

REDEFINING ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS
AND DIALECTICS OF WOMEN'S SOLE-PROPRIETORSHIP, BUSINESS-
OWNERSHIP AND DIRECT SALES OWNERSHIP

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the discursive constructions of women entrepreneurs related to their roles as sole-proprietors, business-owners and direct sales business-owners as well as the communicative contradictions experienced by these women in the leading and organizing of different business enterprises. Relying on social dialectics theory to unpack the tensions associated with entrepreneurial practice, this study illuminates definitions, descriptions and struggles related to enacting gender and various forms of entrepreneurship. By examining the discursive tensions experienced via the direct accounts of sole-proprietors, business-owners, and direct sales business-owners, this research contributes to a larger understanding of gender, communication and entrepreneurship. Findings from this study demonstrate that women define entrepreneurship in different ways depending on a host of factors including their personal work history, differential treatment faced in previous occupations, the type of entrepreneurship practiced, the type of industry or business, and family status. Results also demonstrate that women who enact different forms of entrepreneurship experience distinct relational tensions and enact varying management techniques as they seek to balance these tensions.

DEDICATION

For my parents, Patricia Elaine Jacocks & Kenneth Michael Jacocks. “Mrs. J’s House” and “Specialty Graphics” funded my undergraduate tuition and allowed me to discover and accomplish my professional aspirations. Thank you for modeling true grit and a “pioneering spirit” over the years. You two are the ultimate entrepreneurs and the ultimate parents.

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NOMENCLATURE

BO	Business-owner with >2 employees
SP	Sole-proprietor with <2 employees
DSO	Direct sales business-owner

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“I think gender roles are something you can either choose to be controlled by or you don’t, and even though I’m cognizant enough to be aware of them, I can’t stop myself from being controlled by them. I might be a well-educated 45 year old woman and yet I still feel those pressures.”
--Sole-Proprietor, Attorney, Wife & Mother

Several recent developments have reignited societal discourse addressing the strides women have made in the US corporate sector. With the addition of highly visible leaders such as Marissa Mayer (CEO of Yahoo) and Sheryl Sandberg (COO of Facebook) to prominent positions in Fortune 100 companies, new directions in social, business and political conversations have surfaced surrounding the issues of working women, dual-income families, and women’s progress in the workplace. One such direction addressed by Sheryl Sandberg in her book “Lean In,” has sparked widespread discussion about the lack of women actively engaged in leadership activity. In her work, Sandberg (2013) urges modern women and young girls to “lean in” to leadership responsibilities as “career progression often depends upon taking risks and advocating for oneself – traits that girls are discouraged from exhibiting” (p. 15). In fact, there is an entire business sector where modern women of all ages are “leaning in” and taking control of their personal and professional lives in very progressive measures. This is the woman-owned business sector.

The women-owned business community is the fastest growing segment of the US labor force despite a highly volatile economy. According to the Center for Women’s Business Research, nearly 8 million of all U.S. businesses are currently majority women-

owned which translates into an economic impact of nearly \$3 trillion annually and the creation and maintenance of over 23 million jobs, which equals roughly 16% of all US jobs (CWBR, 2011). In this regard, “If US based women-owned businesses were their own country, they would have the 5th largest GDP in the world, trailing closely behind Germany, and ahead of countries including France, United Kingdom and Italy” (CWBR, *The Economic Impact of Women-Owned Businesses in the United States*, p. 1, 2011). And although the current economic climate in the US could hinder this progress, women business-owners still appear optimistic about future economic trends and seem to be maintaining or improving their business ventures.

For instance, according to a survey conducted in October 2010 (CWBR, *Key4Women Confidence Index*, 2011), 63.5% of women business owners reported their net earnings had either increased or remained “about the same” as compared to 2009 data (CWBR, *Key4Women Confidence Index*, p.6, 2011), only 5% of female business-owners reported they were electing to decrease the number of workers employed by their businesses, and nearly 10% more business-owners reported their average selling price had increased “in the third quarter of 2010 as compared to the corresponding quarter in 2009” (CWBR, *Key4Women Confidence Index*, p. 4, p. 11). Although many women business owners are somewhat skeptical of future US economic downtrends, they are committed to staying “afloat” despite the odds, as demonstrated by the percentage of women business owners who attested to staying up all night to “meet a project or proposal deadline” (nearly 70%), (CWBR, *Key4Women Confidence Index*, p. 4, 2011).

This dissertation project seeks to illuminate how different entrepreneurial processes influence how women entrepreneurs communicate, relate and organize. Through my dissertation research, I hope to investigate the intersection between different types of entrepreneurial processes and activities for working women. The focus of this study is women business-owners and their reality of “being” and “doing” gender, entrepreneurship, and business-ownership (Ahl, 2006; Bruni & Gherardi, 2001; Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004 & 2005; Calas, Smirich, & Bourne, 2009; Gill & Ganesh, 2007).

Relatively few studies that explore the connection between women, communication and the workplace examine different processes of entrepreneurship. Those studies that do explore women’s entrepreneurship tend to assume a case-scenario format and/or examine women business-owners in stereotypical design or beauty industries (Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Edley, 2000; Grimlin, 1996). Few studies examine the discursive nuances relative to different entrepreneurial processes. This study aims to bridge these particular gaps by exploring the stories of women entrepreneurs from a wide range of industries, trades and demographics where entrepreneurship is discussed and enacted in very real and particular ways. This study provides a space for ideas such as gender, communication, and entrepreneurship to be teased out amongst three different types of entrepreneurial activity: (1) sole-proprietorship, (2) business-ownership, and (3) direct sales ownership. A need for research that examines the everyday discourses that constitute the reality or sense of “lived actuality” experienced by women entrepreneurs exists. My dissertation project

explores the activities of women entrepreneurs, the communication intricacies associated with those activities, and the contradictions that emerge from the processes and activities of sole-proprietorship, business-ownership and direct sales business-ownership.

By unpacking the stories, accounts, and experiences of these women entrepreneurs, we can begin to understand how they view themselves, their roles, and the communicative tensions that sustain these roles as well as how entrepreneurial discourses at both the micro- and macro- levels can shift from context to context (Gill, 2007). Moreover, relationships (both personal and professional) serve as the hub of organizational progress and maintenance for many women entrepreneurs. This project seeks to understand and explain the tensions women entrepreneurs face as they develop and juggle relationships and conversations with clients, vendors, contractors and sub-contractors, employees, family and personal connections. Practical implications from a study such as this can contribute to a larger societal understanding of the contemporary organizational woman and pragmatic suggestions for women entrepreneurs in particular.

Rationale and Guiding Research Questions

This dissertation topic stems from a previous study I conducted analyzing the accounts of employees of a small woman-owned business (Jacocks, 2011). As this study unfolded, I was struck that there was no business plan in place to direct the business enterprise. There was no playbook for interacting and communicating about what constituted effective or “good” leadership in this study. Rather, my analysis indicated that employees and business-owners socially constructed different notions of leadership given the emergent situation they were facing as stakeholders. Leadership in this sense

was socially constructed and enacted through improvisational mechanisms and required women to manage emerging tensions and contradictions of organizing.

The results from this initial study, in part, drew my attention to the contradictions and challenges women entrepreneurs experience through the relational process of business-ownership. As a result, I became interested in a dialectical perspective toward communication (Baxter, 1990; Montgomery & Baxter, 1996) as this approach “emphasizes the messiness of interaction in interpersonal relationships” (Considine & Miller, 2010, p. 167). A fundamental construct of the dialectical approach is the idea that contradictions drive our communicative relationships as they exist because of each other and in tension with one another (rather than as polar opposites), such as seeking autonomy and connection in a personal relationship or choosing to disclose or conceal information. These contradictions are not necessarily resolved but are managed through the push/pull momentum of interaction and the evolution of relational development. Tensions surface in the creation and sustainment of business enterprises where no clear roadmap exists for female business-owners as they form and maintain complex webs of personal and professional relationships. These tensions are especially poignant throughout the formation, growth and maintenance of women-owned businesses as female entrepreneurs rely on vast networks of relationships and strive to cope with relational tensions associated with slices of these networks while simultaneously attending to the pushes and pulls associated with their personal obligations. I began to think about the kinds of tensions women entrepreneur’s experience given my initial study.

