self-made

entrepreneur of a multimillion dollar elder care business. She feels confident and comfortable in her identity as an entrepreneur. She thrives in a professional environment that is unpredictable and exciting, where she can tackle her fears and grow as an individual. Chloe has learned that even though she's scared sometimes, she needs to just go for it. She said,

> Rather than making things perfect, oftentimes, you just have to put it out there. Get some things in a row but at the end of the day, just go for it. Otherwise, you'll never be ready. I was scared of and terrified that I was going to look like a fool, and it was just the opposite. People were so supportive.

Chloe described that despite experiencing anxiety, loss of appetite, panic, stress and having sleep issues during hard professional times, she continues to learn how to face her fears. As a mother, Chloe is very proud of herself and her son and his independence and maturity. Her son wants to follow in her footsteps and start a business and is already coming up with great ideas. She said,

> Especially as a single parent, you're just hustling and running around and constantly cleaning up booboos and milk and then it goes to when they're older and then they have hormones and then they're yelling and like you don't know what you're doing, and then to see all that comes to fruition, it's like, 'Okay, all of that was for something,' and it made the difference, you know? My son is so independent, self-sufficient, and our relationship has gotten so much closer, and he's expressing more how much appreciative he is to have me as his mother.

Influence of external support and relationships. Chloe described herself as having a lot of cheerleaders around her, supporting her business and making it a success. Although she feels lonely living in a city so far from her family and close friends, she has learned to master

networking and has started up several large groups in her city where she gives and receives

professional support on a regular basis. These also create pipeline channels for revenue into her

business. She has also been active in parent groups and mother groups that trade childcare and

this has been helpful in providing support. Chloe said that she lacked support for many years

from her ex-husband. She explained the he likely had his own fears and hesitancy toward

entrepreneurship. He responded negatively toward her business ideas, which delayed her

entrance into entrepreneurship. It was not until she got divorced that she felt confident enough to

launch her own business. While her ex-husband told her to be sensible and avoid the risk of

starting her own business, her family and sisters always encouraged her.

Chloe expressed how she sometimes feels unsupported because of her skin color. She's

encountered racism on her entrepreneurial journey, where people have subtly alluded to not

doing business with a woman of color. She finds that some people dig deeper with her to test her

credibility, and that she has to prove herself more in the world. She feels that society is unfair

and unsupportive in this regard. While this affected her confidence in the early years, she now

feels like her reputation is credible and verifiable. She said, "Now I have the confidence to speak

to rooms of hundreds of thousands of people. I never imagined I'd be doing this type of stuff

before, and it definitely held me back." Chloe said when her self-doubts creep in, she finds

loving support through meditation and speaking to her close friends and her mom. Chloe talks to

her mom several times a week and said, "When talking to my mother, she'll like just totally

straighten me out like, 'Of course, this is why this person is doing this, because you're really

amazing, and people are drawn to you, people are….' She will just really build me up." She said

that her mom is one of her biggest supporters and she empowers her get out of her head and to let

the worries go.

Meaning making of the journey. Reflecting back on her entrepreneurial journey, Chloe said she's learned to just take the leap and do it, and to let go of what anybody else thinks. She said, "Just asking for support and also giving support is huge. Try not to do everything by yourself."

Mompreneur Clara

Clara is a White, 38-year-old mother of two children, ages nine and seven. She started her marketing coaching business five years ago, and her architect husband is the primary income producer in their high household income. She helps entrepreneurs attract more clients by coaching them to integrate effective marketing strategies into their business. When Clara was in business school in her twenties, she knew she wanted to be an entrepreneur someday. She was nervous about going into entrepreneurship alone and instead, went into marketing. She worked a number of different roles in small and large firms, and eventually gave birth to her son. The firm she worked in at the time would not let her have a flexible position when she returned from her maternity leave, so she quit and began looking elsewhere. She worked a number of jobs but was unhappy in all of the positions. Eventually, she was laid off, "I knew I had too much fire in me to be a good employee." During her year of unemployment, she invested in education for coaching and began her entrepreneurship journey. She refers to her entrepreneurship journey as her "soul journey."

Identity, inner strength, self-efficacy and confidence. Clara described her education in her coaching program as an experience that allowed her to find her passion and develop the confidence to go into entrepreneurship. Clara expressed enthusiasm, passion, and self-assurance that her coaching business is the right path for her. Clara says that while entrepreneurship can be scary and risky, she learned to set her own expectations. She understands that that she might lose

money for several years while she navigates family life and a new business. She demonstrated patience and a realistic attitude toward her business growth and understanding toward herself as an entrepreneur, knowing that a successful business does not happen overnight. She gains satisfaction and joy from being able to live her passion and help other entrepreneurs and families thrive. She says while life and work are a roller coaster, she stays strong in keeping her priorities straight, "I drop anything at a moment's notice when my kids need something. So, my clients and my business are secondary no matter what because my family always comes first." She enjoys being involved in her children's lives and feels joy in shaping them for the future.

She said throughout her five years as an entrepreneur, "There is so much fear that goes into putting myself out there and shining brightly, to become a lot more. . .I mean, you're selling yourself as an entrepreneur and there's a lot more heart and passion put into it than just going to a job, doing what you need to do and coming home and being able to shut it off. It's really all about setting boundaries and getting along with who you are and getting really truthful about who you are and what you want." For Clara, the entrepreneurship journey has been about shedding perfectionism and external expectations and becoming more real and aligned with who she truly is.

Influence of external support and relationships. Clara said her husband plays a strongly supportive role in her journey. She feels lucky to have a stable friendship and partnership with her husband who was a childhood friend, and whom she refers to as her soulmate. She said their healthy relationship has allowed them both to assume the breadwinner role at different phases of life. They support each other whenever needed, and he cuts back at his own job when needed to support her business or travel. She stays home with their children as much as possible and is also happy taking a step back on her business when needed. Her husband

shares the household responsibilities including laundry, dishes, childcare, and cleaning, and also

supports Clara's self-care by getting extra babysitting hours or a personal trainer to keep stress

levels down. While she said it has been a juggling role with family and work, she also benefits

from the support of grandparents who swoop in and take the children when she and her husband

are tied up with work responsibilities. Clara also has her own coach and support group of like-

minded business women that she meets with twice per month, which she said is incredibly

helpful. She said, "They say the five people you surround yourself with influence you the most.

It's really been key for me to surround myself with the right people, and not hang out with people

that aren't aligned with or supportive of my vision for what I believe is possible."

 Meaning making of the journey. Clara said the biggest lesson she learned through her

process has been to have faith that things will work out no matter what. She said, "I have learned

I have to just keep on breathing. Breathing is incredibly important in entrepreneurship and often

something you don't do very well." She also said she has learned that her business has its own

energy, just like each of her children. She said her business has its own needs for her to nurture

and tend to, just like her children, that it wants to thrive and grow. Clara said she has learned to

become more comfortable being uncomfortable. She said sometimes she cries once a week and

she has learned to be more patient with herself and her emotions. She is learning how to be

imperfect, how to accept herself, and love herself for who she is. Since starting her business,

Clara believes she has grown a lot. She remarked,

> I'm a totally different person. I even meet people and they're like, 'Wow, you're
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> completely different,' because I'm confident with what I'm doing. I have the experience
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> to back up what I always knew I could do but now, I've actually done it and have the
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> systems behind it, so there's way more confidence. I've learned to set way more

boundaries. I now value myself and I'm just more aligned with what I'm doing. So, I'm not selling my soul to go make money, instead I'm making money doing what I love while making a difference in people's lives. My business has become more of a passion project and an evolution. So it's fun because I get paid to do what I love. It has taken awhile though.

Clara is learning to be more patient and compassionate to her children and to herself in her role as a mom. She is learning to find a better balance between nurturing her children and nurturing herself and her own identity. She has learned that she is a better mom when she takes the space to reflect on what she needs to feel happy. She commented, "If I'm not aligned and complete and my soul is unhappy, then that ripples out into the rest of the family. I understand that I am the number one most important." Clara said that since starting her entrepreneurial journey, her relationship with her husband and her children has grown stronger. Her coaching education has taught her to become much more patient with them, and her personal growth has made her a better mom and wife. Now that she has learned these lessons, and her kids are more independent at seven and nine years old, she feels she has everything she needs to thrive and grow her business.

Clara has learned that she is much better off not trying to do entrepreneurship alone, and instead surrounds herself with help from her family, childcare, personal coach, and various support groups. Most importantly, she has learned that the biggest support comes from herself. She said, "It all comes down to the negative self-thought that I have in my head. That is my biggest villain. I don't have to be perfect. I've learned that the more I can release those negative internal stories, the faster and further I can soar." She ended the interview by saying, "I think there needs to be a revolution of how we approach motherhood and how we support our moms. I

know this work will ripple out into the world. I think that moms are the strongest because we are ones that run the world because we bring up the next generation and the world, you know, is in our hands. It's on our shoulders to do that the right way."

Chapter Summary

In chapter four, I presented summaries from a diverse group of twelve mompreneurs from a range of racial, cultural, socioeconomic and career backgrounds. Their stories both shared and unique perspectives that shed light on women's' experiences of growing businesses while raising children. Several themes emerged from their collective stories that reveal insight into how the women evolve throughout their journey, the people and resources they use to support their journey, how they make meaning of their entrepreneurial journeys, and what they have learned along the way.

While the process of growing a business while raising dependent children is unique for each of these mompreneurs, the role of confidence, the meaning of motherhood, the utilization of support resources, the influence of intimate relationships, and the way they learned and transformed are all key factors in these women's journeys. The mompreneur stories shared by the research participants illustrate that entrepreneurship for mothers involves a complex set of learning experiences and support infrastructures impacting a woman's ability to sustain her business. By connecting their stories to the literature on adult constructive development, social cognitive development, and relational cultural theory, the next two chapters will examine the mompreneurs' journeys in more detail through the identification and analysis of themes that emerged from their individual and collective experiences.

Chapter Five: Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate how self-employed women with children view their social support and sense of self as they negotiate various career-life roles, including mothering. In particular, the aim of this investigation was to focus on the processes of how mothers find meaning in the context of growing a business. In this voice-centered phenomenological inquiry, I examined twelve mompreneurs' perceptions and experiences of their entrepreneurial journey. Chapter four provided a glimpse into those narratives. The purpose of chapter five is to present the major findings that emerged from the dominant themes collectively represented in those individual narratives. As the mompreneurs shared the details of their stories, it became clear that while entrepreneurship presented many challenges, it also provided transformational learning opportunities for self-development, overcoming fears, and developing strong support networks of partners, mentors, family, and like-minded entrepreneurs. These learning opportunities contributed to the participants' ability to thrive throughout their entrepreneurial journey.

As described in chapter three, traditional thematic coding provided the core structure of data analysis for this study, while aspects of the voice-centered relational method (Gilligan, 2015) provided one methodological lens to read my transcripts and look at my interviews. As I read the transcripts, I used elements of the voice-centered method to highlight the women's voices about self through two of my coding categories. The idea of contrapuntal voices within the voice-centered method was instrumental to attending to the voices of doubt and confidence in the woman's stories. This resulted in two coding categories, and helped frame my transcripts and thinking about the major findings from a feminist, relational lens.

The data analysis process can be described as time consuming, messy and ambiguous, but also a creative process that brings order, structure and meaning to a large amount of complex data (Schwandt, 2007). In order to organize and structure my data in the data analysis stage, I identified trends and recurring patterns that reflected what each mother entrepreneur felt most strongly about in her life, and where she expressed the strongest emotions. In this study, transcripts and final narratives were uploaded into NVivo 11, a qualitative analysis computer software, which was used to organize the data and assist in identifying themes that emerged. First, I reviewed each interview transcript in its entirety to identify common themes such as self-confidence or self-care, from participants' descriptions of their lived experiences as mompreneurs. Then, I uploaded these narratives into the NVivo software. In order to familiarize myself with my data, I then started the digital coding process with various reviews of all the data by using query commands, word tree and word frequency commands in NVivo to better understand the type and frequency of words utilized by mother entrepreneurs. Next, I ensured the consistency of the codes generated by looking at the relationships between codes and examining the underlying ideas and meanings among them, such as a consistent relationship of support within the data. Themes were then organized using the NVivo 11 software, which helped me examine the relationships between participant narratives. Based on the analysis of the mompreneurs' lived experiences, five categories, eighteen themes, and 31 subthemes were identified as shown in Table 2 below. The creation of 12 separate folders helped ensure the categorization of interview questions, and categories, or nodes, were created from the folders to further categorize the information gained from the interview. Within each folder, nodes were created to capture keywords or phrases identified from the data. The nodes included a brief keyword description of the interview question. Coding data to each relevant node therefore made

it possible to distinguish between major and minor themes by the frequency of the themes made

possible through the coding software. Major categories were then developed from the data for

each of the listed themes and subthemes.

The major findings that emerged from the study are illustrated below in Table 2 and will

be expanded upon in the corresponding sections.

Table 2

Primary Themes and Subthemes Emerging from the Data

Category	Theme	Subtheme
1. Identity and sense of self	1.1 Entrepreneur identity 1.2 Motherhood identity 1.3 Reflections on gender & entrepreneurship	1.2.1 Becoming a better mother & positive impact on children 1.2.2 Child as the most important client 1.2.3 Children & career flexibility 1.2.4 Mothering responsibilities & demands 1.2.5 Single parenthood
2. Confidence and Self-Doubt	2.1 Confidence & self-efficacy 2.2 Self-doubt	2.1.1 Confidence boosters 2.2.1 Confidence erosion
3. Challenges & Coping Strategies	3.1 Challenges 3.2 Coping strategies	3.1.1 Financial instability 3.1.2 Putting work on hold - 'on & off' entrepreneurship 3.1.3 Time management 3.1.4 Uncertainties & insecurities about work 3.1.5 Anxiety & stress 3.2.1 'You just have to put it out there' 3.2.2 Delegating & team work 3.2.3 Getting into 'learning' mindset 3.2.4 Persistence and 'go-get it' attitude 3.2.5 Seeing business as a growth process 3.2.7 Self -Care
4. Support systems: Relational connections and disconnections	4.1 Intimate partnerships 4.2 Immediate family & close friends 4.3 Mentors & coaching 4.4 Professional networks 4.5 Creating your own support system	4.1.2 Being a supportive partner
5. Entrepreneurial Learning & Meaning-Making Processes	5.1 Motivations & Reasons for being an entrepreneur 5.3 Starting or transitioning into entrepreneurship 5.4 Feelings of satisfaction & accomplishment 5.5 Realizations and lessons learned 5.6 Advice for other Mompreneurs	5.1.1 "Building a plane while flying it' 5.1.2 Increased flexibility 5.1.3 Unhappy with jobs or employers 5.4.1 Being appreciated 5.4.2 Expanding professional network & clientele 5.4.4 Making an impact 5.4.5 Personal growth

Identity and Sense of Self

The Identity and Sense of Self category was identified to highlight the participant's process of developing identity constructs relevant to being a women, a mother and an entrepreneur. The data suggests that the ways in which each mompreneur chooses to tell her story to both herself and others creates dialogues that shape her sense of self. It is seemingly through these storytelling dialogues that each woman seems to navigate her entrepreneurial and parenting journey and construct an identity.

Entrepreneur identity. The ways the participants defined an "entrepreneur" and the extent to which the women embraced the role and title varied throughout the interviews. While nearly all of the mompreneurs talked about their identity as an entrepreneur, many of them said that the process to self-identify as such took time. Marie explained that after she became an independent consultant out of necessity to care for her injured child, she struggled to call herself an entrepreneur for a period of time and rejected many of the labels that came with it. She shared, "I hate solo-preneur. And I don't like wearing my mommy label so clearly -like mommy-preneur or mom-preneur - It's just not me."

Similar to Marie, Nina shared her accidental stumble into entrepreneurship, referred to herself as an "unexpected entrepreneur," and discussed for over ten minutes her initial struggle of viewing herself as an entrepreneur, and how stepping into that identity was a slow, incremental process, "It wasn't like I went out and was immediately an entrepreneur or a business owner, in fact I never thought of myself as an entrepreneur. "I remember seeing what entrepreneurs did and I remember thinking that is so not me." Nina went on to describe her vision of an entrepreneur as someone who takes huge risks and is completely consumed by their business with a "sleazy salesperson" type of approach, none of which she identified with. She explained how she

prioritized her children to the point that even her own children and other parents had no idea she managed a business out of her home. She said it was not until four years after starting her business and getting actively involved with other mother entrepreneurs in her community that she stepped fully into her entrepreneurial identity. Nina reflected,

> I have to say I'm really proud of myself. Just in the last year I've become so much more in the identity of an entrepreneur now that I am networking with other women entrepreneurs like me and sharing stories and collaborating and now I'm really coming into my identity in a way I wasn't before.

All of the women expressed that entrepreneurship had fundamentally changed their identity. Marie shared her identity shift in becoming an independent consultant and said, "I wasn't changing what I was doing in terms of my work. But I was changing who I am." Anastasia explained that becoming an entrepreneur and launching her business became a "really strong anchor" in helping her preserve her sense of self:

> Being a mom entrepreneur is a very helpful and healthy because it gives me a sense of purpose and identity outside of being a mom. If you want a career or identity unrelated to the child, outside of the child when they grow up, this is a great way to do that.