The centrality of tensions and contradictions in the work of women business entrepreneurs was confirmed in a pilot study that I conducted prior to the main data collection in my dissertation. I had intended initially to look at the connection between leadership and entrepreneurship in my dissertation. However, one of my dissertation committee members challenged that thinking, suggesting that I explore the theoretical connection between leadership and entrepreneurship. To test out this theoretical connection, I conducted a pilot study to examine how female entrepreneurs talked about performing entrepreneurs and leadership activities (see Chapter 3 for a description of this pilot study). This pilot study was also conducted to test out interview questions related to my dissertation project and gain perspective as to how to structure an interview protocol with entrepreneurs including issues of sampling, the type of questions to ask, and how to ask follow-up questions to participants. The structure of this pilot study took the form of a focus group that included four women entrepreneurs as participants.

Participants in this pilot study did in fact acknowledge that they saw a connection between leadership and entrepreneurship. But what I found more interesting in my analysis was the important notion that certain tensions were associated with their roles as business-owners and entrepreneurs. All of the participants referenced feeling torn between managing employees and clients in particular ways and doing what was “right for the business,” demonstrating a people – production tension (as well as internal – external pushes and pulls). They also described feeling “pushed” and “pulled” between work and their personal obligations. This was a prominent theme as women

entrepreneurs are the center of their work and home universe. A second theme surfaced as women described, “not being taken seriously.” Participants spoke a great deal about “not being taken seriously” as women entrepreneurs by colleagues and business constituents, family members and personal connections and by other female business-owners.

Another idea that emerged in this pilot study was the idea that there were different types of entrepreneurial processes. At the conclusion of the pilot study after participants had exited the research location, one participant remained to explain her concerns related to “different kinds” of entrepreneurship. Speaking about another participant who enacted entrepreneurship through direct sales, she contended that owning a business franchise as a direct-sales representative was very different than enacting entrepreneurship “outright.” This conversation immediately drew my attention to issues and tensions associated with enacting different processes of women’s entrepreneurship and how perceptions and tensions within differing genres of entrepreneurial activity affected the women-owned business sector at large.

My pilot study reoriented my dissertation from being about leadership and entrepreneurship to focusing on the kinds of tensions experienced through different forms of entrepreneurial processes. Specifically, my dissertation is aimed at generating a greater understanding of how women entrepreneurs discursively construct their roles as entrepreneurs and the communicative and relational tensions that emerge from these discursive constructions, within different types of entrepreneurial activity: (1) sole-proprietorship, (2) business-ownership, and (3) direct-sales business-ownership. I am

interested in exploring how women entrepreneurs communicatively manage the dialectical tensions they experience as they organize and relate within their business enterprises. Three research questions guide this project:

RQ1: How do women entrepreneurs discursively construct their roles as business owners at various entrepreneurial levels?

RQ2: What do women entrepreneurs identify as tensions in the leading and organizing of business enterprises at various entrepreneurial levels?

RQ3: How do women entrepreneurs communicatively manage these tensions?

Although scholarship has been generated synthesizing women's entrepreneurship and related struggles (Gill & Ganesh, 2007) as well as the social construction of leadership in women-owned businesses (Jacocks, 2011), research that examines how the process of entrepreneurship emerges from the discursive constructions, dialectics and management strategies incorporated by women engaged in different forms of business-ownership is needed. This study seeks to address these topics by analyzing accounts of how entrepreneurs themselves construct and communicatively manage the tensions associated with the process of entrepreneurship in different contexts.

I define entrepreneurship as a process of communication where the activities of creating, relating and organizing further business organizations. This definition is shaped by the debate concerning "Who is an Entrepreneur" where Gartner (1988) and Carland, et al. (1984; 1988), engage in dialogue about *who* and *what* constitutes entrepreneurship. Although the activities and actors involved in entrepreneurship are bound, there is a current research trend towards examining the process of

entrepreneurship rather than the traits entrepreneurs possess. The definition of entrepreneurship offered by this dissertation is reflective of this position and this literature (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004; Gill, 2014; Gill & Larson, 2014).

The aim of this dissertation is to understand how the communicative process of entrepreneurship is enacted within situated, gendered contexts such as: women's sole-proprietorship, business-ownership and direct sales business-ownership. The trait-based literature defines entrepreneurship based on the static qualities an entrepreneur possesses such as being a "rational decision maker" (Carland, Hoy, Boulton, & Carland, 1984; Carland, Hoy, & Carland, 1988, p. 33). This approach has been challenged by Gartner who argues that studying entrepreneurial traits is a fruitless endeavor (1988). Gartner contends that research questions examining entrepreneurship need to be broadened to synthesize the processes and activities of entrepreneurship (Gartner, 1988). This dissertation study follows the recommendations of Gartner and current entrepreneurial scholarship and seeks to gain an understanding of the processes of sole-proprietorship, business-ownership, and direct sales business-ownership (communicative processes that add to the overall definition of entrepreneurship), rather than sole-proprietors, business-owners and direct sales business-owners (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004; Gartner, 1988; Gill, 2014; Gill & Larson, 2014).

According to Gartner, studying entrepreneurs (and sole-proprietors, business-owners, etc.) is similar to studying baseball players. We can study the traits the best baseball players possess, but the fact is, the best baseball players -- play baseball. Studying the game (or the process) is equally important as studying the player (Gartner,

1988). This metaphor is a useful device for understanding current definitions, descriptions and examinations of entrepreneurs, especially women entrepreneurs who enact the process of entrepreneurship in specific ways. This study seeks to explore the different rules in place that guide how women enact the “game” or the process of entrepreneurship (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004; Gartner, 1988, p. 22; Gill, 2014; Gill & Larson, 2014).

This study examines three different processes of entrepreneurship through descriptions and enactments of sole-proprietorship, business-ownership, and direct sales business-ownership. Although these categories may seem static, they are genres that emerged from exploratory research conducted as a part of this dissertation where women entrepreneurs described the communicative processes of sole-proprietorship, business-ownership and direct sales business-ownership differently. These three categories represent different entrepreneurial “games,” activities or processes (Gartner, 1988, p. 22). This study draws on work by Gartner (1988), Gill, et al. (2014; 2014) and Carland, et al. (1984; 1988) by exploring the different communicative processes of entrepreneurship that women engage given the resources available to them. This dissertation seeks to uncover the specific challenges associated with the process of entrepreneurship by examining the unique kinds of work activities (such as creating, relating and organizing) that women entrepreneurs engage (Gartner, 1988; Kuhn, Golden, Jorgenson, Buzzanell, Berkelaar, Kisselburgh, Kleinman, & Cruz, 2008).

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter II reviews the literature on working women and the modern female entrepreneur from a communication perspective. Additional areas of research include studies that explore the narrative of the working woman, the relationship between sex, gender and entrepreneurs and scholarship that examines the psychological traits and business characteristics of female entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurial research that positions gender and entrepreneurship as enactment will also be covered. Finally, dialectics as a theoretical framework in general and social dialectics as it is frequently used to explore organizational communication topics is reviewed.

Chapter III provides an overview of the methodology in this study. I begin by describing the pilot study. I then provide information related to the major phase of data collection using an interview method including sampling procedures, participant specifics and interview and transcription procedures. I summarize how I used template analysis to explore the data and generate a thematic analysis of the data.

Chapters IV, V and VI address the three research questions posed by this study with each chapter centering on one type of business-ownership. Chapter IV addresses the discursive constructions, dialectics, and tension management strategies adopted by sole-proprietors. Chapter V examines the discursive constructions, dialectics, and tension management strategies adopted by business-owners and Chapter VI addresses the discursive constructions, dialectics, and tension management strategies adopted by direct sales business-owners.