> Anastasia also explained that there is a symbiotic relationship between the skills learned in mothering and entrepreneurship. She believed that being a mother is like being an entrepreneur and described it as "being in the business of raising a child." She went on to describe the view she had of her own mother not applying these mothering skills to other areas of life. She felt that her mother regrets it now. She explained how she wants her children to respect her and how she wants to model to her children a woman who has done something for herself.

She reflected on her journey as a mompreneur and said, "It gives you a sense of purpose and identity outside of being a mom."

Five of the women entrepreneurs, Christy, Juliet, Clara, Zoila and Gretta, all cited how they have always considered themselves entrepreneurial, but having children was the catalyst that helped spur the start of their business. For example, Gretta explained, "I always wanted to be an entrepreneur. I always thought I was very creative and have always come up with creative ways to run a business. Being an entrepreneur allows me to grow in ways that I would not have expected." Similarly. Amina reflected on her natural entrepreneurial spirit,

> Looking back on my life I realized that from a very early age, I was taking the lead, taking risks, doing things that nobody else would necessarily do. When I became an entrepreneur, it was out of necessity, like literal necessity. I mean there were times when I could've been homeless with my children. I really do think that that has a lot to do with the entrepreneurial spirit, just not being afraid to take risks even when the odds are stacked against you.

Motherhood identity. It is important to understand how the participants in this study viewed themselves and defined themselves in the context of raising their children while growing a business. According to Steinberg (2005), being a mother can influence women to modify their internalized ideals about motherhood and how they understand themselves in relation to the people around them. Through the process of integrating motherhood into their personal identity, it was apparent that they were also navigating and juggling the process of integrating their motherhood identity into other identity roles in their life as well, such as that of being a wife and an entrepreneur.

Becoming a better mother and having a positive impact on children. All of the

participants spoke at length about their children and how their role as a mother impacted their

business and vice versa. While every participant highlighted the challenges and frustrations of

being a mother, every participant also spoke lovingly about the time that they share with their

children and how their children's wellbeing was deeply integrated into their work. In fact, it was

clear from the women's stories that work and family life were deeply interwoven, particularly

for the women who ran businesses out of their home. Often times, business was done at odd

hours of the day or after children went to sleep at night. Many of the participants shared how

their business helped them be a better mom because it helped them preserve their identity. Chloe

shared, for example, "I do the things that I love. I dance. I run. I don't stop doing things that are

my self–expression just because I'm a mother. I don't wait to live my life once my son is out of

the house." Raymonde, Juliet, and Gretta shared that while becoming an entrepreneur did put

more time constraints on their parenting, it forced them to be smarter and more efficient with

that time and to teach their children self-sufficiency, ultimately allowing for higher quality time

and greater presence with their children. Raymonde reflected,

> As a mom and business owner, I see myself as more of a facilitator now, a helper to my
>
> children, as a teacher. I see my role more as teaching them and helping them by helping
>
> me first so they can see what it looks like to take care of yourself first.

Similarly, Clara reflected on how her business made her a better mom, as well as how she

learned and benefited from teaching her children self-sufficiency,

> Since starting my business, my relationship with my husband and my kids has grown
>
> stronger, it's going better and I'm much more patient with them. I'm a better mom

because of my personal growth, like, everything is leveled up because of starting a

business, because of its journey.

On a similar note, Anna expressed that when she first started her business, she feared it

would be competitive with her time with her children, but ultimately it helped her be a better

mom because she is doing something she loves and feels more fulfilled when she is with them.

She shared, "I feel that I am more present with my children and happier as a mom because I feel

better with myself." Nina, the founder of a parenting education business, Clara, the founder of a

life coaching business, and Anna, founder of a health coaching business, all cited a direct

positive impact of their business training and learning curve on helping them acquire new

parenting and personal development skills. Anna, for example, shared, "part of what I do for

work is facilitating the self-development of others, but this has allowed me to apply this to my

own life as well. I can now understand myself better than five years ago. I'm definitely a better

parent and calmer with my kids, and I take better care of myself."

Eight out of twelve participants emphasized how they believed being an entrepreneur

made them a positive role model for their children. Juliet, for example, shared about her children,

"they sort of see me doing my own business, and I think it helps kind of open their mind up

about what they do with their lives." Similarly, Raymonde discussed how she's seen her children

grow in a positive way as she has grown not only her business, but also her confidence, "As my

business grew and I started gaining more self-confidence, more personal satisfaction, I started

becoming more emotionally available for my children in a big way."

Children and career flexibility. It was evident in this study that career flexibility was not

only one of the most important reasons they pursued entrepreneurship, but in some cases the lack

of flexibility actually drove women away from traditional employment. Most of the women

expressed to some degree that in order to feel fully satisfied personally and professionally, the career they designed for themselves had to sufficiently support family life so that career conflict is minimized and work-family balance is supported. A majority of the participants discussed how entrepreneurship, unlike traditional employment, allowed them greater flexibility to put their children's needs above work. Seventy-five percent of the women specifically stated that their businesses were built around their children, explaining that their children took precedence, regardless of what was happening with the business. Christy explained that the primary driver for starting her business was to have the flexibility to be available for her son, and described him as her "most important client."

Clara, Nina, Marie and Zoila all used the word "empowered" when discussing the freedom to have the flexibility to help a sick child, to support their family through emotional issues, or have the time to attend school field trips. The women explained how having the flexibility to partake in these activities without guilt provides a huge sense of relief. Marie said, "The good side of owning my own business is unbelievable flexibility. It means that I can be the one who runs to school to pick up my child. I can be the one who runs the sick child to the doctor. If they're on a field trip, I get to be the one who gets to go on the field trip. And that's really wonderful."

Clara pointed to freedom and flexibility as a driver of her satisfaction with her business. She said, "The most enjoyable is having freedom and the ability to manage my own time, be there for my kids, and live my passion while helping people on a really optimum level." Anna explained, "I like the creativity side of the business that I can do whatever I want and the flexibility—flexibility in terms of what I decide to create and how I decide to help people." When it comes to being a business owner, Nina said, "I really appreciate the flexibility and I like

being accountable to myself. I don't have to go to work and go to staff meetings or be

accountable to a boss. Just having the freedom to do things my own way is nice." Similarly,

Juliet explained, "What do I love most about being an entrepreneur? I don't have to work for

anybody who really aggravates me. I can pick and choose my clients. It's all on me, for better or

for worse."

> *Mothering responsibilities and demands*. Mothering small, demanding children can be a

challenge for anyone, but juggling a business on top of childcare can present quite a host of

challenges. All participants discussed the challenges of raising children while they were trying to

manage all the other aspects of their life, including their business. For example, Clara used to

always put her kids needs first but learned that it was not a sustainable approach to managing

everything in her life and work. She said,

> I was so focused on taking care of them that oftentimes I hadn't taken care of myself and
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> I think that's where the anxiety attack came in because it was like I needed to care of
>
> myself first and then I could be the best mom possible but if I'm not aligned and
>
> complete and my soul is unhappy, then that ripples out into the rest of the family.

> Anna, Zoila and Anastasia discussed the difficulty of deciding exactly when to work.

They discussed the complications of figuring out extra childcare from nannies and grandparents

and how to use nap times. Juliet and Christie discussed the difficulty of multi-tasking their

children's various activities, schedules, and emotional needs on top of working. They both work

part-time on their business and struggle to manage their responsibilities, claiming that working

their former full-time jobs while raising a family would have been "impossible." Zoila discussed

how vital networking is when it comes to her job to her public relations business, but she is often

too exhausted after juggling her three young children and work. She said, "You can imagine

being a publicist and then not going out: it's not really ideal**.** I really feel like a hermit crab,

because I'm exhausted."

Marie explained how ever since she had children, she feels like she has had one major

unexpected life crisis after another. From her child's health concerns to therapy to caring for

aging parents and squeezing her business in on nights and weekends, Marie said it has been a

"roller coaster ride." She explained, "I'm not complaining but it's like every time I feel like Oh,

we're back in a stable place in life, it feels like there's one more thing that's around the corner."

Single parenthood. Five of the 12 research participants were either single or divorced,

caring for their children on their own. During the interviews, they all touched upon the scenarios

and challenges they found themselves in as a single parent. Most of the single mothers discussed

the importance of teaching their children independence and self-sufficiency at a young age.

Gretta, a single mother of twins with ADHD, discussed her difficulty raising young children with

little to no support while running a business alone. However, by adopting a new mindset, she was

able to grow her business into a profitable enterprise. She explained how creating consistency in

her work schedule helped, along with adopting a more flexible mindset. Gretta remarked that her

children had to learn to adapt to "all the craziness" and "realize life isn't just so cookie cutter and

cut-and-dry." She explained that since her children have learned to be independent enough to be

home alone, she has been able to take on more last-minute clients. Gretta said that occasionally

she envies other entrepreneurs who have a partner and sometimes feels depressed, thinking "oh

my goodness, if I only had a husband." However, when Gretta reflected on what she handled as a

single mom, from growing a successful small business alone to finishing her college degree, she

concluded, "those are the time looking back, when I think, 'I am such a badass.'"

Chloe, a mother with a teenage son, discussed how she feels that many single mothers, include herself, often gratify their children out of guilt, especially when they are young. She said of her experience raising her son,

> You know, you're tired, and they're cranky, so you're just like, 'sure, you can have ice cream for dinner, whatever.' As a single parent, you're just hustling and running around and constantly cleaning up booboos and milk and you're like, 'Am I doing this right?'

Raymonde found herself struggling with money and starting a business after her divorce. She found herself very ill one week and had to cancel clients as a result. It was a scary experience for her because due to her illness, she was unsure if she could pay her bills that month. She learned to have a support staff and backup childcare and has dramatically shifted her whole lifestyle to eat and live in a healthier way to sustain a strong immune system.

Amina discussed her journey through a variety of businesses while trying to raise four children with little money or support. She described many hardships, including being nearly homeless at one point, and struggling to make money while raising a child with epilepsy. Eventually, she found a sub-contracted mortgage job that allowed her to partner with another mother and share childcare responsibilities. She reflected, "My boss didn't mind me bringing my son in and it wasn't an office frequented by a lot of clients." She discussed her struggle around not having a partner and a better support system, stating "I'm definitely in that demographic of partnering without marriage, which is a situation that a lot of women of color find themselves in." Amina spoke of her former partner who has offered to pay some of her bills but she feels like it is better to pay them on her own. She said, "it gives me more of a sense of accomplishment, and I feel like my own woman."

Reflections on gender and entrepreneurship. Much of the world of entrepreneurship is built upon social norms and values based in hegemonic masculinity that can raise cultural, social and economic barriers against femaleness (Tyler, 2008). It is clear that gender played a role in most of the participants' stories with regard to navigating parenting and business ownership. The data suggest that being a female entrepreneur, particularly a mother, presents a unique set of challenges and circumstances. Clara, for example, explained how she feels pressured by her community and family to be a "superwoman that always has everything together" rather than being allowed to make mistakes in her roles as a mother and career woman. She referred to situations where she was traveling for business and people asked questions such as who was staying home to care for her children, whereas men wouldn't be asked those types of questions. While her clients and business are always secondary to her children, some people in business do not understand the priority of family versus business. Marie also encountered people in her field not understanding family demands, explaining how she is hesitant to use a label like "mompreneur" out of fear that people would think that she would not have the time to take clients seriously because she has children. Marie also explained how she feels isolated as a woman in certain networking settings, such as chambers of commerce made up of mostly older men. Nina also explained how she feels fear as a woman and receives mixed messages from society regarding what she should be or shouldn't be as woman, mother, and business owner. She said,

> As a woman out there, I am always getting messages all the time like don't be too aggressive, don't be too much of a person. You know what I mean? You're supposed to be like a support figure, not like the main thing. I just felt like I should be a good girl and not bring attention to myself. All that kind of stuff.

Gretta and Juliet both explained how gender plays a role in pressure they feel to take on more on the home front than their male spouses. In addition to frustration with having little personal time because of her responsibilities at home, Gretta explained that she'd like to find a mentor, but most of the woman she knows who would qualify are too strapped for time just like her. Juliet observed that they are often too bogged down with housework and childcare to successfully grow their businesses. She said, "You know, the kind of emotional labor business that we keep reading more and more about, that it's just so assumed that the mother is one to have to do all the home related stuff and that's really holding women back."

Amina, Zoila, and Chloe spoke specifically about how their race and gender affect their businesses and also, at times, their confidence. Amina for example, spoke of how her lack of education as a Black female entrepreneur creates feelings of insecurity when she goes into settings dominated by educated white people. She said,

A lot of times, I am the one Black person, the Black woman who was going into, most of the time, fully White board of very wealthy, very influential people and in many cases, mostly men, telling them what they need to do and policies that they need to implement or initiate in their companies to make their businesses better. But they often have so much more education than I do. And that is always in the back of my mind, that someone's going to call me on my lack of education as opposed to feeling proud and comfortable of the experience and what I bring to the table that nobody else could. I don't know I'll ever fully get over that.

Similarly, Chloe spoke of her challenges as a Black woman, including times where she "had some crazy interactions with people" when it was blatantly expressed that they do not do business with people of color. She also described times where she struggled to build trust with

men who didn't trust her as a person of color, as a woman, or both. She commented, "I feel like they have to dig deeper to see if I'm credible enough, whereas with someone else they would take them at face value." Zoila, a Filipino woman, reflected on her frustration being underpaid, sexually harassed, and working harder to build credibility. She also said that due to cultural values, many of her Filipino friends are not supported by their parents if they want to start a business. She explained that in Filipino society, women are told, "You need a job that's going to pay you a steady paycheck. Go into a career that's reliable, that's going to make you a mountain out of money." While Zoila was frustrated by the difficulties this raises for some women to get the support they need, she is grateful that her parents are open-minded, support her entrepreneurial endeavors, and provide occasional childcare.

Confidence and Self-Doubt

When reading the transcripts after my interviews, I listened for two contrapuntal voices: a voice of confidence and a voice of self-doubt. The idea of contrapuntal voices within the voice-centered method was instrumental to attending to the voices of doubt and confidence in the woman's stories (Gilligan, 2015). This resulted in two coding categories, and helped frame my transcripts and think about the major findings from a different lens. Actively listening for these two potentially conflicting yet interlacing voices within the individual stories shed light on how confidence or the lack thereof seems to correlate with self-efficacy as well as a woman's feelings of being supported by others on her journey.

Confidence and self-efficacy. While participants' confidence experienced ups and downs throughout their journey, all twelve demonstrated a strong sense of agency, or a capacity to act on behalf of their own goals (Bandura, 1997). Since launching their businesses, all twelve women experienced an improved and stronger sense of self-efficacy and belief that they were

capable of building a business while mothering. This is despite the fact that all twelve women felt that starting a business was scary in the beginning. Although they demonstrated their confidence, self-efficacy, and agency in different ways, they all stressed the importance of relying on their own inner strength as resource.

Christy, Nina, and Chloe explained how their self-efficacy grew stronger as they learned more professional skills over time. Chloe, for example, discussed overcoming insecurities and developing trust with her clients by building solid professional and public speaking skills that showcased her unique value. She said, "I finally am in this place where people actually know who I am, and I have the confidence. I have the confidence to speak to rooms of hundreds of thousands of people. I never imagined doing this stuff before, and it definitely held me back." Nina also pointed to the development of public speaking skills as a major factor in increasing her confidence. She still struggles to 'sell herself' or be in the spotlight, but noted that this gets easier as she builds new skills, "It feels like I have to always compliment myself and tell people why they need to pick me." Christy explained how over time, her confidence grew as she built skills that helped her transform her clients in positive ways. She said,

> "I feel like I know what I'm doing when I'm with clients now and that's a good feeling. That's a level of confidence that I know I didn't have before. I remember when I was first starting, that was really scary. But now I have confidence in the bigger picture."

Whereas Christy and Chloe pointed to professional skills as their biggest confidence boosters, Clara pointed to learning patience by developing stronger self-acceptance skills as her biggest confidence booster. She explained how her confidence grew over time as she accepted her own discomfort and shifting emotions. The more she accepted her own fears and persisted despite those fears, the more she built up her self-efficacy and trust in her abilities:

So, it's really about learning things like how to be more patient, how to be imperfect, how to accept yourself and love yourself for who you are. So, one day I'll be thinking, 'Well, I can't charge that now because I'm not worth it.' And the next day, I'll charge that and somebody will pay it, and I'll be like, 'Oh my God, I'm the best thing ever!' So it could be within the same five minutes that other thing can happen because there's so much fear that goes into putting yourself out there and shining brightly.

Zoila reads self-help books to sustain her confidence as an entrepreneur. She derives an inner sense of empowerment from the freedom and agency she exercises in being able to care for her family. She shared, "I think that is—that really is a high, of knowing I'm there for my kids when they need me and there's no guilt involved with the day job responsibility." Amina also explained how caring for her children and watching them grow has helped her build confidence. She shared how proud she is of them and said, "My children give me the confidence because they look up to me. . . .these kids today are really, really smart and they will see through B.S. in a second. I taught my children how to be very open-minded and to be respectful but to speak their mind."