Chapter VII provides a comparative case analysis of the key findings in this study and how these findings relate to communication and gender studies. Potential areas for further research and possible limitations to this study are highlighted. Connections with existing research and additional theoretical contributions are also presented.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The narrative of wage earning women in the US has evolved over the last three centuries. It began in the colonial period when traditional ideas about family and work migrated from England where wage-earning women fit neatly into an intricately patterned business economy (Kessler-Harris, 2003). During the earlier years of industrialization, women wage earners were required by modern organizational leaders to perform certain kinds of standardized tasks that simultaneously posed serious societal questions about women's relationship with work and home (Kessler-Harris, 2003). Ultimately, women's labor force roles were institutionalized by protective labor legislation with contradictory effects that protected the need for an ever-expanding labor force (women being the producers of this workforce) and cheap labor (women in low-paying occupations) until new pressures to work outside of the home surfaced during World War II (Ivy & Backlund, 2008). Over 6 million women were sent to work beyond the confines of their homes for the first time in US history during this era, with the majority of these women occupying factory positions or clerical and administrative roles in war-related industries until the end of the war in 1945 (Neft & Levine, 1997). These women were encouraged to return home and those that did not found themselves either laid-off, forced into lower paying positions or encouraged to seek out traditional women's work such as teaching or nursing. Thus, for the majority of these women "home they went and home they stayed" (Ivy & Backlund, 2008, p. 7; Colman, 1995).

This narrative continued through the middle part of the twentieth century as higher levels of consumerism began to dictate a double-income household. In 1950, working wives brought home paychecks in 21.6% of households. By 1960 that statistic had increased to 30.5% which enabled many American families to increase their standard of living, although many of these women wage earners still conducted more traditional forms of women's work or clerical/supportive tasks (Ivy & Backlund, 2008; Kessler-Harris, 2003). Since the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1963, the American workforce has experienced a surge of women wage and salary earners, many of whom are raising children simultaneously (Kessler-Harris, 2003). Although the Equal Pay Act was passed with a great deal of promise the average female employee in today's working environment still only earns 81 cents on the US dollar for conducting the same work male employees engage in (BLS, 2011). That number has increased dramatically over the decades but it is one of many signs that although women employees have made tremendous strides throughout American history, improvement is still warranted. As of 2006 women made up barely more than 2% of Fortune 500 CEOs, evidence that the glass ceiling or what many scholars are now referring to as a "glass labyrinth" is still a powerful yet pervasive force in the modern American workforce (Jacocks, 2011; Miller, 2011; Quindlen, 2006; Ruminski & Holba, 2011). Many argue that these particular struggles (differential pay, promotion obstacles, lack of female mentoring opportunities, etc.) are so prominent that many female wage and salary earners are forced to create their own organizational rules, practices and dividends through entrepreneurship (Mattis,

2004). The narrative of the “working woman” continues to develop and unfold in new directions.

One particular pathway many women are choosing to follow in our current economy is the opportunity to build and sustain their own business enterprises. Although once considered a small presence in the overall US business economy, the women-owned business sector has demonstrated continued growth over the last decade that has made a powerful impact on the economic vitality of the nation. The Center for Women’s Business Research (a nonprofit research institute dedicated to producing data that highlights the economic and social impact of women's entrepreneurship) contends that in 2008, 10.1 million business firms were owned by female entrepreneurs (>50% female ownership), these firms employed 13 million workers and generated 1.9 trillion US dollars in business sales (CWBR, 2011). Shattering the stereotype that women-owned businesses are trivial, immaterial hobbies, these firms are highly lucrative as one in five American businesses with revenue of \$1 million or greater, is a woman-owned firm (CWBR, 2011). Equally impressive, the Center for Women’s Business Research also observes that, “3% of all women-owned firms have revenues of \$1 million or more compared with 6% of men-owned firms” (CWBR, 2011).

The Small Business Administration’s Office of Advocacy highlights some key findings in relation to women-owned business. According to the SBA, 99.7 percent of all employer firms are classified as small businesses (less than 500 employees) and these small businesses employed approximately 51% of all US workers, produced 64% of new jobs throughout the last fifteen years, and generated over 10 times more business patents

per US employee than large, corporate patenting organizations (CWBR, 2011; Helfand, Akbar & Talan, 2007). Keeping these figures in mind, the quantity of women-owned small businesses has increased by nearly 44 percent (5.4 million in 1997 to 7.8 million in 2007) and the number of women-owned agencies doubled the rate of male-owned small businesses (44% and 22% respectively) from 1997 to 2007 (SBA, 2011). Women-owned businesses no longer constitute a small, niche market but rather, a commanding position where they play a major role within the US business economy. The modern narrative regarding women in the workforce now tells a story of resilience as many of these businesses seem to be responding with strength and adversity to the economic downturn that began with the real estate crash in September 2008, as many female firm owners are viewing this as an opportunity to hone their business practices and strategies (CWBR, 2011). Indeed the women-owned business sector is making significant contributions to an otherwise wavering for-profit economy and US labor force (CWBR, 2011).

This trend towards regaining economic progress and resiliency does not seem to have an end point as the rate of education attainment on behalf of female workers continues to impact organizational hiring and development. Recent data gathered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in October 2010 demonstrated that 23.4% of women held a bachelor's degree (or higher), as compared to 14.3% of young men (BLS, 2010). On average, young women are more likely to graduate from high school and attend a college or university than their male counterparts. Once enrolled in a particular collegiate program, female students were less likely than male students to exit that program

between school years without obtaining a diploma (BLS, 2010). This is quite an astounding increase in the level of education attained by women in the civilian labor force compared to labor statistics gathered just four decades ago. In 1970, 22.1% of women wage earners had attended some college courses or earned a diploma. In 2010, that statistic tripled to 66.7% of females with some college education in the US labor force. The percentage of working-women in the civilian labor force that had attained less than a high school degree dropped dramatically from 33.5% in 1970 to 6.8% in October 2010 (BLS, 2011). In conjunction with these findings, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics has offered some labor force projections. They contend that from 2008 – 2018, “the women’s civilian labor force is projected to increase by 9%, or 6,462,000” (BLS, 2011, p. 15).

Despite the influx of women into the American workforce and a surge of women-owned businesses in the US economy, women still confront some age-old obstacles related to starting and maintaining their own businesses. Women who contemplate becoming entrepreneurs face some very steep hurdles. As many of these women seek to escape the proverbial glass ceiling still existing in many large corporate environments, they are often taken aback by the many disadvantages they face when creating and funding a new business venture (Mattis, 2004). In recent years many start-up firms (owned by women) have attained less than 2% of “available venture capital funds” primarily in highly lucrative high-technology ventures (Mattis, 2004, p. 154; Thomas, 1999). Although male entrepreneurs cite several sources of start-up capital available to them when beginning new business ventures including a long list of outside investors

and bank loans in addition to their own personal investments, women entrepreneurs typically rely primarily on personal assets such as checking and savings accounts and/or credit cards (Mattis, 2004; Hisrich, 1990). Furthermore, women entrepreneurs oftentimes have fewer mentors or role models at their discretion than do men and businesses headed by women tend to be much smaller and develop at a slower pace than those led by men (Mattis, 2004). All of these challenges indicate that despite the advances that have been made at both societal and organizational levels, women still face greater obstacles in obtaining success as entrepreneurs than do their male counterparts (Cliff, 1998; Cooper, et al., 1994; Mattis, 2004; Gill & Ganesh, 2007). These findings coupled with the fact that female entrepreneurs are typically perceived by society as possessing stereotypical masculine traits, have created a difficult reality for many women entrepreneurs “swimming upstream” to gain practical credibility as business owners (Baron, et al., 2001; Mattis, 2004).

Even faced with these challenges, women-owned firms continue to flourish at twice the pace and rate of all other small business constituents while current economic despairs have diminished business growth for many other entrepreneurial segments. However, despite this trend and the aforementioned statistics, research analyzing women-owned businesses typically positions this sector as a second-rate sector in the overall US business economy, or is virtually nonexistent in many research journals as evident by the relatively small amount of PhD dissertations dedicated to the topic – 54 between 1993 and 2003 (Mattis, 2004). Furthermore, in political and media discussions, the primary focus remains on large corporations and/or organizations which only

account for .03% of all agencies and employ fewer workers than the small business sector does in total (CWBR, 2011; Helfand, Akbar & Talan, 2007). This focus on large corporations combined with stereotypical expectations that society holds regarding how women business-owners should behave and communicate has created a tough situation for many women entrepreneurs as they seek to build enterprises against many odds. The following section outlines how women entrepreneurs have been historically depicted in earlier forms of entrepreneurship, business, and management scholarship. Later sections will address more contemporary forms of theorizing and exploring the women-owned business sector.