Anna explained how entrepreneurship forced her out of her shell as an introvert, and her confidence increased in parallel with stepping more outside her comfort zone. Anastasia emphasized that her confidence increased over time, but that it often goes through what she describes as "peaks and valleys" in conjunction with how her business is performing financially.

Like Anastasia, six other participants alluded to experiencing declines in confidence when their business incomes dip. For example, Gretta also explained that while her confidence increased over time, she experiences a crash when her business dips financially. She also explained how she is building confidence by giving herself permission to feel good about what

she is doing with or without achieving a goal. She shared how she is breaking through the mental

trap of "I'll wait until I get to this point, and then I'll be so confident." She also talked about how

she continues to work on publicly expressing confidence as a lice removal specialist and

claiming that as part of her identity. She shared,

> If I go on a date and I'm just like, 'Yes, I own a lice shop,' and even when I tell you, it's
>
> like I laugh a little bit. It's like, 'Yes, that's what I do.' There's still. . .even though I'm an
>
> entrepreneur, it still is a stigma.

Marie explained that often she feels like her life is a scramble because of all she juggles

as a mom and business owner. With a mix of frustration and sadness in her voice, she explained

that her lowest confidence points occur when she feels like a failure as a mother, wife, and

daughter. She discussed how she is learning how to celebrate success in her personal and

professional life through a support group who celebrates with her.

Confidence boosters. The data throughout the narratives supports the finding that a

woman's ability to support herself emotionally with confidence boosters can play an important

role in the success of her business. When it comes to confidence boosters, Christy said that she

gets lifted when she sees tangible progress either in her own or her clients' personal

development. Chloe pointed to meditation and public speaking as confidence boosters, but said

that when she really needs a big boost, she calls her mother. She said, "she just will build me up.

She knows what to tell me to get out of my head so I stop worrying, and just make me feel great

without tearing other people down like she'll just empower me."

Anna explained that compassion for and trust in herself are her biggest confidence

boosters. She explained how every time she takes a risk in her business, leaving her feeling

scared or insecure, she ultimately ends up figuring it out. This exercise builds trust in herself and

serves as a major confidence booster. Similar to Anna, Zoila and Nina explained that their confidence increases when they follow through on something that they initially thought they were unable to handle. Stepping into business challenges, rather than shying away from them, was a form of self-efficacy building for many participants.

All 12 of the mother entrepreneurs interviewed for this study shared that their self-confidence grew over time, particularly since starting a business. Christy explained that over time, she grew more confident in her ability to do her job and now knows exactly what to do when a client is in a difficult situation. She didn't have that level of self-efficacy prior to starting a business. Clara explained that when she first started her business, she had "zero confidence, she "didn't want to charge anybody," and considered herself a "total screw up." Her confidence has grown since launching her business.

> I'm confident with what I'm doing. I have the experience to back up what I always knew I could do but now, I set way more boundaries. I value myself and I'm just more aligned with what I'm doing. So, I'm not selling my soul to go make money, instead I'm making money doing what I love while making a difference, like it's become more of a passion project and evolution. So it's fun because I get paid to do what I love.

When Chloe first started her business, she was depressed, insecure, and had a constant feeling of "wanting to throw up."

> It was that feeling of like, 'Ugh!' it's at the pit of my stomach, but once I overcame it, like anything else that you overcome, that's like really scary, then you tackle it and that makes it so much easier to take on new things with my business. Now, every week, I speak to rooms of anywhere from between like 30-50 people four days a week and then I

do a lot of panels. If I was not being who I am, now, which is extremely confident, I would not even have gotten half of those opportunities to be a part of.

Self-doubt. All participants expressed moments of self-doubt, worry, and insecurity when speaking about their journey. Christy shared how she worked to undo the social conditioning around what it means to have a successful business coach in order to reduce her tendencies toward self-doubt. She explained,

> We live in a culture where we bathe in the idea that if you're not growing, you're not
>
> going. That way of thinking has been also a source of worry for me. When I doubt
>
> myself….like am I good enough if I don't get you a million dollars every year.

Like Christy, many participants expressed financial related self-doubt. For example, Clara and Anna both explained that they occasionally question their value and don't feel "worth it" when clients pay them. Nina also expressed self-doubt when it came to charging for her services. She shared, "When it comes to money, I want to communicate the value of my services, but I question if my business is worth that much or I'm tempted to offer a discount. It's a work in progress to vouch for myself and my value. It's hard but I am getting better at it."

Anastasia, Zoila, and Marie discussed having days where they doubt their entire business and whether they should continue. Anastasia explained how she sometimes feels like throwing it all out to get a regular job again,

> There's highs and lows of just not knowing if I'm really just fooling myself. Like, is this
>
> something that's real? Like there's some days it's like, 'Oh, this is going nowhere. This is
>
> just kid's play,' and that's probably the hardest.

Gretta also felt a rollercoaster of self-doubt, particularly in the first years when she was growing the business alone. She said there were days when she thought,

Should I close up, should I not, and then you get mad at yourself because you didn't do what you should've done. It's so easy to see it as, 'Well, you should be doing this and you should be doing that,' and 'Look how much they're doing. You're not doing as much.' But it's not productive to be feeling guilty or bad about yourself. It doesn't serve business and it doesn't serve my own mental empathy.

Zoila and Amina described different forms of "imposter syndrome," where they had difficult time taking credit for their success. Marie explained that her self-doubt creeps in when she feels overwhelmed by her dueling roles. This results in her feeling like a failure in all areas because she cannot give any of them the energy she feels they deserve. She shared how she becomes overwhelmed by feelings of guilt and self-doubt,

There's a sense of when I'm at work on my business, I should actually be spending my time on life stuff, and then when I'm doing life stuff, I feel like I should be putting my time on work stuff. That is degrading my ability to build confidence in either realm. So, I feel like sometimes...it's like a failure. I feel like a failure as a mom. I feel like a failure as a wife. I feel like a failure as a daughter. And I feel like a failure as a business owner.

Confidence erosion. It was apparent in the findings that behaviors and internal dialogues that fed feelings of low self-confidence could be a hindrance to business performance, as well as cause added personal stress. With regard to confidence erosion, Chloe shared how the "little girl inside" of her gets knocked down by critical people and she feels like she is "going to go cry in a corner." Anna explained that for her, the biggest factor in confidence erosion was having a foreign accent and being in a new industry where some people don't take her seriously. Many participants find finances to be the biggest factor in confidence erosion, as they associate it with both their personal value and the sustainability of their business. This was particularly stressful

for women whose families rely heavily on their business income. For example, Zoila's business pays for a large portion of her family's expenses and she said, "What diminishes my confidence is the financial part of when I look at my bank account and I'm like, 'F***. What are we going to do?"

Challenges and Coping Strategies

For all participants, starting a business was a highly emotional journey. The findings uncovered a variety of coping strategies women used to manage personal and professional challenges on their journeys. The extent to which their coping strategies were healthy or dysfunctional seemed to be directly correlated with the level of sustainability and resilience they were capable of building over time personally and professionally.

Challenges. When discussing the emotions associated with their journeys, the words "roller coaster" and "ups and downs" were used by more than half of the women during their interviews. Gretta explained, "There's a lot of ups and down, like sometimes you get depressed. I wouldn't say clinically depressed or anything, but for me, personally, I would just shut down."

Marie explained that she feels challenged by the intersection of work and life, and said, "I didn't start a business to work seven days a week, I didn't start a business to never see my kids. I would say almost every day, it feels like that work-life balance, it's just getting wildly out of control."

Financial instability. All 12 women cited money as a source of stress when running their business. Even the women whose partners support them financially cited money as a "challenge." Anna and Nina explained that even though their husbands provide financial support for their families, they still feel the pressure to earn a profit. Anna explained, "My husband provides financially for the family, but I'm investing more than what I am receiving right now.

And it feels a little uncomfortable." Nina found that having her own income brings her a sense of peace and said, "God forbid if something happened to my husband and I had to raise my family. I still feel like I am contributing in a minor way with my business." For Clara, finances caused a lot of stress. She felt she was trying to figure out how to "stay ahead of things" and generate income. She explained how she was "super stressed" when she took out a loan in order to grow her business.

Gretta, who runs her business and raises her twins alone, relies completely on her lice shop business income. She explained that she has reached a difficult situation where the business sustains her family but there is no money left to reinvest into the business. Zoila and Raymonde both explained that experiencing financial hardship with their businesses was emotionally draining. Raymonde learned hard lessons through the process, but it required a lot of personal strength and self-compassion. Zoila said that her lowest moments were when her business was lacking money but that, "the trade-off is even if you work for a corporation, you don't know when they're going to cut you." Zoila and Raymonde both pointed to books and workshops that helped them shift their "money mindset" and create an attitude of abundance. Zoila said,

> I'm really trying to shift my money mindset. That's been a huge challenge. I think for women in general there is a challenge of knowing we're the ones that are underpaid against men. . . .I'm reading a lot and hearing "money is energy" and that I need to shift my energy to allow that money to come into our lives, so these are things that I'm personally trying to grow right now.

On–and-off entrepreneurship. Five of the 12 participants worked part-time for other employers before committing full-time to their businesses. Christy described this as a stepping stone to entrepreneurship and to "get out of the house and do something interesting." Clara and

Anastasia were both able to use the money generated from their part-time jobs to launch their businesses. Juliet worked part time as a way to transition from her marketing executive career in New York City to discovering her business and passion as a birth doula. Eight of the 12 participants explained that at some point during their journey, they temporarily put their business on hold to tend to personal situations. The top reasons cited were an unexpected turn in the needs of their children, followed by aging parents, and divorce. After Christy took a break to care for her son who was experiencing emotional challenges, her aging mother and father were then in need of temporary care. She said she is now in a position where she has to completely "restart" her business and will be working on it part-time until her personal life is stable. Raymonde explained that she was forced to close a business that she co-founded with her ex-husband when they divorced. She worked for someone else for a short period of time before she restarted her chiropractic business again in a new location. Meanwhile, Zoila went through a series of starts and stops with her business after she unexpectedly got pregnant with twins shortly after having a baby. She said, "I just completely shut my business down until I could get a handle on things."

Time management. Time management was a top challenge for many of the women interviewed. Christy explained that she struggled with clients who don't always respect her time or understand that she has other obligations outside of her work. She said, "Sometimes it is really hard to manage the time boundaries if clients have a different work ethic or a different set of expectations about how much time is done on something, and how accessible they expect me to be at all hours of the day or night." Nina explained that she struggles setting boundaries for herself and often ends up consumed by her business. She said,

> The big drawback of being an entrepreneur for me is my personality–like I'm working on
> my computer till 11pm at night, and I'm thinking all the time about what I can be doing

or what I should be doing to get more business. So it's very all-consuming mentally, which is a real downside for me.

Uncertainties and insecurities about work. Insecurity and uncertainty about the future of their business was a theme brought up by a number of participants. Christy explained that sometimes it is difficult to deal with the uncertainty that comes with not knowing if the hard work she is investing is going to lead to a positive outcome for a client. She said, **"**The thing for me is that sometimes it's hard to tell whether what I'm doing in the moment is really going to matter. Sometimes it's just too dynamic or complicated." Nina and Chloe explained that when their business is slow, it can trigger feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. Inconsistent slow periods combined with an overload of administrative work presented challenges for them. For example, the word "inconsistent" was commonly used among mompreneurs and was used by Nina at least ten times in her interview. She shared,

> The inconsistency and uncertainty is really hard. And I don't do that very well. It's hard and it's very draining, and even though I have a lot of passion, sometimes I feel the cons outweigh the pros. I don't know what the future holds, I don't know if I'll be doing this in 5 years. It is so inconsistent and unpredictable.

Anxiety and stress. Clara explained that when she first started her business, she had young children and was experiencing hormonal imbalances and anxiety on a regular basis. Although her doctor offered her medication, she refused, opting instead to try to understand the source of her anxiety and stress. She explained, "I think part of entrepreneurship and really figuring out with who I am. What I am. So in the beginning, it was very much like all this anxiety of I don't know what to do with my life."

Coping strategies.

Delegating and teamwork. Another way that many mompreneurs persisted through

challenges was by discovering creative ways to delegate tasks and build a team around them.

Zoila, for example, explained,

> I'm not a solo-preneur without a team. I have three, four people. . .five people? They're
>
> all contractors, but they help me with my business: managing clients, doing research,
>
> doing outreach, strategic thinking. All of that is happening with a team and it's not just
>
> me. A lot of stuff that gets done in my business, I'm actually delegating to other people.

Other participants delegated in different ways. For example, Clara used virtual assistants

to help with business management and accounting, while Anna hired a nanny to manage

household chores, errands, and childcare.

Getting into a learning mind-set. A number of the women explained that getting

themselves into a learning mindset was a helpful way to cope with challenges. Christy, for

example, explained that in the early days of her business, she felt weighed down when working

with a difficult client team. Over time, she learned to put herself in a learning mindset to tackle

the next challenge. She said, "When I can get myself in the right mindset, it's like, 'Oh, it's the

next thing to learn,' it grows my curiosity and then I'm really good at working with the next

team." Chloe also talked about overcoming her perfectionism by getting into a learning mindset.

She said she remembers constantly telling herself, "Okay, wait. Once I do this, then it'll be

perfect, and then I can roll it out." Instead, she is learning to put things out there before they are

perfect. She said, "Otherwise, you'll never be ready. So I think for me. . .that I was scared and

terrified that I was going to look like a fool, and it was just the opposite. Oftentimes, you just

have to put it out there." Gretta, Raymonde, Clara and Zoila all specifically pointed to self-help

books and like-minded individuals that have a "commitment to personal growth" to maintain a learning mindset.

Nine out of the 12 women specifically pointed to learning persistence and a "go getter" mindset to get them through challenges. They used phrases like "I won't stop," "This is going to be great" and "I can make this work." Raymonde explained that she strengthened her ability to cultivate persistence by letting go of a mindset that tells her that things are always happening against her, rather than for her. She said

> Instead of saying something like, 'I'm all alone. When is this going to stop being so hard?' I shift my mind to say, 'Wow, it is in my power to create what I need. . .I have the tools. I have the power to see myself as a creator that can create my business and ask for help and be a facilitator as well and facilitate other people to come and help along the way.

Other women viewed their businesses as opportunities to learn and grow personally, professionally, and spiritually. Zoila said, "An important part of my entrepreneurial journey has been learning, self-reflection and tapping into my purpose." Anna described her entrepreneurial endeavors as a "learning journey" and that she learned to enjoy the process. Clara expressed that her business forced her to grow personally by teaching her to be more patient, to accept imperfection, and to love herself for who she is. She explained,

> I'm learning from my experience that on an energetic level, my business has its own energy, just like each of my children does and our family and everything, like everything has its own energy. And so, my business wants to...it wants to grow. It wants to thrive and it wants to...you know...there's a purpose to it. There's something bigger to it.

Self -care. The narrative of self-care emerged in all participants' stories and was used as a strategy to overcome various challenges encountered during their journeys. For Juliet, self-care involved working with a therapist to address her tendency towards self-sabotage. Raymonde explained how meditation, a healthy diet, and an empowered mindset serve as self-care and also allow her to be more effective and present in parenting and business management. She explained,

> "I see myself as more of the creator now versus a poor person who's all alone to get
>
> everything done, to make everybody happy. So I make myself happy first and take care
>
> of myself first. I can't go out and take care of patients if I'm not taking care of myself, or
>
> take care of my children if I haven't been taking care of myself.

A woman's sense of confidence as well as her overall level of self-efficacy seems to be directly connected with the quality of interpersonal support she received in her life as well as the stories she chose to tell herself when she was confronted with challenges in her life. If a woman framed her challenges as debilitating struggles, she seemed to repeat a story about her life and business being difficult. If she framed her challenges as being opportunities grow, she instead seemed to tell a story about her life and business being places to experience learning and happiness.

Support Systems: Relational Connections and Disconnections

It was evident from the findings that the extent to which a woman felt supported or unsupported by her most intimate relationships had a profound impact on her confidence, resilience and overall sense of wellbeing personally and professionally. Ten of the 12 participants experienced strong feelings of loneliness along their entrepreneurial journey. It was evident from the data that as independent spheres, the roles of both mothering and entrepreneurship can increase an individual's tendencies toward feeling socially isolated. Many participants expressed

how mothering can put them in a situation where they are stuck in the house after 7 p.m., making it difficult to get out for social events or networking. The lack of childcare help exacerbated this issue for participants. The demands of parenting and caring for young children also left many of the women with little free time for building and maintaining relationships, and even when they did have the free time, they expressed sometimes feeling too tired to go out and chose to go to sleep instead. When it came to their role as an entrepreneur, many participants expressed that having a home-based business cut them off from other colleagues, and they found themselves working long hours at home alone. Some participants expressed missing their social lives in active office environments in their former jobs. The participants explained a range of ways in which they overcame these challenges with isolation to maintain feelings of support and relational connectedness in their lives.

For example, Clara has a variety of supports including friends, neighbors, and family. However, when she feels lonely, her biggest hindrance to feeling supported comes from how she connects with herself. She tries to watch the "stories in her head that want to alienate her from others" and ensures that she is proactively asking for support. Meanwhile, Nina explained that she feels isolated since becoming an entrepreneur. She said,

> I feel lonely in my work. Although I love my connection to my clients and workshops, most of my days I am alone and I miss social aspects of being in an office and laughing. I miss that. But there are a few other people like me who also miss that and we get together sometimes for fun and social and idea exchanges which helps since I am alone a lot throughout my days.

Gretta expressed feeling very lonely quite often as a solo entrepreneur and a single parent. She wishes she had more support and especially more sound business advice. Marie said

she often feels "unbelievably lonely" and explained her loneliness comes from not having

anyone in her close circles who understands her journey as an entrepreneur.

Intimate partnerships.

Being a supportive partner. Of the 12 women interviewed, eight were in intimate

partnerships. Of the eight partnered women, four of them described their partners as being very

supportive of them personally and professionally. For example, Christy described her husband as

being "extraordinarily supportive" and a "cheerleader" during her journey. She explained that

her husband is a busy medical doctor who is appreciative of everything she does to keep the

household running, and that taking on most of the household responsibilities "is a choice." For

years, Christy spent more money than she made and struggled to balance parenting, personal

responsibilities, and a business. She explained her husband was supportive through these

struggles and encouraged her to start her business. Without his encouragement, she would not

have done that on her own. Christy laughed as she reflected back on her husband picking up on

her restlessness after she had her baby and he said, "we're going to freaking get you out of this

house - what do you want to do with that other part of your brain for a while?" Zoila's husband

also encouraged her to work again after she was overwhelmed caring for her four children. She

recalled her husband saying, "I think you need to go back to work and just get this business

started." Zoila said her husband was "a cheerleader" and "key in all of this" - not only with

regard to financial support, but also emotional support. Zoila expressing a lot of gratitude

towards her husband for all he does to support her. Clara described her husband as "incredibly

supportive" and her "soulmate." Throughout their relationship, they have taken turns as

breadwinner and home caretaker, and Clara said her husband "understands that the lack of short

term income is for a longer gain and he sees that there's a lot of potential." She feels grateful that

he takes an active role in parenting when she needs a break or when she has a business obligation. Juliet, a doula who works untraditional hours, described her husband as "super supportive" and a "huge fan" of her work.

Anna, meanwhile, described the support she receives from her husband as "a challenge." While he provides financial support for the family (which she considers herself "lucky" to have), he doesn't actively contribute to the household or child care needs. Similar to Anna, Nina also explained that she is "grateful" that her husband is financially supportive and she said, "I probably would not be an entrepreneur if my husband wasn't there providing." However, she also expressed frustration with his lack of support at home and with her business. For example, he often refuses to watch the children when she has to attend events for her business.

Anastasia also described her husband as the "sole breadwinner" as she grows her business from home and cares for their young daughter. She was uncertain about the extent of her husband's support, explaining, "There are ways I that I don't feel supported by him - like sometimes I wish he would just be a little bit more...like helpful on the weekends. I just hate that I feel like I need to ask for help." Marie was also conflicted about the extent of her husband's support. She felt micromanaged and criticized, often feeling that he doesn't trust her to run the business on her own. She said,

> But I'm getting overwhelmed by his reactions, and the blows he deals me with the
> potential new money coming in or not and whether or not a new client will come through.
> I mean, it's tricky because I feel like instead he gets pretty wrapped up in the highs and
> lows of the business.

The role of intimate partnerships in this study highlighted a number of unexpected and emerging themes, including gender roles and gender stereotypes within heterosexual marriages. There

seems to be a trend of some husbands viewing their wives' businesses as unimportant side projects, which forces their wives to prove their validity as not only a business owner, but a respected equal and financial contributor to their household. This lack of support appeared to have costly consequences on the mompreneur participants. The women in this study who expressed a desire for more support, help and respect from their husbands also expressed the greatest amount of loneliness overall amongst all the participants, along with lower expressed self-efficacy toward growing the business in the future.

Immediate family and close friends.

Immediate family. Immediate family members, particularly parents and in-laws, were a source of support for many participants. While all the participants who had familial support in their lives also expressed frustration with the inherent challenges that came with it, overall it was vital for the women who relied on it. For example, Clara even moved to a different city to be closer to her immediate family. She explained how "incredibly helpful" it is to have her parents and her husband's parents nearby to provide childcare. Like Clara, Marie also moved her family to be closer to her parents. She described her parents as "deeply involved" in her family's life. Marie explained that while this is a resource, her parents are also caring for her aging grandparents and that complicates the situation, "So I live a life of waiting for the shoe to drop and knowing that my child care could evaporate on a moment's notice, temporarily or permanently. So there's blessings and curses here."

Zoila also has a lot of family support, especially from her retired father who helps with childcare. Chloe described her mother as her "greatest source of support," both personally and professionally. Her mother is also a successful entrepreneur of a successful business, so she also looks up to her mom as a business mentor. Having a mother that served as both a positive

parental figure as well as a strong female business mentor has been an asset. Chloe also emphasizes how watching her mother build a successful multi-million dollar business has planted many seeds of confidence in her throughout the years as she too sees herself becoming a successful entrepreneur in the future. Meanwhile, Nina said her mother and sister play a supportive role in her life, and understand her as a woman, a mother and a business owner because they have walked through similar life journeys and challenges. She says they are "very proud" of her, and "get it" which is very helpful for her in staying in check with a balanced mindset. Nina values having these kindred, shared mindsets and lived experiences with other close women in her life, which promotes a greater sense of wellbeing and confidence.

However, some participants felt torn by family relationships, as many could be draining. For example, Christy admitted that while her parents are great "cheerleaders" for her work, they are also demanding of her time because of their declining health. Similarly, Gretta feels limited by her parents' health needs. Amina's father is also in poor health and while he provides emotional support, she said, "he's getting older and I sometimes don't even want to tell him about some of the challenges I have because I'm afraid that's going to affect him medically."

Close friends. Five of the participants cited positive relationships with friends who not only supported their entrepreneurial journey, but were also often mothers as well who could relate to their parenting experience and provide tangible support. Zoila receives support from close friends who help care for her four boys. Her friends often take the kids for a night so she and her husband can have a date. However, she is often concerned about whether people can handle taking care of all of them at once. She explained, "Sometimes, we can barely handle it, so how are we going to let other people take all four of them?"

For Gretta, finding support from friends is more difficult. For example, when she finds herself without childcare, her friends have said things like, "Why didn't you ask me for help? If you just asked I would've watched the kids." While she has friends who are supportive of the business, she doesn't like giving her kids to them inconsistently and randomly calling them and saying, "hey, it's five o'clock at night, I have to work late. Can you grab my twins even though you haven't seen or talked to me in a month?" However, their emotional support has been critical. She explained that at first, her friends thought she was crazy for starting a lice business, but now they are supportive. She said, "the encouragement and support I get from my friends is awesome. It just kind of helps reassure you and solidify that you're doing the right thing."

Zoila feels supported by a solid group of friends who are also mothers. She said that making friends with other entrepreneurs and 'non-traditional mothers' has helped, especially being Filipino and coming from an immigrant family. She explained, "I think for the most part, a lot of these traditional parent groups feel very White to me and, as a woman of color, I--I mean, I'm half-white, but...I don't know. I just never felt super connected to those types of groups, so I never got really involved."

Mentors and coaching. Nine out of the 12 participants worked with some sort of formal coach or mentor during their entrepreneurial journey. All nine of those who did found this formal support to be helpful personally and professionally. Christy said that working with a coach was transformational for her business. Now when she encounters an obstacle, she thinks to herself, "Every moment now feels like a choice and a chance to learn about next time. Having a coach enabled me to see the mindset I was in. It has absolutely changed me personally and professionally." Clara has worked with a life coach since starting her business, which she explained was vital to her success. She also hired an additional coach who specializes in

publishing to help mentor her through writing her new book, and finds this to be "incredibly valuable" in her professional life.

Chloe said that registering for a personal training and development program helped her gain access to the mentoring and coaching support she needed. She said their coaches have been "invaluable" to her success and she said that her coaching program "was probably the beginning of my journey to self-love and self-acceptance, and it gave me the courage to take on everything that I do now with my business." Anna also explained that although hiring a business coach was "extremely expensive," she felt it was transformational to how she approaches her business and life. She shared, "I hired a business coach and joined a mastermind group and it's working beautifully. I feel more, much more structured." Anastasia said that she collaborates with friends that act as business mentors to her, and finds them to be "very supportive to help me when I fall." One friend is also a business coach and has been "really supportive" in helping her "jumpstart" her business after she took time off for her children. She explained,

> Having a business coach is a big thing. That's something I would tell any entrepreneur, whether they're a parent or not. Just having this outside perspective and someone pushing you to do bigger and better and look at things differently is really key in growing your business.

Marie hired a life coach because she struggled balancing work and life. She shared how her life coach helped her tremendously in reflecting on boundaries and priorities, as well as navigating difficult financial conversations with her husband. She explained, "I don't need advice about running the business. What I'm struggling with is that intersection of work and life. Working with my life coach I think has been helpful. It has given me some new ways of thinking

about some things and helped me feel more power in the stories I tell myself." She wishes she could meet with her coach more frequently.

While Nina sees the value in a coach, she explained, "I would like to hire a business coach to help me with the entrepreneur stuff but I feel like I don't deserve it and I have a hard time spending money on myself. I'm just too cheap." Similarly, Gretta expressed wishing she had the money or contacts to secure a business coach or mentor. She said that one of the most difficult parts of her journey has been not having any kind of mentor or coach, and shared,

> I have nobody to bounce things off of or look up to. . . .I really was alone along the way and I think if I had like a consistent mentor to help reassure and solidify that I'm doing the right thing, I feel like it would be the difference of taking my business to the next level faster or the right way, because I wasted a lot of time and energy in stuff that now I know doesn't work. So like do you take that money and put it into a business coach, or do you take it and put it into the business, you know? And, being a mompreneur, how much time do we really have?

Professional networks. Networking emerged as a prominent theme in all participants' stories. While all participants viewed professional networks as valuable, their level of involvement varied widely. Marie struggled to find likeminded networking groups and is still looking for the right fit. She tried her local chamber of commerce but she said, "they're all men in their 70's with like white hair, who can't relate to me." Clara had better luck with her local chamber, which had a women's business networking group with whom she meets with twice per month. She said that this, combined with online support groups for mom entrepreneurs, has been "incredibly valuable." Chloe participates in several online and offline networking groups and also helps run one of the largest networking groups in her city. She said, "Creating and growing

that group early was huge. It's like an integral part of me, and helped me get my name out there fast with the right people."

Nina found a local networking group of mother entrepreneurs who meet regularly. She described this group as transformative for her business, her personal growth, and confidence. She explained, "Being around and connected to other women and having more models of other women like me and networking with them, I feel more like a valid working mom entrepreneur in this world." Anastasia joined a networking organization unique to her health and wellness field of work. By volunteering for the organization, she became a more visible member and made important connections for her business. She recalled, "The organization has been a wonderful door to understanding kind of where I wanted to go in the corporate wellness industry. One gentleman was like, 'I will set you up with everybody.' He connects me." Juliet also shared that volunteering as a board member for a networking organization helped her gain visibility and clients. She found networking with other women entrepreneurs to be less transactional than networking with men, and has created longer term, sustainable relationships with women from networking activities. Anna explained that she feels she is lacking business support, networking opportunities, and a sense of community. However, she hopes to expand her professional network and is looking for groups to join. Gretta talked at length about the importance of professional business support groups, but struggles to find the time to network. She explained,

> I know it's really important to be around like-minded individuals, and I'm not, in any way whatsoever, around that. . . .I think I have definitely underestimated the importance of networking. I think it would be really helpful to join a networking group, but how are you going to find the time? I can't even find the time to go on a date, how do I find the time to like network, just to network?

Similarly, Zoila also shared that while she recognizes the value of professional networking, she finds it difficult to network in the evenings due to her family responsibilities. When reflecting on this, she said, "I don't think networking groups necessarily support parents. I don't feel like they're anti-parents, but it doesn't feel like, 'You can definitely bring your kids here' especially at night."

Zoila, along with seven other participants, mentioned the value of online networking groups, particularly those through Facebook. They explained that it helps them to "not feel alone" and that the flexible and asynchronous nature of digital networking groups allowed them to access support at times that were convenient to them. Marie, however, found drawbacks to digital networking groups and would prefer to network in person. She said, "I would be really thrilled to join a small group of women like that and meet with them on a regular basis. I'm not really interested in laying all this out in a Facebook group or pen pals online or something like that." Unfortunately, she struggled to find an in-person group that was aligned with her schedule, location, and networking needs.

Creating your own support system. When some participants went through periods of feeling alone, they learned to develop their own support system. For example, Raymonde explained that shifting her mindset proved to be helpful. That allowed her to be more open to seeing opportunities for support. She shared, "So, there has been moments of feeling alone, but then taking that and turning it around and saying, 'I can do something about this' and asking myself, how do I feel supported by myself?"

Zoila, Anastasia, and Chloe relied upon other mothers in their local communities for support, from child-swapping to meal sharing, along with business support and inspiration. Anastasia said, "Just the other day I put out a note saying, 'I need help. I have a consultation, and

my husband's traveling,' and a mom from the co-op came over. It has really been so supportive and so helpful." Chloe explained how she relied upon a similar community when she found herself in a new city as a single mom with no nearby family. She recalled, "I had no solid connections at first, and so really having to create that family by choice here, like really creating a super supportive community to help me when my son needs to be picked up or brought to a practice." She explained that this inspired her to look to other organized groups for support. She started one of her own and joined online groups through Meetup and Facebook where she made some of her closest friends. She said joining these groups has been "so powerful" for her journey.

Throughout the findings within this theme, it was clear that whether a woman felt supported or unsupported seemed to impact how they viewed themselves and the types of stories they chose to construct about their lived experiences. Gilligan (1982) remarked that for women "to see themselves as women is to see themselves in a relationship of connection" (p. 171). This supports the findings in this study that women construct their identity and perception of self through their relational connections and disconnections. This is also supported by Josselson (1996) who suggests that women are anchored deeply in the intimacy of personal relationships. A clear theme emerging from all 12 participants was the impact of support systems on their personal and professional wellbeing.

Entrepreneurial Learning and Meaning-Making Processes

Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the participants' meaning-making systems was important for understanding the ways in which mompreneurs learn about themselves, their developing entrepreneurial identity, and the world around them.

Motivations and reasons for being an entrepreneur. All participants spoke at length about the motivations behind becoming an entrepreneur, which were naturally woven throughout

each of their narratives. All participants worked for an employer full-time prior to having

children, although some left work to be a stay at home with their children prior to considering

entrepreneurship. A dominant theme emerging from the narratives was the value of flexibility

when considering entrepreneurship, particularly with regard to caretaking for their children. The

only participant who did not start a business in order to care for her children was Chloe, who

started a business "to have something for the next chapter of my life when my son goes off to

college." For the vast majority of participants, starting a business provided more ideal

circumstances for their parenting schedules. For example, Christy began working part-time for

her consulting company after having a child, but felt unsupported at her place of employment.

She recalled, "For me, the primary driver of starting my business was to be able to have the

flexibility to be available for my son." Similarly, Clara shared, "After I had my daughter, going

back to work for my employer wasn't really an option because they wanted me full-time and that

wasn't what I was looking for. And finding a part-time job was really challenging." Gretta

explained her reasoning for starting a lice removal business:

> I wanted to make money for myself and I needed the flexibility of going and getting the
>
> kids from school, or if it's a half day, you don't have to scramble for child care. I couldn't
>
> get a job that would give me 60, 70, 80,000 dollars a year because I had just graduated in
>
> a new field and stuff so, I decided to do my own business. I went back to my friends and I
>
> said, 'I'm going to be the lice saver.'

Raymonde explained how her decision to start a business followed the birth of her second son

when she found job lacked the flexibility she needed to care for him the way she wanted to,

> I was at home and I didn't want to go back to work full-time and be away from the
>
> children but I tried to go back to work for two days a week and my oldest son was very

needy and wanted me all the time, be nursed, nursed, nursed all the time. It made it really hard to go and see patients and work for somebody else and fit into their hours. At home, and after the second baby, and then when he was getting a little bit older, I wanted to start working from home and that's when I started entrepreneurship.

For Zoila, working full-time became more challenging with the birth of each of her four children. During that time, starting a business was always in the back of her mind. She recalled, "My company had massive cuts and I got laid off, and I was like, 'Well, that's just shit. I am now going to start my business up. And I'm not going to depend on somebody else.'" Similarly, Marie also said her full-time job was not ideal for supporting a family. She explained,

> I loved the work that I was doing for my employer, but with this whole arrangement, you can't possibly ever work from home even in situations that are far outside the norm, like snowstorms that cause three hour commutes or a kid who just broke her leg and has doctor's appointment, which is scheduled first thing in the morning at 8 a.m. and they need you to be back at the office at 8:30. It just really led me to think that there has to be a different way in which the work that I was doing could be done differently. My work life didn't align with my priorities, so I started my own consulting firm.