Gender and Entrepreneurs

Literature that examines women business-owners is a fairly recent trend as academic studies addressing this topic didn't appear to surface until the late 1980s. Early forms of research focused on creating an understanding about particular entrepreneurial characteristics based on gender roles and characteristics stereotypically assigned to male business-owners and their female counterparts. A great deal of this scholarship adheres to a more objective/behaviorist form of theorizing that draws out causal and correlational relationships between gender-based traits, entrepreneurial behaviors and external business and management factors (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 1994; Brush, 1992; Greene, Hart, Gatewood, Brush, & Carter, 2003).

According to Green et al. (2003) in their whitepaper titled "Women Entrepreneurs Moving Front and Center: An Overview of Research and Theory," getting a manuscript on entrepreneurship published in a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal "was

next to impossible before 1976 – the year when the *American Journal of Small Business* and the *Journal of Small Business Management* were officially launched” (p. 1).

Remarkably, that same year “Entrepreneurship: A New Female Frontier” by Eleanor Schwartz was published in the *Journal of Contemporary Business* (Greene, et al, 2003; Schwartz, 1976). While this article was not the first research study published on entrepreneurship, it was a watershed moment for entrepreneurial literature in that it was the first to focus on women business-owners (Greene, et al., 2003). During this time period women-owned businesses constituted 4.6% of all US businesses and research at that time correctly predicted there would be a seismic increase in that percentage in years to come. Published research concerning women entrepreneurs has steadily increased in business and entrepreneurial journals for the last several decades.

Particular patterns and areas of convergence emerged from study to study during this research era as scholars hammered out variables that impacted gender and entrepreneurial success. A great deal of this scholarship relied on survey methods and focused on entrepreneur and gender traits (behavioral and socio-psychological), individual and organizational characteristics, the process of obtaining a business, and environmental factors. More specifically, past and current streams of entrepreneurial research have emerged that examine topics such as sex roles (Fagenson & Marcus, 1991), personal attributes of entrepreneurs (Baron, Markham, & Hirska, 2001), human capital characteristics (levels of education and experience), demographics related to entrepreneurship (Neft & Levine, 1997; Schwartz, 1976), motivations (Langowitz & Minniti, 2007), initial capital resources (Cooper, Gimeno-Gason, & Woo, 1994), the

investment process (Buttner & Rosen, 1988), social and family networks (Aldrich, 1989), inhibiting factors such as barriers and obstacles (Cron, Bruton, & Slocum, 2006), and global economic impacts (Greene, et al., 2003; Orser, Riding, & Carrington, 2009; Shinnar, Giacomini, & Janssen, 2012). These studies appeared primarily in scholarly journals such as *Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research*, *Journal of Small Business Management*, *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice* and *Journal of Business Venturing* (Brush, 1992; Green, et. al, 2003).

Preliminary studies analyzing gender and entrepreneurship focused mainly on static qualities related to the entrepreneurs themselves, the organization, and the environment. Studies such as these typically construct a juxtaposition between male (masculine) and female (feminine) traits and analyze perceptions of these characteristics primarily when one sex behaves or adopts tendencies counter to societal expectations (Baron, Markham & Hirska, 2001; Cron, Bruton, & Slocum, 2006; Orser, Martine, Riding & Carrington, 2009 & Shinnar, Giacomini & Janssen, 2012). Several studies have been conducted that compare female entrepreneurs (and relative traits and perceptions) to male entrepreneurs. More recent streams of research continue to analyze perceptions of entrepreneurs (Shinnar, Giacomini, & Janssen, 2012) as well as entrepreneurial traits, behaviors and effects in international and global settings (Orser, Martine, Riding, & Carrington, 2009). And while some studies argue that women entrepreneurs have a perceptual edge through attributional augmentation (we don't expect women to be entrepreneurs, so when we encounter one we assign additional importance to their roles), others contend there are vast differences between male and female entrepreneurs and

these differences translate into obstacles for female business-owners throughout the enterprising process (Baron, et al, 2001; Cron, et al., 2006).

One of the many obstacles women entrepreneurs face includes social expectations of what “real” entrepreneurs should look like and how they should behave. In many cultures (including the US culture) these expectations can be highly gendered. In this sense, espoused entrepreneurial expectations are typically very masculine as many regard entrepreneurs as maintaining the qualities of being “aggressive,” “autonomous,” and “risk-takers” (Baron et al., 2001; Buttner & Rosen, 1988; Fagenson & Marcus, 1991; Gupta & Bhawe, 2007; Orser, et al., 2009; Shinnar, et al., 2012). This can often have a detrimental impact on a woman’s intention to become a business-owner, as some research has determined that when women with proactive personalities (and the intention to become an entrepreneur) are exposed to negative stereotype threats (masculine qualities associated with entrepreneurship), their intentions begin to severely diminish (Gupta & Bhawe, 2007). These prescribed stereotypical expectations are detrimental to the success of aspiring women entrepreneurs as “considerable empirical evidence confirms that women aspire to tasks that are associated with their gender, while preferring to stay away from those that are not associated with their gender” (Gupta & Bhawe, 2007, p. 75; Miller & Budd, 1999).

Additional research grounded in feminist theory from a sociological perspective has generated interesting findings related to gender role expectations, women laborer’s professional experience, motivation for becoming an entrepreneur, and the amount of effort dedicated to building an enterprise (Cron, Bruton & Slocum, 2006). Some of

these studies contend that gender as a static variable does not impact a woman's success in developing a business venture as much as societal beliefs about what constitutes typical and appropriate gender behaviors. As society pushes women to behave and communicate in particular ways, this often limits workplace opportunities for female workers as they are exposed to a more limited professional experience base than men which is directly linked to less managerial expertise and lower wages and indirectly linked to business venturing success (Cron, Bruton & Slocum, 2006). According to feminist theory, female employees are leading, managing and organizing in silos that have been socially constructed on linear assumptions regarding the appropriate behaviors and characteristics that constitute gender roles in the workplace (Cron, Bruton & Slocum, 2006). And these gendered silos aren't limited to societal expectations. Divisions in the entrepreneurship literature examining male and female forms of business-ownership also exist as a great deal of this scholarship inadvertently casts women-owned businesses as "the other" through this comparative research method (Ahl, 2006; Baker, Aldrich, & Liou, 1997; Bird & Brush, 2002).

Research that facilitates these divisions can unintentionally cast women's entrepreneurship as secondary, less significant, and even complementary to men's entrepreneurship. Current streams of research contend that new directions in theorizing and investigating gender will capture "more and richer aspects" of women's entrepreneurship neglected by research that adopts a linear empirical focus while relying on masculine-driven measurement instruments (Ahl, 2006, p. 610). As previous research lacks an explicit feminist perspective, these studies often neglect robust

structural, historical and cultural features as well as a power perspective (Ahl, 2006). Gender, as it is defined within this newer branch of scholarship, is not something we are free to perform in any way we choose - we perform and enact gender that is consistent with (and constrained by) cultural and societal norms. So unlike biological sex (an inherent trait), gender is socially constructed via interactive representations of femininity and masculinity. In this regard, professions are constructed on gendered interactive patterns and entrepreneurship is no exception to these premises as it is practiced and researched in ways that are consistent with norms that guide gendered performances of business-ownership (Ahl, 2006).

Until recently, the narrative or the discourse reproducing what it means to be a woman entrepreneur addressed several key patterns: (1) entrepreneurial traits are masculine and therefore it is more acceptable for men to enact entrepreneurship than women, (2) entrepreneurship is an instrument for economic growth and development and should be studied as such, (3) men and women are essentially very different and this has a direct impact on entrepreneurship practices and economic impact, (4) entrepreneurship is tied to individual and organizational characteristics and scholarship should examine the “differences” between men and women business-owners as individuals (Ahl, 2006). Ahl and other scholars call for “an expansion of the research object” and a “shift in epistemological position” in an effort to shape a new narrative about women’s entrepreneurship research, societal discourse and mediated depictions surrounding women business-owners that are cast as secondary at best and nonexistent at worst (Ahl,

2006; Baker, Aldrich, & Liou, 1997; Bird & Brush, 2002; Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004).

Bird and Brush (2002) argue that the effect of male dominated discourse present in entrepreneurship literature generates two dilemmas. First, although these theoretical and methodological frameworks are helpful explanatory devices for men, “we cannot be sure they adequately reflect the organizing process and organizations of women” (Bird & Brush, 2002, p. 42). While differences do exist between male and female practices of leading, organizing and interacting; feminine versions of these practices should be studied in their own right rather than in the shadows of or within more masculine views of entrepreneurship research. Literature that draws on unfair comparisons illustrates an incomplete narrative regarding women’s entrepreneurship, as thick descriptions of these practices become background and thin descriptions prevail as foreground or constitute the entire story (Bird & Brush, 2002). Thus, if the feminine aspects of business venturing are not well-articulated, then previous scholarship may actually suffer from a lack of construct validity and future research endeavors will continue to perpetuate singular definitions of gender (Bird & Brush, 2002). Because these scholars have called for new research direction and paradigm shift related to how we conceptualize women’s entrepreneurship, we now see a body of literature examining the gendered act or practice of entrepreneurship rather than measured traits of entrepreneurs as individuals.

From Entrepreneurs to Entrepreneurship

More recent streams of research contend that the “boundaries of entrepreneurship theory research” need to be extended from a more objectivist epistemology to more

constructionist ways of viewing women's business venturing. Ahl (2006) calls for additional research examining how women construct their relationships and businesses as well as how they "do gender" and more studies of "how social orders are gendered and of the mechanisms by which the gendering is reconstructed" (p. 611). Thus, scholarship examining the enactment of entrepreneurship as a gendered process has surfaced as a new and appropriate avenue for examining discourse concerning women's entrepreneurship (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004).

This body of research contends that traditional literature related to entrepreneurship in general has relied heavily on models of "economic rationality alleged to be universal and agendered" (Bruni, et al., 2004, p. 407). Based on several ethnographic studies conducted in small business enterprises, Bruni, et al. offers a different point of view – "one that embraces at the same time gender and entrepreneurship as substances, [and] as practices learnt and enacted in appropriate occasions" (Bruni, et al., 2004, p. 407; Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2005). From this perspective, one's identity is a direct product of a pattern of interactions, which give definition and meaning to the acts of gender and entrepreneurship. Enactments of entrepreneurship in this sense are not intentional or driven performances (although they may be partially as such) and "objectivity and subjectivity are produced together in situated practices" (Bruni, et al., 2004, p. 407). Identity, then, is viewed as the product of both "material and discursive practices" (Bruni, et al., 2004, p. 407; Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2005; Bruni & Gherardi, 2001). As gender and entrepreneurship are both seen as situated practices through this perspective, enactment of these ideas can be

viewed as fluid and dynamic codes of gender are kept, changed and transgressed pending the symbolic space (Bruni, et al., 2004; Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2005). The processes of gendering and business venturing have been further analyzed by critical/feminist studies in various ways that overlap with this notion of gender and entrepreneurship as enactment (Bruni, et al., 2004; Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2005; Bruni & Gherardi, 2001).

This body of critical/feminist research creates and assesses case analyses of gendered acts of entrepreneurship as well as provides a critique of organizational and societal structures that create obstacles or constraints for women business-owners (Calas, Smirich, & Bourne, 2009). These studies seek to reframe the act of entrepreneurship from an economic activity to “entrepreneurship as social change” (Calas, et al., 2009). This scholarship rejects the traditional definition of entrepreneurship as “new venture creation, growth and opportunities” assessed via rational measures and probes the possible definition of “entrepreneurship as a social change activity with a variety of possible outcomes.” (p. 552 – 553). Understanding entrepreneurs as an economic activity conceals all that the entrepreneur truly is and does and moving these ideas about entrepreneurship into a new set of ontological assumptions allows scholarship to advance ideas previously lost in generalizable findings. Entrepreneurship research should assume a feminist/critical lens that emphasizes reflexivity and the notion that knowledge production and the interests of those who engage in knowledge generation are “part and parcel” of any envisioned social change (p. 554). Entrepreneurship as social change therefore “includes examining what the scholar is doing, for whom, and

for what as he or she does entrepreneurship theory and research” (Calas, et al., 2009, p. 554).

Several critical analyses of women owned-business contexts exist in scholarly journals. Many of these case analyses adopt a critical and or feminist perspective that articulates the ways women entrepreneurs are “held back” by social constructions of female business-owners and even ways women often discursively hinder their own progress. For instance, Ashcraft & Pacanowsky (1996) conducted a study of a woman-owned office supply firm and argued that female leaders and workers participated in their own subordination by constructing and performing a narrative of collective self-awareness that hinged on themes of “divisiveness” and “cattiness” perceived as a uniquely “female practice” (p. 217). Grimlin’s (1996) analysis of “Pamela’s Place” demonstrated that female stylists in a Long Island salon constructed gendered class and status identities. Women in this study (both stylists and customers) used beauty work to distinguish social differences between professional, working women (unattractive) and polished/attractive stylists. Similar findings surfaced in Edley’s (2000) study of discursive essentializing in a woman-owned design firm as women enacted gender in socially acceptable ways that allowed female owners and leaders to suppress organizational conflict and support the vision of an “ideal” workplace for women (p. 272). While these performances led to a community of support and flexibility, they simultaneously suppressed opportunities for dissent and forced subordination of individual needs to the owner’s vision. Lastly, Punita & Gailey (2012) discovered that women in a resource-scarce environment (India) where constraints such as lack of

government support, a dominant patriarchal society, failed cooperative initiatives and poor self-perceptions, still managed to find empowerment through collective business-venturing initiatives.

Beyond these case analyses, some scholarship has been generated synthesizing constraints that women entrepreneurs face from self-reported data. Gill & Ganesh (2007) demonstrated, for example, that elements of the entrepreneurial identity were most evident in the narratives women provided about why they became business owners in the first place. This study was groundbreaking for several reasons. First, this particular study prioritized the way women entrepreneurs themselves construct the context surrounding the performance of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial identities. Secondly, as opposed to investigating case sensitive data, Gill & Ganesh conducted semi-structured (face-to-face) interviews with 23 women entrepreneurs. Lastly, this study extended a critical position assumed by Knight (2006) that previous women's entrepreneurship research tends to neglects the voice of women of color (Gill & Ganesh, 2007; Knight, 2006). In this regard, this particular study paved the pathway for additional communication scholarship surrounding the notion of entrepreneurship.

Another category of entrepreneurship literature adopts social constructionism as a guiding framework for understanding the process of doing and talking about gender and entrepreneurship. Ideas such as business-ownership and leadership from this perspective are socially constructed as workers and entrepreneurs themselves engage in everyday communicative practices. In one particular study where leadership was the primary focus, themes of effective organizing, leading and managing surfaced in data

collected from a women-owned manufacturing and design firm that employed primarily female workers (Jacocks, 2011). In this organizational study what counted as “effective” leadership and management was dependent upon contextual “in-the-moment features” of the episode or moment. Women in this context demonstrated the messiness of communication within complex workplace relationships as they improvised communication, management, decision-making and even conflict-management strategies per situational requirements and constraints (Jacocks, 2011).