Amina said she became an entrepreneur out of "literal necessity" following a difficult divorce and a period of financial and housing instability. Working for a traditional employer didn't feel like a reasonable choice for her as it wouldn't allow her to provide hands-on care for her child with epilepsy. She said,

> There was no choice to become an entrepreneur. I really did what I did out of necessity and my success never really felt like success because I was hustling, and there was never any time to rest or even understand the accomplishment that I was making. It was really

just about surviving and working through either divorce or the breakup, moving, and making sure that my children were not being poisoned by the hardship that we were living through.

Building a plane while flying it. A number of participants felt as though they were improvising when starting a business, emphasizing that they were learning as they went along. As mentioned earlier, Nina referred to herself as an "accidental entrepreneur" and shared, "So one thing led to another and all of a sudden I found myself like renting space and getting insurance…and I basically was like building a plane as I was flying it and I had to figure a lot out as I went. I learned a lot." Anastasia explained that her wellness field is "constantly growing and changing" so she must learn and evolve to stay relevant. Zoila started her business after getting laid off by an employer. Of this impromptu decision, she said "I got some new clients, and boom, my business started back up again. That's been going on for three years now of me still learning to balance this mompreneur life."

This statements suggest a theme where mother entrepreneurs often find themselves having to take risks and plunge themselves into entrepreneurship due to a variety of unexpected circumstances personally and professionally. As a result, things like learning on the fly and constant discovery processes by trial and error appear to be more common aspects of their experience, rather than a well thought through business plan backed by careful planning.

Increased flexibility. The theme of increased flexibility emerged in every participant's narrative. Christy said that starting a home-based business allowed her to "really manage the whole household" while her husband worked long hours. Juliet explained that as her children became teenagers, she was surprised that her children needed her more than she expected. She said, "As an entrepreneur, I can be here and be present and...a lot of that, and just be around

because I find that at this age, we really...I mean, it's wonderful, but I still think they really want

to talk to me. They want to be around me." Raymonde explained that becoming an entrepreneur

empowered her to give more of herself to both her work and her family because she could

schedule clients when it was least disruptive to her personal life. She said,

> As a business owner, I was able to structure working around when my children are in
>
> school or with their dad and so it gave me flexibility. So that allowed me to give
>
> everything I had, to give a lot, because I wasn't taking away some time with my kids in
>
> that structure. Things improved so much.

Marie said that shifting to a home-based business has given her "unbelievable flexibility"

and that she feels "empowered" being able to care for her children. Zoila also used the word

"empowered" when describing how entrepreneurship provided more flexibility than her former

corporate job.

   Unhappy with jobs or employers. Nearly all of the participants explained that they had

felt unhappy or unsupported by their previous employers, particularly with regard to balancing

work and children. For example, Clara knew it was "time to figure out what was next" after she

struggled finding flexible work and felt misaligned with the leadership in her previous position.

Meanwhile, Anna struggled with ethical issues at her corporate job. Juliet described her former

career as toxic and felt that the dysfunctional environment eroded her self-esteem and made her

feel like a "terrible employee," "not good enough," and "not that smart." Zoila said her

experience working for employers was mostly "negative" but that her negative experiences

empowered her to take initiative and start her own business when she lost her job. Marie started

her own business after a string of difficult life events including family health issues and

commuting difficulties. Her employer would not allow her to work remotely during this time and

after several months of long commutes, she thought, 'Well, wait a minute. I could have started

working from home at seven in the morning and had a productive day, instead I spent five hours

driving around.'

        Feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment. Feelings of satisfaction and

accomplishment emerged as a theme from the narratives of all 12 participants. Within this theme,

women pointed to feeling appreciated, having freedom and flexibility, making an impact, and

opportunities for personal growth. The act of becoming an entrepreneur appeared to be less

significant than how it acted as a catalyst to positively impact their relationships with children,

clients, family, and themselves. The sense of agency that many women felt resulting from their

decisions to go into business, and do so successfully, appears to be a key component of feeling

satisfied and accomplished with their work.

        Being appreciated. Christy explained that she experiences high points on her

entrepreneurial journey when she is appreciated by her clients. She said, "I mean, I love the

people, the clients, and I love that they appreciate my work and want me to continue to be a part

of that." Anastasia said, "It's wonderful when you see a satisfied client, who's really excited and

feeling like helpless, like 'Oh, my gosh. I really loved your suggestion. I really loved talking to

you.' I really love that interaction with those clients." Juliet said she feels "great" and "very

privileged" when a client tells her they have heard of her before. Raymonde explained that she

feels fulfilled and appreciated when she has a large volume of clients and calls these times

"really big high points" not only for her as an entrepreneur but also as an individual. She said,

"This is universe letting me know that I'm on the right path and that working for myself and

creating my version of work was the right thing to do." Amina pointed to the women she helps

and the audiences she speaks to who help her feel appreciated. She said, "They're the ones that

give me confidence to say, you know what, I've gotten this far and whether I have that Ph.D. or not, I've really been able to impact people's lives in a way that nobody else could, and I believe that that was more than just coincidence."

Making an impact. One emergent theme from all participants' interviews was the importance of passion in driving their work; most specifically, making an impact on the lives of others. For example, Clara explained that when she launched her book, it was a high point because she believed she was "really making a difference" in the lives of other people. She went on to explain, "So, I'm not selling my soul to go make money; instead, I'm making money doing what I love while making a difference." Anna explained that helping other women become more motivated "feels amazing." She said, "I just love it. I love it." Juliet shared that, "Supporting someone through a birth is amazing" and explained how she feels about doing community based birthing work, "The child mortality rate among women of color who give birth is way, way higher than among White women. Helping address this problem is something that really touches me, and it's something I'm going to be working on more." Most of the women interviewed had struggled to find a sense of fulfillment in corporate settings. They attributed this to being forced to "play by others' rules" and to put their families' needs second. Entrepreneurship helped them re-design their life structure and play by their own rules in these arenas.

Personal growth. Feelings of personal growth and fulfillment also emerged from the women's narratives when discussing their entrepreneurial journeys. Juliet and Clara shared that becoming an entrepreneur allowed them to grow in ways that they did not expect. Clara described her entrepreneurial journey as an "incredibly valuable personal growth process" in teaching her how to overcome fears and be more compassionate towards herself both as an entrepreneur and a parent. She said, "It's really helped me figure out what my values are and

what I want in life so that I can pass this on to my children." She said since starting her business

she is "really, really happy like 90% of the time" and has a newfound excitement for life. Anna

described her entrepreneurial journey as a "major self-development process" and shared, "I can

now understand myself better than five years ago."

Realizations and lessons learned. Participants shared a number of lessons and

realizations throughout their interviews, making it clear that starting a business was a very

unique and profoundly transformative learning platform for each woman. Clara explained that

she learned to "be comfortable with being uncomfortable," set healthy boundaries, and practice

"getting along with who you really are." She felt that by being forced to work through fears and

insecurities triggered by entrepreneurship, she developed a deeper acceptance of her

shortcomings.

Christy shared that she learned how to redefine her relationship with time and how she

views success. She said, "I feel like as a culture, we have this idea that you've got to work all the

time or you won't be successful, and I think that's not true." Anastasia said that she learned to

improve her time efficiency since starting a business. She shared,

> When my daughter went down for a nap, it would be like, boom! Alright, I have limited
>
> time before the ticking time bomb wakes up. There was no Facebook, there was no
>
> chatting with friends. It was just getting my stuff done. . . . If you want one of the most
>
> time-managed efficient employees, get a mom.

Raymonde shared that she learned to not "do it completely alone" and the value of

support on her entrepreneurial journey. She explained further,

> If you're able to see the path and see how you can create your own life, you can create
>
> your own business and then you can attract the right people and hire the right people to

help you or even just organize the right people to help you, whether it's a family member

to take care of the kids, or a neighbor to do a grocery run for you. I've learned you really

need a strong sense of yourself and taking care of yourself because then, it's easier to ask

for help, and see whether it's help that is needed and you'll be less likely to want to do

everything yourself because it's all up to you.

Advice for other mompreneurs. At the end of the interview, each participant was given

the opportunity, if desired, to share any advice they would like to give to other mother

entrepreneurs. These comments reflected a number of important findings including how and

what the women learned throughout their journey. Christy shared that her main recommendation

to other mompreneurs was the importance of prioritization and time management so that family

can be nurtured at the center. She emphasized that it is important to choose a business one feels

passionate about, but also one that has low associated costs and high flexibility with customers.

Clara felt that the most important thing mother entrepreneurs can do is to "get out of your own

way and understand it's not an easy journey." She said, "Be willing to invest in yourself more

than anything because you are the one, you are the business and your growth is what's going to

make or break it. Really lean into what excites you. Move through your fear." Anastasia and

Chloe both said the best advice they can give is to not push things off until later and instead "just

do it." Chloe recommended starting right away and blocking out the noise from others who may

distract or bring new entrepreneurs down. She emphasized the importance of support, because

"you just can't do all of this by yourself." Anna recommended viewing mistakes as learning

opportunities, "If something doesn't work, it was an experience." Nina recommended carefully

considering the stage one's children are at when one considers how much to take on with a

business. She also recommended networking with other mom entrepreneurs as early in the

journey as possible. Gretta emphasized the importance of financial stability through a part-time

job or a partner. She explained,

> I would say to have another income, which kind of ties into whether or not your husband
>
> or wife is there. I don't have experience with that, but if someone else is there, if there's a
>
> dual income, a second income that's floating the bills, I think that would be great because
>
> I think that's when you can put the money back into the business and really make it take
>
> off.

Juliet and Zoila recommend having a business coach and healthy network, believing that

"investing in yourself is the most important thing." Zoila also recommended that women don't

put off having children to start their business, and said that businesses can always be "growing

and changing" to accommodate families. Marie, however, cautioned women starting a business

when pregnant with their first child because they may not know what to expect and could quickly

become overwhelmed. Amina recommended women reflect on the skills they have developed as

a mother to inspire their next business idea. She said,

> Reflect on the skills that you've developed as a mother. What is it that you do best? Think
>
> about the things that come so naturally to you that you don't even think that it's a skill
>
> because it's so organic to you.

Meaning-making and learning was a major theme in this study, and what was revealed

was the demanding social and entrepreneurial roles and responsibilities of mompreneurs may

require expanded capacities mentally and emotionally as well as quick learning processes to

navigate challenging terrain personally and professionally. According to Kegan et al. (2001), the

evolution from a simpler to a more complex way of knowing depends on the level of support,

challenges, and encouragement that surround an individual. Of the nine women who expressed

having positive support in their life, all nine women also displayed evidence of positive inner

dialogues, particularly when asked questions about their level of self-confidence, and the way

they make meaning of their journey. It was evident from these interviews that the women who

were surrounded by encouraging support and positive inner dialogues about their journey learned

and transformed the fastest during their journey, despite the obstacles placed on their path. By

contrast, those women who had little support also expressed more negative meaning-making

toward themselves and their personal growth. In addition, women who lacked support,

particularly from their most intimate relationships like that of a partner, had the lowest levels of

confidence toward the future growth of their business.

Chapter Summary

Chapter five presented detailed findings related to women's perceptions of their

entrepreneurial journeys, sense of self, and meaning-making, as well as their experiences

developing support networks. I presented the findings for each analytic category related to the

participants' sense of self, confidence and self-doubt, challenges and coping strategies, support

systems, and meaning-making processes. The participants' belief in themselves, trust in their

capabilities to overcome challenges, and dedication to learning, combined with a solid support

system, were key components supporting participants' ability to thrive. In contrast, a lack of

positive meaning making and support structures impaired their ability to thrive.

I have presented detailed findings related to the women's perceptions of their personal

and professional journeys of starting a business while raising children, the role that relational

support and self-efficacy played in their personal and professional development, as well as how

they learned and at times experienced transformational growth. In the next chapter, I present an

analysis and discussion of the overarching themes that emerged from the participants' stories,

connect these themes to the theoretical framework, and present a model of mompreneur immunity that captures the main findings of the study.

Chapter Six: Data Analysis and Discussion

While the women's experiences were distinctive and diverse, major themes and subthemes emerged from their narratives that connected the participants' stories. Chapter five introduced each of these themes and subthemes, supported by data in the form of participant quotes and presented in Table 1. The five major categorical themes that emerged from the interviews with mompreneurs were: (a) identity and sense of self, (b) confidence and self-doubt, (c) challenges and coping strategies, (d) relational connections and disconnections, and (e) entrepreneurial learning and meaning-making.

Chapter six will illustrate the intersection between the theoretical frameworks and the major findings that emerged from the mompreneurs' entrepreneurial journeys and connect the overarching themes that influenced the mompreneurs' development as entrepreneurial learners. It will offer a synthesis and interpretive discussion of the participants' experiences using a lens that integrates Kegan's (1982, 1984) constructive developmental theory, Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, and the relational cultural theory of Miller (1976) and Jordan (2017). The literature on constructive developmental theory, social cognitive theory, and relational cultural theory confirms that these components are critically important for mompreneurs, and this study validates these theories in a population not yet studied extensively. This chapter will discuss how these findings validate the theories and will address the question, "How do women perceive themselves as they grow new businesses while raising children, and particularly how do entrepreneurial self-efficacy and relational connections influence the sense of self?"

After interviewing the mompreneurs, transcribing the interviews, journaling my reactions to their stories, coding for themes, listening to their voices multiple times, and highlighting quotations entailing detailed descriptions to present the interview themes most accurately, it

became apparent that, although the women interpreted their journeys in different ways, there

were two themes that summarized the experiences of the mompreneurs best. The most significant

factors that influenced their ability to ascribe meaning to their journeys were (a) personal growth

through learning and (b) relational influences. The extent to which each woman felt supported by

others in her life and was able to frame her experience through a lens of personal growth and

learning was linked to her own confidence and success in business. Persistence in the face of life

challenges, raising a family, and growing a business were underscored by a willingness to view

these experiences as learning opportunities, with the help of family, peers, and loved ones.

As explained in the chapter three, several validity strategies, including journaling, peer

scrutiny, and reflection (Morrow, 2005), were used to guide the discovery of the dominant

themes noted in this study. Evaluating the project through journaling and reflections at different

phases helped me monitor my own developing reflections on the findings contained in these

data. I made sure to record my initial impressions of each data collection session as well as the

patterns I saw emerging in the information generated along the way. Careful scrutiny by peers,

academics, and supervisors offered fresh perspectives as well as challenging some of the

assumptions I made as an investigator. My closeness to this study at times inhibited my ability to

view the findings with real detachment; these strategies were helpful in arriving at the major

themes described in this chapter.

This study's findings add to the emerging body of literature on mother entrepreneurs. The

discussion draws upon the theoretical frameworks and the existing literature regarding mother

entrepreneurs and frames this study's findings to provide a deeper understanding of

mompreneurs' perceptions of self and meaning-making processes.

Mompreneur Immunity Model

Despite an uptick in women's entrepreneurship in recent decades and the volume of literature on women's career-life development, there remains an under-representation in the literature on the career-life development of mother entrepreneurs (Korsgaard, 2007). Further, there is virtually no research on the influence of self-confidence and personal relationships on mompreneur identity development. Schultheiss (2009) argued that there is a need for more research on the career-life development of mothers. This study addresses that gap, specifically exploring the meaning-making processes among a sample of mother entrepreneurs. The limited research on women's entrepreneurship does not sufficiently give voice to mother entrepreneurs' perspectives on and experiences of self-perception and how they develop meaning-making processes. Therefore, this study uses a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of women combining entrepreneurship and motherhood.