A similar study conducted analyzing entrepreneurs of Moroccan and Turkish origin in the Netherlands discovered discursive contradictions related to identity formation amongst women business-owners. Through the collection of biographical narratives from 20 entrepreneurs, Essers and Benschop (2007) found that identity formation was a complex process for women in this particular region. Gender, entrepreneurship and minority status (Moroccan/Turkish descent in the Netherlands) led to complicated discursive strategies of identity formation that involved the negotiation of various contradictions. These tensions included pride and restriction, honor and shame and hybrid identities. While most of these women business-owners were proud of their respective enterprises, most of them had to manage this pride with the social restrictions placed on them within their cultural and economic contexts. Similarly, women of Moroccan and Turkish descent constantly struggle with bringing “honor” to their male superiors and family members (e.g. remaining pure and behaving within a strict set of rules) and avoiding anything that will place “shame” on their families and social circles. This is especially trying as women who are “honorable” typically behave in a demure,

subservient and domesticated manner. As entrepreneurs, these women have to behave beyond what is socially expected of them, thus managing what is perceived as “honorable” and “shameful” can be a delicate impression management process. Lastly, these women struggled with behaving and communicating within two distinct cultural contexts – their culture of origin (Moroccan and Turkish descent) and the dominant culture (the Dutch culture in the Netherlands) (Essers & Benschop, 2007). This study is especially insightful as it highlights key discursive contradictions associated with how these women socially constructed their roles as entrepreneurs.

Social Dialectics and the Contradictions of Organizing

Although contradictions in the Essers and Benschop (2007) study were not necessarily linked to social dialectics, dialectical tensions emerged in the findings and provided a springboard for entrepreneurship research grounded in the dialectical perspective. My dissertation research relies on the dialectical perspective as a theoretical framework to unpack the tensions associated with enacting gendered entrepreneurship. Social dialectics, as it is commonly referenced, is an extensive set of ideas grounded in the belief that “all relationships are interwoven with multiple layers of contradictions” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007, p. 275). Rich, complex, and varied, the dialectical perspective seeks to “illuminate the contradiction-ridden nature of communication” in social and organizational relationships (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007, p. 275). A recent description of the family tree of theories that constitutes this perspective differentiates “social dialectics” from Marxist ideas concerning dialectical materialism. While Marx was first to theorize dialectics from a “systematic, social scientific perspective,” his

focus was on the “material conditions of production” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007, p. 275). In order to achieve the material needs required for basic living, classical forms of hierarchy and division of labor emerged that would ultimately lead to a sense of alienated exploitation within workers. A great deal of organizational communication scholarship has been generated relying on Marx’s view of dialectics where scholars seek to discover oppressive structures that produce and reproduce tensions for marginalized groups (Ashcraft, 2005; Collinson, 2005; Mumby, 2005; Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004). Social dialectics assumes a very different position than that of Marxist views and focuses on the “social and symbolic practices of people in relationships rather than the material conditions of capitalism” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007, p. 276).

The concepts that drive social dialectics are rooted in Mikhail Bahktin’s conceptions of dialogue as a constitutive process, dialectical flux, aesthetic moment, utterance, and critical sensibility (Baxter, 2004). Communication as a process (from this perspective) shapes reality, is filled with contradictions, is a messy pattern of opposing and related discourses, is symbolic and a tool for critique. Although Baxter and colleagues are noted for the intellectual conception of Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT), they contend that it is but one theoretical strand harbored under the umbrella of social dialectics (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007). At its core, the dialectical perspective views relating and communicating as a process of contradiction in which participants wrestle with opposing tensions that are seemingly unified as well. Tensions can be binary (two unified opposites) or multivocal (multiple, interdependent opposites) as well as internal (located within the relationship) or external (located within context

the relationship is embedded in). Tensions can also surface in front stage interactions where participants are communicating in a public manner and they can also manifest in backstage dialogue where messages are hidden to particular audiences. Baxter and colleagues (Baxter, 1993; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Werner & Baxter, 1994) describe three primary contradictions that have emerged in several studies including: (1) integration-separation, (2) expression-nonexpression, and (3) stability-change. Baxter and Braithwaite (2007) caution us in viewing these categories as an exhaustive list because it “is important to understand what different dialectical approaches share in common and how they depart from one another as well” (p. 286).

The dialectical perspective stands as a family tree of theories with nine different branches identified in the literature (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007). One particular branch emerges through discourse analysis scholarship. Discourse analysis “is a perspective devoted to the microlevel details of enacted talk – turn-taking, interruptions, pauses and so forth” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007, p. 288). Through meticulous analysis of communicative acts in particular contexts, discourse analysts contend that “communication is a dilemmatic undertaking, characterized by contradictory tensions and contrary themes” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007, p. 288). Whether speech acts occur in academic forums (Tracy, 1997), collaborative interorganizational relationships (Lewis, Isbell & Koschmann, 2010), maternity leave policies and practices (Buzzanel & Liu, 2005), planned organizational change (Jian, 2007), caregiving roles (McGuire & Dougherty, 2006; Miller & Consodine, 2010), compassionate communication (Miller,

2002 & 2007), correctional facilities (Tracy, 2004) or even feminist organizations (D'Enbeau & Buzzanell, 2011), this branch of theorizing “adopts a microscopic lens in viewing communication as riddled with contradictory themes” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007; p.288).

The dialectical perspective has served as a useful framework for unpacking and understanding the many contradictions associated with being a part of an organizational system or grid of workplace relationships. Benson’s organizational scholarship synthesizing these contradictions predates Baxter’s work related to social dialectics (Benson, 1977). As there are many contradictions associated with organizational membership (e.g. connection to the system vs. autonomy, front stage vs. backstage communication and organizational change vs. maintenance), dialectics has since been used frequently to understand the emergent communicative contradictions related to organizational status. Until recently, organizational studies grounded in the concept of dialectics have adhered to Marxist ideas related to material dialectics, rather than social dialectics as a theoretical framework (Ashcraft, 2005; Collinson, 2005; Mumby, 2005; Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004). In the last decade, however, social dialectics has surfaced as a useful theoretical framework for understanding a variety of contradictory discourses within healthcare organizations, nonprofit institutions as well as for-profit business environments.

Kramer’s work (2004) examining organizational groups, illustrates how dialectics can be used to understand naturally occurring groups (such as community theater groups) and the communication these group members use to enact a “group

performance” (Kramer, 2004, p. 314). His scholarship identified examples of contradictions or tensions that organizational members experienced such as autonomy/connectedness, independence/dependence, predictability/novelty, needs for certainty/needs for uniqueness and openness/closedness (Kramer, 2004). This study also highlighted how group members managed emergent tensions associated with group placement and the organization of a group performance. Equally important and relative to the scope of this study, Kramer demonstrated how the need to understand human behaviors and practices as paradoxical and full of contradiction extends into the organizational realm (Kramer, 2004; Stohl & Cheney, 2001; Tracy, 2004).

Tracy’s review of dialectics and employee reactions to organizational tensions suggest that, “contradictions are inescapable, normal and, in some cases, to be embraced” (Tracy, 2004, p. 121). Through her analysis, Tracy drew on reactions to internal organizational contradictions that employees grappled with including what she termed, “selection/splitting/vacillation,” “attending to multiple organizational norms simultaneously,” and “withdrawal” similar to the praxis identified by Baxter and colleagues as denial, segmentation, balance and reaffirmation (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, 1998; Tracy, 2004, p. 129). Additional organizational communication scholarship conducted by others and Tracy centralize the discursive framing of contradictions that is managed by employees of a singular organizational context. Specifically, in Tracy’s examination of two correctional facilities, discursive frames took the form of “contradiction” (p. 136), “complimentary dialectics” (p. 137) and “double-binds” (p. 139).

Lewis and colleagues conducted a study using a focus group methodology to explore how research participants engaged in collaborative IORs (interorganizational relationships) faced and responded to certain contextual tensions that pulled individual participants and entire organizations in opposing courses (Lewis, Isbell & Koschmann, 2010). Through this research endeavor, Lewis et al. identified specific relationship tensions (me-orientation/we-orientation) and structural tensions that spotlighted a “strain” related to rules that governed operational procedures and engagement (Lewis, et al., 2010, p. 470). One such strain addressed the contradictory concept of structured collaboration, where collaboration was expected to incorporate “open dialogue” via formal agenda and procedures (Lewis, et al., 2010, p. 470). Accountability tensions dealt with how employees involved in interorganizational relationships struggled with steering the direction of collaborative initiatives and outcomes, and decision-making contradictions highlighted a paradoxical relationship that existed between spontaneous and unplanned decision-making and the need to formally codify decision-making processes (Lewis, et al., 2010).

Additional organizational communication scholarship has been generated that examines the contradictions associated with caregiving. McGuire et al., for instance, explored the contradictions that nurses describe in constructing their roles as caregivers. This study revealed that nurses in this context negotiated their roles as caregivers and the poles of “closeness and distance” in communicatively relating to their patients (McGuire, Dougherty, & Aktinson, 2006, p. 417). When these same caregivers were faced with sexual harassment in the workplace, however, the ability to negotiate their

roles diminished and nurses were forced to choose distance as a communication strategy (McGuire, et al., 2006). Miller and Consodine (2007), on the other hand, discovered a central dialectic between “leading and following patients and families in discussions of spirituality at the end of life” (p. 165). These authors chose to rely on dialectics as a theoretical framework as it emphasizes the “messiness of communication in personal relationships” and was therefore helpful in fostering an understanding of communicative patterns that surface around the emotionally complex context of end of life caregiving (Miller & Consodine, 2007, p. 167).

Miller has also used social dialectics to frame emotion in organizational contexts beyond the healthcare industry. Her 2002 study analyzing the experiences of an insider struggling emotionally with how to deal with organizational tragedy, was grounded in autoethnographic accounts of teaching, researching and mentoring in the aftermath of the 1999 bonfire collapse that took place on the campus of Texas A&M University (Miller, 2002). Twelve students perished in this tragic accident and several were severely injured. As the university called for “business as usual,” students, faculty and staff were left to make sense of and wrestle with some hard truths. Miller discovered a strong, pervasive tension between rationality and emotion through narratives of other organizational members as well as experiences of her own (Miller, 2002). Additionally, Miller continued to study this particular dialectic (rationality and emotion) through her examination of compassionate communication in a variety of organizational contexts and noted that the “individuals we interviewed were clear in understanding the emotional content and emotional impact of their work lives” but this homage to

compassion did not “replace rational and information-based approaches to organizational life” (Miller, 2007, p. 237).

Buzzanell & Liu (2005) relied on social dialectics to gain an understanding of the contradictions associated with maternity leave policies and practices. Findings from this study demonstrated that women constructed gendered discourses of themselves and others that shaped organizational practice in interesting ways. The ironies and contradictions that surfaced from the narratives of these participants highlighted several dialectics between masculinities – femininities, public – private and reason – emotion (Buzzanell & Liu, 2005). Equally important, this study analyzed how female workers constructed identities that rested on the dialectic of working professional – working mother. In this regard, findings indicated that contradictory discourses surfaced surrounding maternity leave policies and practices and one cannot assume that such policies and practices are an automatic right.

Social Dialectics as a Theoretical Framework for Understanding Women’s Entrepreneurship

In summary, a great deal of literature exists that examines the concepts of gender, entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship, as well as bodies of organizational communication research reliant upon the dialectical perspective as a useful theoretical framework. Several gaps in these bodies of literature exist, however. While scholarship examining women entrepreneurs has evolved dramatically over the last several decades, very few research articles examine entrepreneurialism from a communication perspective. With the notable exception of Gill & Ganesh (2007), very little literature exists in the realm of

communication studies that assesses business-ownership and gender. In keeping with the current trend in entrepreneurship literature this study seeks to fill these gaps by examining gender and entrepreneurship as an enactment that is constituted by complex relational tensions. In this regard, discursive constructions (provided by women entrepreneurs themselves) of entrepreneurship, business-ownership, and gender as well as the contradictions associated with these constructions are the focus of this study. Furthermore, this study seeks to discover the different discourses and contradictions associated with different levels of entrepreneurship.

The aforementioned studies highlight the pragmatic use of the dialectical lens in unraveling the intricacies associated with organizational communication and practice such as the balancing of tensions embedded in both professional and personal relationships by women business-owners. By relying on the discursive branch of the dialectical perspective (as opposed to Relational Dialectics Theory), this dissertation proposes that different processes of entrepreneurship emerge from the discursive constructions women entrepreneurs provide as well as the management of different dialectical tensions associated with enacting entrepreneurship in different ways.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research project proceeded in two phases. The first phase was a pilot study using a focus group methodology that identified specific topics related to women's entrepreneurship, including the communicative practices of women business-owners to be explored in the second phase of this study. These findings shaped the second phase where I carried out 30 in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs representing three different categories: (1) sole-proprietors (SPs), (2) direct sales business-owners (DSOs), and (3) business-owners (BOs).

In this chapter, I will discuss Phase I of the research project including details associated with data collection and analysis, as well as how this project informed Phase II. Then I will discuss the research design developed for Phase II.

Phase I - Pilot Study

This section describes Phase I where I conducted a pilot study using a focus group to examine the connection between women's entrepreneurship and leadership. In the very early stages of my dissertation project, my focus was to examine the relationship between women's entrepreneurship and leadership. However, one of my dissertation committee members challenged the assumption that I was making that the two concepts were related. To explore whether this assumption had merit, I decided to conduct a pilot study to explore the connections between women's entrepreneurship and leadership. Moreover, the pilot study allowed me test out possible interview protocols

for the dissertation. This section addresses key features of this pilot study and how it informed the second phase of this research project.

Sampling and Participants

Purposive theoretical sampling was used to recruit participants in the focus group as well as snowball sampling through first-hand and second-hand referrals. Focus group participants were recruited by the lead researcher and members of the research team (advanced undergraduates who received course credit for their assistance). Participants volunteered to be a part of this focus group session and they were provided lunch from a local woman-owned café to compensate them for their time. The focus group took place in a conference room at a local university campus and included four participants.

Women were solicited to take part in this focus group because they were identified as business-owners or entrepreneurs by the lead researcher and/or members of the research team.

One characteristic of the participants I noticed was their diversity in terms of business-ownership as participants engaged in different forms of entrepreneurship. One participant was a business-owner of a security services venture, two were sole-proprietors (one who partnered in owning a communications consulting firm and a second who owned a photography business), and one participant was a direct-sales business-owner. Table 1 highlights some key demographics related to the focus group participants.

Participant	Title	Type of Business	Ra ce	Marital Status	# Children	Level of Education	Age	# Employees	Age of business
1	BO	Residential and commercial property security services	H	M	0	Some college	34	16	10 years
2	SP	Communications consulting firm	AA	S	0	Master's	29	0	5 years
3	SP	Photography	C	M	0	Bachelor's	30	2	8 years
4	DSO	Jewelry sales	C	M	2	Bachelor's	37	0	1 year

Table 1. Phase I Participants

Analysis

The focus group session lasted approximately 1 hour and generated ten pages of double-spaced notes. The session was recorded and transcribed resulting in an 18-page, single-spaced document of the transcribed conversation. I used a grounded theory approach to analyze the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The grounded theory analysis generated salient themes that served as a springboard for conducting Phase II of this study.

Rationale for Phase II Study

My initial thinking that the women's entrepreneurship and leadership were connected was confirmed as many of these women did attest to "seeing" themselves as leaders and enacting leadership as entrepreneurs. However, what surprised me was the idea that women engaged in different forms of entrepreneurial activity and business-ownership and that this influenced their experiences. As a result, my focus in this

dissertation shifted from looking at the general connections between women's entrepreneurship and leadership to the specific role that different types of entrepreneurial activity and business-ownership played in the way that women constructed their experiences. Two primary experiences that emerged from these conversations include: (1) not being taken seriously, and (2) relational tensions.

Dialogue in the focus group continually circled back to a particular struggle that many women entrepreneurs experience – “not being taken seriously.” In general, women felt as though they were not “taken seriously” by personal and professional constituents. Some women argued they were less credible as *women* entrepreneurs and others attributed this lack of respect to the type or size of business they operated. Regardless of the reasoning, the entire group of participants described struggling with this issue in different ways.