Through in-depth analysis of individual stories and experiences across participants, themes and patterns emerged. A key finding from this study was that a mother entrepreneur's self-efficacy and framing of personal and professional transformation was influenced by her level of social support and ability to frame experiences through a learning lens. Together, these two factors provided a form of "mompreneur immunity" (see Figure 1), wherein a woman was more likely to persist through challenging personal or professional circumstances than another women who might lack these factors. These findings confirm the theories I used to understand this particular under-researched population. Disconnected relationships, chronic loneliness, self-doubt, feelings of guilt, and lack of confidence seemed to stifle learning and often caused further isolation among women in this study and ultimately impacted their ability to effectively grow their businesses.
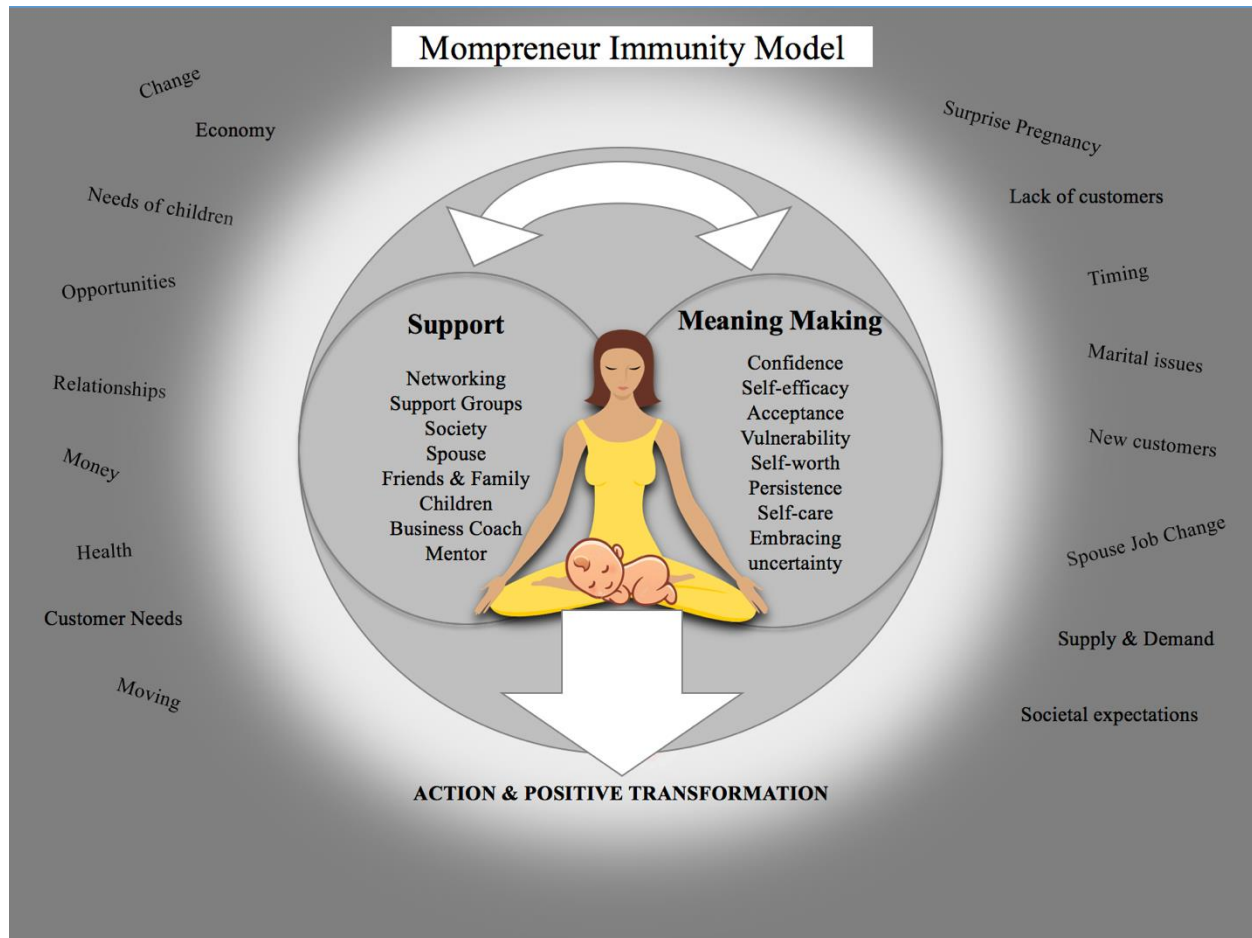
Figure 1. Mompreneur immunity model. The model shows how support and meaning-making structures work in collaboration to foster greater positive transformation for a mompreneur both personally and professionally.

From a social constructionist perspective, knowledge is created through relationships and reflective inquiry; therefore, connecting supportive family relationships with career development can positively affect one's personal and professional identity (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004). Availability of familial support seemed to have a meaningful impact on women in this study. Relationships can be a source of connection or disconnection and also present opportunities for growth and learning, depending on how one chooses to navigate them (Jordan, 2017).

The data produced by this study suggested that mompreneurs were able to develop "immunity" to various personal and professional challenges if they felt that they had a robust support network in place. For the purpose of this study, I define immunity as a sustainable resilience that allows individuals to continue growing along a positive trajectory, despite the personal and professional obstacles they face. This differs from Kegan and Lahey's (2009) use of immunity to describe an individual's hidden resistance to changing, even when change is desired. The contextual use of immunity in the mompreneur immunity model instead describes immunity as a protective membrane made up of her own internal and external support systems that surround her and allow her to learn and change in positive and transformative ways. This immunity helps women manage stress and unexpected circumstances so they can thrive personally and professionally. This study's findings also suggest that the perceived level of support further sustained this immunity by encouraging positive meaning-making and learning processes resulting from challenges. Therefore, relational support and meaning-making processes are two spheres that work symbiotically to stimulate mompreneurs' personal and professional growth. Immunity encourages the mompreneur and her business to grow in the face of challenging external forces such as unexpected pregnancies, childcare changes, financial hardship, business troubles, marital issues, aging parents, sick children, and gender discrimination. Figure 1 provides a visual overview of this mompreneur immunity model. If a woman can grow and feel supported through the challenges of entrepreneurship, she has more energy to invest into her family, her business, and her broader community.

The mompreneur immunity model was built by identifying patterns and themes in the qualitative data and boiling them down to the two most significant factors influencing a mompreneur's ability to thrive in her business and personal life. Upon consideration of all the

participant data, the most dominant themes were (a) personal growth through learning and (b)

relational influences. Meaning-making and social support were the internal factors holding

together the mompreneur's nucleus, forming a protective membrane and allowing her to learn

and be resilient despite challenges and unforeseen circumstances. Positive personal growth and

transformation were the results of these factors being fed, nurtured, and developed. The

mompreneur is at the center of the model, representing not only the individual but also the

nucleus of an ecosystem that included a business, children, and broader family. Unexpected and

often unavoidable life and business circumstances loomed that could permeate this membrane of

social support and positive meaning-making. Whether external circumstances were good or bad

lay within the meaning-making structures for each mompreneur. If the mompreneur did not have

immunity, her ability to construct positive interpretations of her experiences and to thrive

alongside her circumstances could be hindered. The greater the support and the more positive the

meaning-making from the inside, the thicker the membrane and the more likely she was to

sustainably thrive personally and professionally.

        Support and meaning-making worked in a collaborative manner to strengthen immunity

to outside forces that otherwise could penetrate the membrane and erode sustainability and

resiliency for the mompreneur, her family, and her business. Likewise, a lack of support and

positive meaning-making could erode the membrane from the inside, increasing the

mompreneur's vulnerability. The following sections will discuss how supporting theories were

validated by this study, and how evidence from this study demonstrated the importance of the

various facets of the mompreneur immunity model.

Supporting theories

      Relational theory. The data from this study showed that relationships profoundly influenced participants' ability to cultivate positive self-perceptions and leverage support resources to grow their businesses. As discussed in the literature review, a relational lens (e.g., Blustein, 2001; Flum, 2015; Motulsky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2003, 2007), which takes into account the interconnectivity of a woman's relationships, explains how changes in one area of a relational system impact other areas. This is helpful in understanding the mompreneur immunity model because it explains the interconnection between positive relational support and positive meaning-making systems, which work together to result in positive action and transformation. Given the centrality of relationships in human development, this study used relational cultural theory (RCT) to examine mompreneurs' perceptions and experiences (Jordan, 2017). Relational connections and disconnections are at the center of developmental processes; therefore, it was important to consider the women's quality of support from partners, friends, family, coaches, mentors, and support groups (Flum, 2015). Relational cultural theory confirms that social support is critically important for mompreneurs, and the participant experiences in this study validated this theory and provided evidence that supported the usefulness of the mompreneur immunity model. The model lists networking, support groups, spouse, friends and family, children, and coaches and mentors as types of support structures, and those will be highlighted in this section, using evidence from study participants to emphasize their importance.

      While the degree of social support impacted women differently, all 12 participants expressed strong feelings of loneliness at some point in their journey. Whether they attributed this feeling to the isolation of working from home, being a single parent, tending to the needs of their children, lacking the energy to socialize, struggling to find likeminded friends, or

geographic isolation, loneliness was an expressed struggle for all participants at some point.

Parallel to the theme of loneliness in many of the women's stories, there were dimensions of

consistent and dependable support in a number of forms, ranging from grandparents who

provided free and reliable childcare to business coaches who kept them motivated, to mother

entrepreneur support groups where they swapped emotional support and business advice.

However, even the women who were being tangibly supported expressed strong feelings of

loneliness. This could suggest that they were craving emotional support beyond childcare

support from grandparents, as one example. Nina, for example, expressed feeling supported by

her family on the childcare front, but unsupported at times by her husband and isolated at home

building a business. This led to an overall feeling of loneliness even though she had more

childcare support than some other women in the study.

Supportive relationships are an important resource for women when navigating a

transition such as an entrepreneurial journey, particularly in the context of mothering

responsibilities (Schlossberg, Waters, Goodman & Gullickson, 1996). Relationships greatly

influenced the study participants' capacity to gain forward momentum and thrive personally and

professionally as they grew their businesses. The extent to which the mompreneurs' perceptions

of their relationships provided connection or disconnection had apparent impact on their self-

confidence as well as their mental and emotional capacity to learn and grow from experience. A

mompreneur's overall sense of agency to persist was greatly hindered by negative or problematic

personal or professional relationships.

When considering the participants' narratives, it is crucial to acknowledge the context.

This study was based in the United States, and the U.S. working culture influenced the

experience of all participants. Becoming an entrepreneur for many participants was not born

solely out of passion or pursuit of the American dream. Rather, the opposite was true for several

participants. In this country, employees often lack sufficient parental leave and childcare, in

contrast to other developed countries (International Labor Organization, 2014). Furthermore, the

United States has one of the worst paid parental leave systems in the developed world, allowing

mothers a mere three weeks off to care for a new baby under the most recent family leave plan

(Donovan, 2018). While this study did not analyze the societal, legislative, and cultural

implications of raising a family in the United States, many of the study's participants felt that a

transition into entrepreneurship was the only reasonable choice for their families, given the lack

of flexibility and work-life balance associated with their traditional jobs. Some said they had no

choice about becoming an entrepreneur, that they made the decision out of necessity, because

they could not care for the family in what they considered to be a healthy way in a traditional

American workplace. Some reasons participants cited leaving traditional employment were lack

of flexibility, ability to care for sick children, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, long

commutes, and lack of sufficient childcare. Participants emphasized that entrepreneurship

allowed them to support the family financially and at the same time be more available to their

children because of the flexibility self-entrepreneurship afforded them. After going into business

for themselves, the women reported feeling more supported by society and their community,

family, and friends and that, in turn, they were able to provide more support for their own

children, businesses, and themselves.

In this study, the most important relationship was that of a spouse or partner. The

presence or absence of a supportive spouse appeared to empower or disempower the women on a

number of dimensions, including self-worth, resilience, and feelings of support or isolation.

Intimate relationships appeared to either be very helpful or very hurtful for the participants and

their abilities to maintain a positive meaning-making process and gain forward business

momentum. Christy, for example, described her husband as "extraordinarily helpful" while Zoila

described her husband as a "cheerleader." Both women went on to describe a lot of momentum

in their businesses and positive learning and meaning-making processes, despite the hurdles they

encountered. It is interesting to note that the women whose husbands were not supportive were

also the ones who struggled the most with confidence. For example, Nina, Anastasia, and Marie

described low self-esteem and negative meaning-making processes in contrast to other

participants. All three expressed a great deal of frustration with their partners, particularly with

regard to child-rearing and business obligations. As a whole, these women also seemed to

express the most negative perceptions of their journeys and circumstances. It was surprising,

however, that these women did not have life circumstances apparently any more challenging than

some of the very positive women in the study. In fact, they had more income and arguably more

favorable life circumstances than many of the other women. In addition to the lack of spousal

support, these women seemed somewhat more isolated overall, and this and poor spousal support

were expressed throughout their narratives and seemed to have a magnified effect on overall

well-being and confidence. The impact of spousal support on confidence and even overall self-

efficacy is worthy of consideration for future research. When referring to gender role

socialization, power differentials, and other social injustices, Comstock et al. (2009) argued,

"Chronic experiences of disconnections lead to the ongoing disempowerment of many persons in

oppressed groups in contemporary society" (p. 283). Feelings of disconnection due to unfair

power differentials between women and their spouses appeared to contribute to feelings of

personal and professional strife. Those who felt unsupported described feeling more weighed

down by the demands of both family and work. This is in line with Ortqvist and Wincent (2006),

who argued that role overload serves as the primary trigger of high levels of stress in women

entrepreneurs.

The majority of the partnered women interviewed, particularly those with younger

children, took on a disproportionate amount of childcare and household responsibilities. This

included organizing childcare, picking children up from school or activities, and household

chores. This finding is supported by existing research that suggests that women generally

perform the majority of unpaid work in the home and remain the primary caregivers for children,

with women, on average, spending more than double the amount of time per week on childcare

than their partners (Milan, Keown, & Urquijo, 2011). Green and Cohen (1995) criticized the

seeming advantages of entrepreneurship for women in enhancing work-family balance. Instead,

they pointed to women accepting personal responsibility in negotiating the competing demands

of paid and unpaid work, although existing social gender inequalities remain unchallenged in

many marriages. Most participants generated income through their businesses, but this was often

viewed by their husbands as less important than their own work; therefore, the women typically

managed a majority of household responsibilities and childcare in addition to their business

ventures. The desire to earn money while maintaining a flexible schedule was motivation for the

mompreneurs in the study. Schultheiss (2009) argued that there is a cost to mothering beyond

childcare fees, and men typically do not pay the same costs. Since most of the women

participating operated home-based businesses, the majority of home-based chores and family

work also became their responsibility. Slaughter (2013) suggested that removing gender labels

from parenting work could help reframe the household labor–divide problem, by thinking "less

in terms of men and women and instead…thinking about caretakers and bread-winners" (p. 1).

On a similar note, Richardson (2012) suggested that encouraging society to value care work as

much as it values and acknowledges market work can offer a broader base of stability and

security to families. Unfortunately, household responsibilities and traditional gender roles often

trigger complicated marital negotiations, as evidenced in many narratives, such as the stories of

Nina, Marie and Anna that highlighted tension around spousal support. These women lacked the

most immunity out of all study participants.

Many women experienced stress from managing their own businesses and the majority of

their family's needs. High stress levels can negatively affect a woman's mental wellness as well

as her business (Elmuti, Kathawala, & Wayland, 1993; Örtqvist & Wincent, 2006). This was

evidenced in cases in which women lacked a supportive spouse and took on an unequal amount

of work at home. Facing a different set of circumstances, single mothers in the study also

experienced being overburdened with family care, as there was no partner to support them or

share in the workload at home. Four out of 12 of the mothers in this study were single mothers,

and all four women emphasized the importance of teaching their children independence and self-

sufficiency at a young age since they lacked support from adults in other areas. However, even

though they lacked the support of a partner, they still displayed high levels of immunity in this

study.

Many women also discussed the value of a mentor, business coach, or support group of

other mompreneurs. For example, Chloe and Nina believed that their relationships with other

groups of mother entrepreneurs were "transformative" and "incredibly valuable" to their

businesses and personal development. With regard to women business owners, Marlow and

McAdam (2012) claimed that gaining entrepreneurial legitimacy can be challenging, often

requiring deep identity work and deconstructing embedded gender assumptions about the nature

of the ideal entrepreneur. Many women in this study struggled to find other entrepreneurial

mothers and were actively looking for a likeminded group of peers. The few who did find this

discussed the profound impact it had on their positive identity associations as an entrepreneur as

well as their overall self-efficacy.

It was surprising that most participants did not talk much about specific friends in their

life. While no participants specifically stated that they had no friends, many alluded to the fact

that they had felt socially isolated for years, and their children's sleep schedule combined with

the fact that their friends were also busy parents made it difficult to nurture their social life. Most

participants emphasized a desire for a larger support group, and a number of women mentioned

already being part of a mom meet-up group. Being part of a social group, either online or offline,

helped the participants gain social capital, feel more empowered, and feel at ease with their

identity and capacity to grow their venture. Social capital is a critical ingredient for

mompreneurs, as it empowers them to tap into personal relationships to supplement their own

capabilities and deficiencies (Aldrich, Zimmer, & Jones, 1986; Greve & Salaff, 2003). Miller

(1976) explained that women who lack a sense of belonging with likeminded people are at risk

for experiencing loneliness, confusion, low self-worth, decreased self-knowledge, and isolation.

This argument was supported by the findings of the current study.

Relational support from a variety of sources can help women deal with career stressors

and build stronger emotional foundations (Blustein, Prezioso, & Schultheiss, 1995). Coaches and

mentors were cited by nearly all of the participants as a strong source of support. Many described

having a coach, even if only temporarily, as "transformational" and a "confidence builder" for

their businesses, important for learning from their experiences, and helpful in developing their

ability to trust in themselves as entrepreneurs. Bandura (1997) highlighted that self-efficacy can

also be influenced by social support and external validation provided by a mentor or coach. Cox

(2006) explained that the coaching process has many parallels with adult learning theory, including andragogy (Knowles, 1980), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Cox (2006) argued that similar to adult learning emerging from psychology, coaching relies on these areas of adult learning to help clients learn and grow. When implemented properly, a coaching program can "provide clients with the opportunity to explore their previous life experiences through life chapters and to reflect on continuity and congruence" (Cox, 2006, p. 214). This is consistent with the women's shared experiences about business coaches, coaching programs, and undertaking coaching training themselves. While all women in this study emphasized the positive impact of coaching on their businesses, emotional well-being, and personal development, many also noted that the financial cost was a prohibitive factor when seeking a coach. In addition to coaching, research suggests that career counselors may create a supportive relational environment to aid women with positive career growth and development (Motulsky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2005).

Family relationships and expectations can have a large influence on women's work decisions and career development (Schultheiss, 2005). In the current study, parents and in-laws were often mentioned as critical forms of support for mother entrepreneurs. While emotional support from parents and in-laws was mentioned, the dominant theme that emerged from their stories was the value of dependable and trustworthy childcare. For some women, this allowed them to pursue their businesses. In some cases, high-needs children required the extra care provided by close family. Facilitating this access to care sometimes required a cross-country relocation. In some cases, women mentioned that although their parents were "cheerleaders" for their entrepreneurial work, their elderly parents' health issues placed demands and constraints on their abilities to properly manage their businesses, care for their children, and even care for

themselves. Overall family relationships tended to be supportive in the area of childcare, but tended to lack emotional support or overall encouragement with the business venture.

It was clear from these findings that relational support from the variety of sources described above, such as that of a spouse, coach, or family member, could build a solid emotional foundation and better equip a mompreneur to deal with the stress that often accompanies raising children while growing a business. The extent to which their intimate and extended family relationships were interpreted as supportive or unsupportive had a significant influence on the entrepreneurial decisions and the overall sense of personal well-being and confidence of these women. Counselors and coaches were a clear source of strong and effective support that most of the women expressed either already having and benefiting from or desiring to find in the future.

Adult learning and development theories. This study used a social constructivist lens that looked at how individuals make meaning when seeking to understand experiences with people and processes while navigating growing a business venture (Creswell, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005). Kegan (2003) noted that a "person's beliefs construct the reality in which he lives, and the way these beliefs can change or develop over time" (p. 59). With each narrative in this study, it was apparent that the daily experiences of being a woman, a mother, and a business owner impacted the meaning-making system and the perception of self. These factors could positively or negatively influence many aspects of the entrepreneurial journey. A majority of participants referred to their entrepreneurial journey with words like "ups and downs" and "a roller coaster ride." The extent to which the women could learn from the highs and lows on their journeys can be understood through constructivist theories (e.g., Kegan 1982, 1994; Savickas, 2005) and social learning theories (Bandura, 1986) that view the implementation of self-concept as a key

element of the career-life development process and how the self evolves with experience over time.

Constructivist and social learning theories posit that meaning-making regarding self and life experience is critically important for adults; the participant experiences in this study validated these theories for mompreneurs and provided evidence that supported the usefulness of the mompreneur immunity model. The model lists confidence, self-efficacy, acceptance, vulnerability, self-worth, persistence, self-care, and embracing uncertainty as important meaning-making structures, and those will be highlighted in this section, using evidence from study participants to emphasize their importance. In the case of this study, the learning, personal growth, and knowledge gained from experience was an integral part of the mother entrepreneur's self-concept, which she implemented by adapting creatively, accepting and trusting herself, and embracing uncertainty and vulnerability. Throughout difficult family and entrepreneurial transitions, each woman appeared to learn about and refine her self-concept. As each participant made sense of and learned from her personal and professional experiences through her unique interpretive lens, her meaning-making systems evolved and became more complex. Her self-concept and interpretive lens acted as filters as she absorbed, organized, understood, and interpreted her entrepreneurial experiences. These meaning-making structures were central to the development of her identity, ultimately driving how she learned, built, and transformed the types of support structures around her.

Becoming an entrepreneur acted as a catalyst to help participants form positive, impactful relationships with children, clients, family, and themselves. All participants interviewed were greatly driven by the impact of their businesses on others. Juliet and Clara shared that becoming entrepreneurs allowed them to grow in ways that they did not expect. Clara described her

entrepreneurial journey as an "incredibly valuable personal growth process" as it taught her how to overcome fears and be more compassionate toward herself both as an entrepreneur and a parent. Many of the women also cited how important it was for them to feel like they were "really making a difference" in the lives of others. Furthermore, being an entrepreneur was central to their mothering identity and the importance they placed on the well-being of their children and overall quality of life. This included acting as a positive role model and forming a sense of identity outside of parenthood. For example, Amina cited her children giving her confidence because they looked up to her, motivating her to project a positive role model for them.

Marie and Nina referred to themselves as "accidental entrepreneurs," and it is interesting to note that of all the women they appeared to express the most uncertainty and fear toward their entrepreneurial identity, lifestyle and overall entrepreneurial future. In contrast, it appeared that when entrepreneurship was intentionally planned with the family and welcomed as part of a lifestyle rather than accidentally stumbled into, there seemed to be a quicker willingness to embrace the entrepreneur label as well as the personal and professional learning that was required along the way. There was also more expressed hope toward the future. Anna described her entrepreneurial journey as a "major self-development process" and shared that, "I can now understand myself better than five years ago."

Placing priority on self-care and nurturing positive self-perception was cited as a main lesson learned for many of the participants when it came to raising thriving children while managing a business. Clara, for example, shared that as a result of developing greater patience, strength, and self-awareness through her entrepreneurial experiences, her relationship with her husband and children improved. The theme of entrepreneurship igniting deep personal growth

was present in all participants' narratives. This came as a surprise for many participants as they

reflected on becoming better mothers and individuals their journey. Raymonde shared, "As my

business grew and I started gaining more self-confidence, more personal satisfaction, I started

becoming more emotionally available for my children in a big way." When participants

expressed enthusiasm toward entrepreneurship, particularly with regard to its healthier career

structure, a situation in which they could provide more in-person care for their children, they also

had more confidence and energy to invest in other areas, including their businesses. Part of

nurturing self-care was also learning how to proactively reach out for help to those around them.

For example, Raymonde shared that the most important lesson learned has been to not "do it

completely alone" and to value support on her entrepreneurial journey. For Juliet, self-care and

nurturing a positive self-perception involved reaching out for help not only to her family and

community but also to a trusted therapist. Gretta, Raymonde, Clara, and Zoila all specifically

pointed to self-help books and likeminded individuals who had a "commitment to personal

growth" as part of maintaining a positive perception of their experiences.

All of the women expressed times when weak meaning-making processes, filled with

doubt and self-sabotage, eroded positive traction personally and professionally. Three women,

namely, Anna, Marie and Nina, expressed that this occurred fairly regularly and described

feeling "drained" or "isolated" or "depressed" and "feeling like a failure." They went on to detail

the ways that these thoughts constantly came in and out of their heads, and all of them

questioned whether they would have the desire or ability to continue with their businesses. These

women expressed not only resistance to their current life circumstances and a lack of confidence

but also demonstrated a lack of relational support. The mompreneur immunity model illustrates

that when mompreneurs do not have enough positive meaning-making and relational support

structures in their life they can suffer personally and professionally. Counselors and educators can utilize the model to guide clients and students to cultivate more of these supports in their lives and build their immunity.

Another unexpected finding was that all 12 participants experienced improved levels of self-efficacy after starting their businesses. This was surprising because of the tremendous stress and difficult experiences many of these women described having during their journeys. All 12 participants expressed some form of increased confidence in their entrepreneurial capacities, and they also developed confidence to tackle other obstacles and had more trust and faith in themselves as individuals. For example, Anna explained how entrepreneurship forced her out of her shell as an introvert, and Clara pointed to learning greater patience with herself as she developed stronger self-acceptance. Clara explained how her confidence sustainably grew over time as she accepted her own discomfort and shifting emotions. The more she accepted her own fears and persisted despite those fears, the more she built up her self-efficacy and trust in her abilities. Christy explained that, although she had low confidence in her abilities at first, the experience and corresponding challenges of juggling a business and family forced her to face her fears. Today she explains that she is more confident in her ability to do her job and handle difficult business situations. Three women however ascribed negative meanings to their experiences. When it came to negative meanings, for example, Marie explained that she was constantly feeling wedged between her business and family obligations and ultimately felt stressed being an entrepreneur. She said, "I feel like a failure. I feel like a failure as a mom. I feel like a failure as a wife. I feel like a failure as a daughter, and a business owner."

Research suggests that individuals with positive self-views are more likely to overcome challenges and reach their goals, whereas individuals with lower self-esteem or negative self-

views are less likely to reach their fullest potential (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). Perceived or real intrinsic and extrinsic barriers can pose significant roadblocks for entrepreneurs as they grow their businesses (Hatala, 2005). Researchers have suggested that self-efficacy plays a central role in women's ability to effectively overcome work and family challenges (Erdwins, Casper & Brien, 2001). Therefore, self-efficacy is a critical area of development for the mother entrepreneur in order to bring greater balance to her work and home life (Kephart & Schumacher, 2005). This is evidenced throughout the women's stories and in their descriptions of personal and professional growth as they navigated the experiences of entrepreneurship.

Constructive developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994) is based on the concept of transformation and can help frame how each mompreneur learns about herself and her world and how she evolves through different stages of meaning-making. While it is important for a mother entrepreneur to gain knowledge or skills, transformation is a result of shifting to an entirely new meaning-making system from which new knowledge is born (Kegan, 2001). Transformational growth and learning were dominant themes that wove through participants' stories. Similar to relational connections, learning and personal growth were anchors that helped women persist in business and created resilience to the inevitable yet unexpected challenges embedded in their journeys. All women discussed entrepreneurship as one of their greatest learning experiences, and greatest challenges. Clara, for example, explained that she learned to "be comfortable with being uncomfortable," to set lots of boundaries, and how to "get along with who you really are." Whether learning integrity, vulnerability, to be more in touch with emotions, self-care, autonomy, to stand in front of crowds, or to embrace imperfection and uncertainty, each woman faced a unique set of challenges and lessons when growing her business. The extent to which she

framed these challenges as positive or negative was a strong indicator of her ability to learn from her experiences. Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive developmental theory also provided a helpful model for understanding the power of perception and meaning-making and for recognizing each woman's shift toward greater autonomy. As the women felt more external and internal support, actions of forward momentum were cited in the interviews. Narratives of confidence and doubt embedded in their experiences provided a multilayered lens through which to observe their personal and professional journeys (Gilligan et al., 2003; Kegan, 1994).

Purpose of the Mompreneur Immunity Model

The purpose of the mompreneur model is to provide educators, coaches, and counselors who directly work with the mompreneur population a guide to frame how they may support and educate women about creating resilience and sustainability in their personal and professional lives. By cultivation of positive support and meaning-making structures, the model ultimately guides mompreneurs toward positive action and transformation. Positive action may include taking steps in their business or personal lives that help them move forward in a positive way; examples include: creating a budget, joining a support group, hiring a coach, or finding creative childcare solutions. Positive transformation may include changes to identity, confidence, self-efficacy, or personal agency, empowering a mompreneur to change in a positive way and wield more personal power as a result; examples include exhibiting greater patience and love in interpersonal relationships, less fear when conducting business-related activities such as sales or public speaking, and greater flexibility when facing the ebbs and flows of life and work.

In addition to guiding women toward positive action and transformation in the parenting and entrepreneurial realms, practitioners using the mompreneur immunity model may also help

mother entrepreneurs learn to sustainably build immunity against unforeseen challenges that could derail them on personal, professional, or emotional fronts.

Conclusion

Chapter six discussed the study's two major findings, (a) personal growth through learning and (b) relational influences. It illustrated the intersection between theoretical frameworks and these two findings and connected the overarching themes that influenced the mompreneurs' development as entrepreneurial learners. This chapter also offered discussion of the participants' experiences using a lens integrating Kegan's (1982, 1984) constructive developmental theory, Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977), and relational cultural theory (Jordan, 2017; Miller, 1976) and illustrated validation of these theories in a population not yet studied extensively. This chapter also discussed the mompreneur immunity model as a tool to frame the study's findings and aid counselors and educators guiding mompreneurs toward greater positive action and transformation. The extent to which each woman felt supported by others in her life and was able to frame her experience through a lens of personal growth and learning was significantly linked to her own confidence and success in business. Persistence in the face of life challenges, raising a family, and growing a business was underscored by a willingness to view these experiences as learning opportunities, with the help of family, peers, and loved ones.

The mompreneur immunity model may be a helpful frame for educators, counselors, and coaches who work with mompreneurs in one-on-one sessions and in group educational settings. This may provide a helpful guide to identifying and addressing gaps and shortcomings in meaning-making systems or social support structures that hold a woman back from positive action and transformation personally and professionally. The next and final chapter, chapter

seven, will discuss in detail the implications these findings as well as use of the mompreneur

immunity model in practice and educational settings.

Chapter Seven: Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

In this study, I explored the entrepreneurial journeys of 12 mother entrepreneurs using a phenomenological methodology and traditional coding for analysis, as well as aspects of the voice-centered relational method (Gilligan, 2015; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003) to more deeply explore meaning-making throughout the participants' rich narratives. This study's theoretical frameworks included Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive developmental theory, Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, and relational cultural theory (Jordan, 2017; Miller, 1976), which helped examine the participants' learning processes throughout their entrepreneurial journeys. This research compared and contrasted its findings to previous research on women's career development generally, and mother entrepreneurs specifically. Particularly, this research underscored the importance of understanding the influence of meaning-making and relational connections on the role of self-concept in career-life. In this final chapter, I discuss the study's strengths and limitations, present educational implications, make recommendations for policy and future research, and provide some final reflections on the research.

Strengths of the Study

This study contrasts with previous research that highlights the "average" woman entrepreneur, who is generally White and middle class, has a postsecondary education, is married with children, and has a supportive spouse with a well-paying occupation (Belcourt, 1990; Greene et al., 2003). Although there were only 12 women in this study, there was a good deal of diversity among this small sample. First, this study's participants were diverse ethnically; participants included two African-American women, one Filipino woman, one Hispanic woman, and eight white women. Three of the women were immigrants to the United States. This study also included four single or divorced mothers and eight married mothers, illustrating a more

diverse range of relational experiences. Household income was also diverse, with household

incomes ranging from $20,000 to $200,000 annually. The diversity in income added an

interesting dimension to the research, as it presented a range of cases, from those who started a

business out of interest to those who started a business out of economic necessity. Participants in

this study often started a business to generate income while also having the flexibility to properly

care for their children or after being pushed out of the traditional workplace due to family

obligations. Participants' ages ranged from 37 to 52, which provided generational diversity as

well as diversity in the ages of their children. The number of years that women had been in

business for themselves ranged from one to 13 years.

Recent research has suggested that mompreneurs are a distinct group of mother

entrepreneurs who start businesses with interests based primarily in the parenting and childcare

industries, thereby putting children and moms at the center of their products (Richomme-Huet,

Vial, & D'Andria, 2013). This study, however, found that mompreneurs as a population can be

found in a variety of businesses related to diverse sectors and products. While their businesses all

provided flexibility that helped them be more present for their children, only three of the

businesses specifically focused on mom-themed products or exclusively served mothers and

children. The remaining businesses spanned corporate consulting, food prep services,

chiropractic care, public relations, and health coaching. This study also moved beyond the

limiting mompreneur descriptions found in popular media (Forger, 2010; *Mompreneur*

Magazine, 2018) to offer a deeper understanding of the complex process of how self-employed

women with children are influenced developmentally by meaning-making processes and

relational connections.

Unlike broader research focused on all entrepreneurs, including both males and females and both parents and nonparents, this research specifically highlighted the mothering role as a unique dimension to the developmental processes of mompreneurs. Women's entrepreneurship research has been criticized for failing to take into account the gendered nature of work when comparing male and female entrepreneurs (Ahl, 2006; Bird & Brush, 2002; Hughes et al., 2012). While this study does not compare and contrast the entrepreneurial endeavors of women and men, by focusing specifically on mother entrepreneurs this study sheds light on the developmental experiences of those who are uniquely combining work-life roles interwoven with their gender.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was its small sample size of 12 participants, which limits its transferability. Despite the diversity that was achieved in this small sample, the racial, class, sexual orientation, disability, and gender identities of the participants were not highly diverse. For example. all participants except one bisexual woman identified as heterosexual. Examining lesbian or same sex couples could provide richer data to see how gender roles and social identities might impact mompreneurs' relational support and meaning-making experiences.

The purpose of a qualitative study is to deeply understand a phenomenon, which limits generalizability of the findings (Morrow, 2005). However, this small study can still provide a starting point and provide insight into exploring the experiences of mother entrepreneurs. There was also little triangulation since the findings are from interviews with the mompreneurs themselves. This provided only one source of data, as there were no focus groups, no observations and no external interviews, such as with clients, children, or spouses. Data analysis

was done using only one approach through traditional thematic analysis, and there was a lack of some validation strategies such as member checks.

Another potential limitation of this study included a lack of diversity in the women's businesses. While the women's professional backgrounds included a wide range of fields, the study lacked product-focused businesses and was heavily based in the services sector. This study also included mostly small, self-funded businesses and did not include businesses that were backed by venture capital. Another potential limitation was that the sample did not include father entrepreneurs for comparison, which would have allowed for further examination of how much having children impacts a person developmentally, as well as the degree to which social support plays a role. Previous research suggests that male entrepreneurs do not experience as much work-family conflict as female entrepreneurs (Kirkwood, 2009; Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008).

Another area of limitation of this study is that it focuses exclusively on mother entrepreneurs living and working in the United States, a country with one of the worst parental benefit systems of any developed nation, along with cultural and social factors that do not value or prioritize working mothers (Pew Research Center, 2016). The United States is the only country among 41 developed nations that does not mandate any paid leave for new parents. This study does not include a critical, global cross-comparison that could shed light on to what extent a mother chooses entrepreneurship because she feels constrained by the current workplace landscape and therefore seeks an alternative that creates a healthy work-life structure for her family. Other countries may offer contrasts in terms of social and cultural values associated with entrepreneurship and with mothering. Studying mompreneurs in developing countries with extreme poverty may be a very important area of future research. For example, I have direct experience with nonprofit work on the ground in India and Nepal, where I interviewed mother

entrepreneurs whose challenges were vastly different from the women I interviewed for this study. Entrepreneurship for the extremely poor was much more a means of survival and feeding children than it was for the women I interviewed in this country.

In addition to these limitations, it may be a drawback that I am a member of this group, as a mother entrepreneur myself. This may also be a strength, as it can help me build trust and understanding with my participants, but it can also create difficulty in detaching emotionally from my data and cloud my ability to hear things different from my own assumptions and experiences. As a member of the population I am studying, my personal experiences may have caused bias in the relationship with the mompreneur participants.

Implications for Education and Practice

When it comes to supporting the unique needs around the mother entrepreneur as a learner with entrepreneurship educational programs, mentoring or coaching services, nonprofit entrepreneurship services centers, or funding initiatives for startups, considerations should include the needs of the mother as an individual, and her family as a whole. Leveraging advances in technology, such as educational technology platforms, can provide remote access to online support groups, educational videos, video conferencing, online classes, crowdsourced funding campaigns, and a host of other resources that can empower mothers who stay home with children while also staying connected to professional opportunities.

According to a study conducted by Ettle and Welter (2010), entrepreneurial learning differs greatly by gender, and the learning barriers that women face in life and work can prevent them from fully realizing their entrepreneurial potential. Their study demonstrated gaps in business-related knowledge for women entrepreneurs compared to their male counterparts, which appeared to be the result of low self-confidence combined with a lack of support. Brush,

de Bruin, and Welter (2009) suggested that women entrepreneurs may be limited in their

learning capacity because they are often forced to abandon their female behavior in favor of male

behavior in male dominated business sectors in order to successfully grow their businesses. Cope

(2005) argued that women entrepreneurs, particularly those caring for children, often lack the

positive and supportive environments needed for the higher learning outcomes required to build

a sustainable business over the long term. Policy makers and educational institutions may want

to consider these factors when guiding, teaching and supporting mother entrepreneurs. Rather

than simply providing them with business-related knowledge and hard skills, they may also want

to consider gender-specific support that extends beyond these limited areas into soft skills such

as confidence building, how to create social support, resources for childcare, and creative

lifestyle design that supports their ventures. When designing the curriculum for women

entrepreneurs to learn, it is important to consider how to first help them cope with the many

constraints they face in various environments, before they are capable of actually absorbing the

knowledge and applying it to their businesses.

When it comes to career development practice, the current research offers insights for

career coaches, counselors, and educators working with mother entrepreneurs. Figure 1 in

chapter six offers a mompreneur immunity model developed for this study, which may

complement existing career development models in assessing the process of supporting self-

employed mothers or mothers considering entrepreneurship as a future career path. Further, this

research illustrates how changes in one area of a relational system impact other meaning-making

process areas as well as positive action and transformation. This study highlights the centrality of

the meaning-making and relational systems throughout the career-life development of

mompreneurs. Since this is a new and emerging area of study, it may help educators and

counselors address the emerging mompreneur phenomenon among their clients and better

understand the influence of meaning-making and relational connections when merging

mothering and entrepreneurial roles.

Another area for counselors and educators to consider is the sensitivity that arose in

participant interviews when it came to the use of the term "mompreneur." While some

participants identified with the term "mompreneurs" and placed themselves among a subset of

entrepreneurs within the business community that merged two synergistic roles, some

participants were offended by the term, as they felt it was demeaning to their role as business

women. New definitions of the term "mompreneur" have been suggested over the past several

years (e.g., Duberly & Carrigan, 2011; Richomme-Huet, Vial, & D'Andria, 2013), with some

pointing to tension around the term (Korgaard, 2007). A suggestion for practitioners is to be

aware of the vast range of definitions of the term, some of which can be quite limiting or

stereotypical, and to consider using descriptors such as "mother entrepreneur" or

"entrepreneurial woman with children" to more broadly highlight the two main roles present

therein.

With regard to policy recommendations, it is important to first consider that national

statistics and studies used to inform policy, budgetary, and legislative decisions do not capture

the many facets of women entrepreneurship, and mostly overlook the mothering dimension

within this population. Significantly more work needs to be done, using findings from

quantitative and qualitative studies to better inform policies that impact, support, and influence

the population of mother entrepreneurs.

Directions for Future Research

By grounding the new concept of mompreneurship developmentally, theoretically, and empirically, this study contributes to the emerging research on understanding women's self-perception, meaning-making processes, and relational support as mother entrepreneurs. Further research is needed to better understand mother entrepreneurs developmentally on a multidimensional global scale, and to examine how women use their roles as both mothers and entrepreneurs to assert their place in a range of societies and economies. Future research is also needed on how entrepreneurship can play a role in acquiring economic freedom and developing work-life balance, as well as its impact on children. A dominant theme from the participants was the hope that the mother entrepreneur was acting as a role model for her children, and in some cases involving the children in the business. The mothers in this study expressed a desire to model independence and perseverance outside of the family system. Particularly, they wanted to show that it is possible to combine both mothering and a career without abandoning one's children, one's values, or oneself. Since research has highlighted issues with work-family conflict (Kirkwood, 2009), future research could also more specifically examine the impact of entrepreneurship on children by focusing on the perspectives of children with a self-employed mother.

Since the mother entrepreneur is part of a uniquely interconnected system involving her children, partner, childcare providers, business coaches and mentors, and clients, deconstructing and academically framing this complex system in theoretical models may be helpful in future research to improve understanding for supporting this population.

Family businesses could also be examined in future research, particularly in the cases of immigrants and families in developing countries, in which a full family effort may be needed to

thrive (Valdez, 2016). It would be helpful to have further research that explicitly examines the

dimensions of culture and ethnicity for entrepreneurs in many societies across global economies.

Furthermore, as societal norms and research the meaning of fathering continue to evolve

(Abraham et al., 2014) and fathers take on a more active parenting role (Finley & Schwartz,

2016), future research could examine how evolving gender roles could prompt fathers to launch

more home-based businesses and make meaning of their career development in ways

traditionally attributed to women.

Lastly, future research around the role of technology as a catalyst to reach mother

entrepreneurs on a large scale may have a range of beneficial applications for the field. A

majority of the women in this study talked about how they used online technology platforms

such as social media, online support groups, video chats, education or training, and mentorship

or counseling through business coaches. These platforms were pivotal for many of the mothers

interviewed because they often have to stay home to care for their children or lack childcare, and

technology provides access from the comfort of home. Getting a babysitter to attend an

entrepreneurship class or training, spending the time to drive to a business coach or therapist, and

spending the time to attend multiple in-person networking events or support groups to seek out

likeminded peers is simply not possible for many mother entrepreneurs.

Final Reflections

Looking back on this project, I would like to pause for a moment and reflect on the

journey that I have undertaken. As I shared in my introduction, my own personal mother

entrepreneur journey was part of the rationale for this research. It has been a "roller-coaster"

ride, as many participants noted about their own mother entrepreneur journeys. I navigated an

unhealthy career as a technology executive as I raised a baby, and experienced gender oppression

in the workplace as well as in my own marriage. I ultimately chose to leave my marriage and start a new business as I raised my daughter on my own and departed from the traditional workplace. There have been countless unexpected life transitions and life lessons. Through it all, social support, confidence, and meaning-making have played profound roles. While I had a strong desire to understand how other mother entrepreneurs navigated their journey, and ultimately how they could be better supported, I must admit that I was most surprised by what I learned about myself throughout this dissertation process. This quote by Edith Wharton (1902) comes to mind: "There are two ways of spreading the light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it" (p. 631). As I listened to and transcribed each participant's story, I thought of my research like a candle that illuminated their own unique journey, and as I wrote this dissertation, I thought of the readers for whom this work may rekindle the flame of possibility for their own entrepreneurial journeys and dreams and what could lie ahead for them. In many ways, this entire doctoral process served as a clear mirror into my blind spots, which had previously been unexamined. This was a learning process that strengthened my awareness of the powerful influence my perception and relationships have on how I make meaning of and move through this world. Reflective journaling throughout different phases of the research learning process unveiled surprises and unexpected discoveries that were quite different from own experience, even though there were many areas in the stories with which I connected. For example, I did not expect to discover how vital the role of a mompreneur's meaning-making processes were to her ability to positively learn and transform. The stories a mompreneur chose to tell herself about her experiences had profound effects on how she viewed herself and sought out support. The most valuable unexpected lesson was how I unconsciously view my own child, my seven-year-old daughter, as a prominent source of my inner strength. Modeling to her a genuinely joyful,

fulfilled, and empowered woman lights a fire in my being that fuels me to face my fears every single day, despite life's unexpected twists and turns.

Women have been raising children and setting up businesses for thousands of years—this does not constitute a new phenomenon. However, at this time in history, it can be a strong declaration for a woman to proclaim herself as a 'mompreneur' in terms of her identity and her role in society. This is also a much overlooked group in society and in empirical research, and many opportunities for support and education exist. This study suggests that educators, coaches, and counselors who directly work with this population may start with the mompreneur immunity model as women learn to create resilience and sustainability in their personal and professional lives.

I believe this research sheds light on an overlooked and under-researched phenomenon and gives voice to mother entrepreneurs whose stories highlight how their meaning-making and relational processes influenced their self-concept and business as a whole. After conducting this study, I would argue that when a mother entrepreneur is empowered with support and positive meaning-making processes, she potentially has a greater capacity to empower her children, her community, and her economy at large. This ripple effect is why I believe future research is needed to increase understanding of and support for this overlooked population.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

MOMPRENEUR
Volunteers Needed for Research Study!

Project Description:

This is an IRB approved study conducted under the supervision of a Lesley- MIT committee focused on understanding your perceptions as a mother who has launched a business while raising dependent children

To participate:

- You are a woman between the ages of 25 and 50
- You have been a business owner for the past 1 -7 years
- You are a caregiver to at least 1 dependent child
- You are available for a 90 minute in person or skype interview*

All identifying information will remain anonymous & all participants will receive a full copy of the study once published

Please contact PhD researcher felicianewhouse@gmail.com to participate

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Participant Informed Consent Form

The lived experiences of women growing businesses while raising children
Dear Participant,
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study exploring women's experiences of starting businesses while raising children. This Consent Form details the purpose of the study, a description of the involvement, your rights as a participant and contact information.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY
The specific purpose of this research study is to understand how you experienced your entrepreneurial journey while your raise your children. Specifically, this study will focus on how social support and a developing sense of self affected how you made sense of your experience and what motivated you as an entrepreneur.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?
You will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire collecting general information on your personal and educational background. Your participation will include one approximately 90-minute interview, at a mutually agreed upon time and place. The interview will be audiorecorded and later transcribed.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You can stop participating at any time with no negative impacts at all whatsoever.

RISKS
The risk to participants is minimal for those contributing to this study. However, there is a possibility that the interview may bring up difficult experiences or strong feelings. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the interview, if you do not wish to do so. Please note that you do not have to give me any reason for not responding to any question or for refusing to participate in the interview.

BENEFITS
There is no promise that you will receive any benefit from taking part in this study, but your contributions may be useful in advancing knowledge on this topic to assist other mother entrepreneurs who have experienced similar journeys.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The information that is collected for this research project will be de-identified and kept private. All information about you will be kept confidential and you will be assigned a pseudonym, with any identifying information removed or concealed. Your name and identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the research. All efforts will be made to uphold confidentiality of research participants. Though direct quotes from you may be used in the study, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous. Demographic data collected will also be assigned pseudonyms. Audiotapes and questionnaires will be secured

in a locked cabinet. Research data will reside on a non-networked computer, only accessible by a security password. All data will be destroyed after 5 years.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT
Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods I am using. Please contact me at the email address or telephone number listed below.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS
You may wish to discuss this with others before you agree to take part in this study. If you have any questions about the research now or during the study contact:

Researcher:
Felicia Newhouse
newhouse@lesley.edu
978-857-0003

Faculty Supervisor:
Sue Motulsky, Ed.D
Associate Professor
Counseling and Psychology
Lesley University
smotulsk@lesley.edu
617-349-8404

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at Lesley University, 29 Everett Street, Cambridge Massachusetts (irb@lesley.edu).
By signing this consent form, I certify that I

_____
(Print Full Name Here)
agree to the terms of this agreement.

_____
(Signature) (Date)

Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic and Educational Background Questionnaire

The lived experiences of women growing businesses while raising children

This form is a questionnaire intended to collect general demographic and educational background information about you and your entrepreneurial journey. The information collected in this form will be used to supplement the questions during our time together in the individual interview. All of your information will be kept private and your identity will stay anonymous in this study.

Name:_____

Year of Birth:_____

In what city do you currently live?_____

Current business name, type and industry: _____

Previous Career: _____

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

What is your race? Check one or more of the following groups in which you consider yourself to

be a member:

_____Black or African American

_____Asian

_____American Indian or Alaska Native

_____Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

_____White

_____ Hispanic

_____Other (please specify):_____

MARITAL STATUS

_____Single

_____Married

_____Widowed

_____Separated

_____Divorced

_____Remarried

_____Partnered

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Do you consider yourself to be:

_____Heterosexual

_____Homosexual

_____Bisexual

_____Other (please specify): _____

Do you consider yourself to be transgender?

_____Yes

_____No

EDUCATION

_____High school

_____Some college

_____College graduate

_____Master's degree

_____Doctoral or professional degree

_____Other (please specify) _____

If applicable, please specify educational area of study: _____

CHILDREN

Number of Children: _____

Children's ages: _____

Any important info about your children you'd like to share:

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EXPERIENCE

Name, industry and description of business:

_____ _____

Number of years since starting your venture:_____

Reasons for starting (please check all that apply):

_____Finances

_____Passion, interest

_____Schedule Flexibility

_____ Job loss

_____Other (Please specify)_____

FINANCES:

Business is your primary source of income: Y/N

Household income range:

_____Less than $25,000.
_____$25,000 to $34,999.
_____$35,000 to $49,999.
_____$50,000 to $74,999.
_____$75,000 to $99,999.
_____$100,000 to $149,999.
_____$150,000 to $199,999.
_____$200,000 or more.

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Welcome to our study on Mompreneurship!

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview and sharing your experiences. The specific purpose of this research study is to understand how you experienced your entrepreneurial journey while your raise your children. Specifically, this study will focus on how social support and a developing sense of self affected how you made sense of your experience and what motivated you as an entrepreneur.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY
I would like to briefly review the most relevant conditions of confidentiality and anonymity that are outlined in the consent form.
- The discussion will be audiotaped and transcribed.
- Your answers and the discussion will be kept completely confidential and a pseudonym will be used so your name and identity will not be used or seen by anyone else.
- Other identifying information that is revealed by you such as the names of friends, relatives, spouses, employers, locations, etc. will also be kept confidential. The names of people will be assigned pseudonyms and a descriptor will be used to identify their relationship to you (i.e., spouse); the names of employers will be removed and a descriptor will be used for the type of industry it represents (i.e., financial services).
- Your participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time without any reprisal or consequence.
- There are no known risk and/or discomforts associated with this study. I will be asking you to reflect upon your experiences.
- You may decline to answer any specific question(s) for any reason.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?
You will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire collecting general information on your personal and educational background. Your participation will include one approximately 90-minute interview, at a mutually agreed upon time and place. The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES:

- Can you tell me the story of your transition into entrepreneurship up to where you are today, from beginning to end?
- Can you share with me a high point (or feeling of satisfaction or accomplishment) in this transition and a low point or time of difficulty or challenge?
- In what ways do you feel supported as a mother entrepreneur? In what ways do you feel unsupported?
- Tell me about your sense of self, how you view and understand yourself as a mother entrepreneur.

- Looking back from where you are now and knowing what you know now - what would you do differently if you were to start a business again?
- What advice would you have for other women going through this transition?

CLOSING STATEMENT

As a reminder, the audiotape will be transcribed, you will be assigned a false name for the purpose of the transcript and data analysis so that you will remain anonymous, and then they will later be destroyed. Thank you for your contribution to this study, but more importantly for sharing a part of your journey with me. This was a great discussion and your thoughtful responses are invaluable to me and the other women this study will hopefully impact in the years to come.