Another conversational theme that emerged, addressed the relational tensions that women entrepreneurs experience. Women described their work as relational where a great deal of their attention as business-owners is geared towards initiating and maintain relationships with clients, employees, vendors, recruits, and colleagues. Participants often described feeling torn while accommodating these different constituents who oftentimes presented competing demands to the woman business-owner. Furthermore, a lengthy discussion was held that addressed a unique work – home tension that women entrepreneurs often experience. Participants described the “pushes and pulls” they experienced in different ways, depending on the type of business-ownership they practiced.

While these two emergent themes were compelling, I became interested in the different responses the participants provided based on the type of business-ownership that characterized their entrepreneurial practice. For instance, consider some of the examples provided by the different entrepreneurs in this focus group when addressing “not being taken seriously.” The sole-proprietor linked “not being taken seriously” to the “small” and home-based nature of her business impacting her overall professional credibility. The direct sales business-owner felt as though she wasn’t perceived as a “real” entrepreneur because she technically operated under a parent organization (Stella & Dot, Inc.). The owner of an elite security services business felt as though she wasn’t taken seriously as a petite, female entrepreneur embedded within the male-dominated field of personal and residential security services. Thus, “not being taken seriously” was experienced differently for women who engaged in these three forms of entrepreneurship. Consider the following statement provided by another sole-practitioner who struggled to “be taken seriously” by male clients:

With my clients, I go into industries that are pretty dominated by males. So whoever we’re working with, whoever that point of contact is, you have to exude... For me, I exude a little more confidence than I even feel going into those environments, because I need them to know, walking in, that I can do this job. And whatever perceptions you may have because of you know, being a woman, or whatever, get rid of them. Because I’m here, I can do the job. I may be quaking in my boots sometimes, and that’s okay, but I have to show them that I’m steady.

– *Owner of a communications consulting firm, describing how she commands respect*

In this narrative, the owner of a communications consulting firm describes how she commands a certain level of respect or “seriousness” because of certain “perceptions” her clients may have about her “being a woman.” She does what she has

to in order to demonstrate to her clients that she is “steady,” even if she is “quaking in [her] boots.” This is an example of how this particular sole-proprietor experiences and manages “not being taken seriously” in unique ways. Business-owners and direct sales business-owners described experiencing and managing “not being taken seriously” in different ways.

Women frequently discussed experiencing unique relational struggles as sole-proprietors, business-owners and direct sales business-owners. The sole-proprietors in this focus group struggled to accommodate a host of different constituents in their positions as the “sole” owners of their businesses. Both of these sole-proprietors worked from their residences and described a unique work – home tension grounded in the structure of their work. The direct sales business-owner experienced relational tensions between her personal obligations, her individual business priorities and needs related to her “lower line” recruits. And lastly, the business-owner representative of this group described a distinct relational tension she struggled to leverage between being a “boss” to her employees and a being a “friend.” The following narrative captures this tension.

I’m really your boss. I’m not your friend, I’m your boss. It’s hard, because on your other side, it’s like the bride. You want to be best friends with the bride because you want to please her and figure out what her needs are. And then you have your employees over here who you want to be their boss before you’re their friend. It’s like you’re on opposite sides.

– *Owner of elite security services firm, speaking about managing a boss-friend relationship with her employees*

Through this description the owner of an elite security services firm compares her position as business-owner to being “the bride.” Her employees want to be “best friends” with her because they “want to please” the bride and “figure out what her needs

are.” But this business-owner doesn’t necessarily want to be treated as “the bride.” She wants her employees to see her as “their boss” and not “their best friend.” Thus, she struggles with enacting responsibilities related to being “boss” and a business-owner and enacting care and friendship with her employees.

These themes were very insightful as they demonstrate that women entrepreneurs define certain struggles and tensions as common experiences related to being entrepreneurs and doing entrepreneurship. As I analyzed the focus group data and began to observe certain themes clustering around the three different types of entrepreneurship exhibited in this pilot study, I began to refine my research questions to explore these three areas: (1) the different discursive constructions provided by women sole-proprietors, business-owners and direct sales business-owners, (2) the different relational tensions experienced by these three groups of participants, and (3) the different strategies implemented in managing these tensions. The following sections detail the research design incorporated in Phase II.

Phase II – In-Depth Interviews

The research protocol in Phase II is built on the idea that women may articulate their experiences differently based on the type of entrepreneurial work and business ownership they engage. As a result, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with thirty women entrepreneurs: 10 sole proprietors, 10 business owners, and 10 direct sales owners. Sole-proprietors conducted their business in a “sole” nature and did not maintain an employee base to assist with tasks related to their enterprise. Business-owners employed two or more full-time workers. Direct sales business-owners

conducted the direct selling of various products or services on a full-time basis. The following sections describe research procedures, sampling techniques, participant information, transcription procedures, data analysis and the coding scheme adopted by this study.

Interview Procedure

Participant interviews served as the primary data generation method for Phase II. I examined interview responses from women entrepreneurs as reports of interaction to “distinguish the decisive elements,” categorize “complex attitude patterns,” and “understand the interpretations” that respondents “[attributed] to their motivations to act” or communicate in certain ways specifically regarding the three salient foci of this study: (1) entrepreneurship, (2) gender, and (3) dialectics (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Respondents were questioned as to their thoughts and feelings related to their roles as entrepreneurs, contradictions associated with being female entrepreneurs and strategies for managing these contradictions through semi-structured interviews. These interviews employed a standard set of questions used with the purpose of directly comparing responses across the entire sample as well as cross-comparing responses within three sub-samples: (1) business-owners (BOs), (2) sole-proprietors (SPs), and (3) direct-sales-owners (DSOs), (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Appendix A provides a copy of the interview guide.

The interview guide addressed several important topics including the previous work experience of the respondents, discursive constructions of entrepreneurship and gender, contradictions related to gender and entrepreneurial roles, and strategies

employed to manage these tensions. Moreover, several secondary questions were posed in accordance to the aforementioned topics that allowed respondents to answer questions thoroughly and provide in-depth information. The structure of the proposed interview guide was moderately open (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2004) and the items within this guide were constructed in an inverted funnel sequence, as preliminary questions were more closed, demographic items. The guide then adopted a tunnel sequence where a series of open to moderately-open questions were posed. In keeping with the flexible nature of this study, the interview guide assumed a quasi-diamond sequence on occasion, as I felt compelled to reopen the interview guide in certain areas when new information was discovered that warranted the expansion of the interviewing process.

Study participants were contacted by telephone and email and asked if they would be willing to participate in a study about communication and woman-owned businesses. I would then follow-up with willing participants and negotiate a time and place for the interview to take place (usually through email). Several of these interviews took place in a face-to-face format in local coffee shops and restaurants, some interviews occurred in the participant's respective office locations while others (approximately 1/3 of interviews) took place via telephone. Regardless of the location or medium used to conduct these interviews, the format and core interview guide remained constant.

Prior to conducting each interview, all participants were assured of confidentiality and consent forms provided by the Institutional Review Board of Texas A&M were signed (see Appendix B). Each interview began with an introduction of the interview protocol and an explanation of the participant's rights. Furthermore, I

explained to each participant that they could choose to withdraw participation from this study at any time without any adverse effects on their relationship with me (the principle investigator), or the Department of Communication at Texas A&M University.

Interviews lasted from 39 – 74 minutes with an average interview time of 56.5 minutes.

Sampling

Purposive theoretical sampling was adopted for this study. I contacted potential participants through existing local networks of women business-owners such as the NAWBO (National Association of Women Business Owners), WBC (Women's Business Council) and alumni databases from local universities. Additionally, I sampled from an online local database (M/WBE SIC Listing Report) that provided information regarding local women- and minority-owned businesses and business-owner information that is accessible to the public. In conjunction with these sampling methods, I recruited personal (second- or third-person) contacts as participants, through my personal knowledge and confirmation of (through second- and third- person accounts and referrals) participants' business-ownership status. Participants were also recruited using snowball sampling as participants already involved in the study would refer me to additional women business-owners. Initiatives were made to encourage participation from a variety of women entrepreneurs within multiple industries and subsectors (e.g. creative/design, finance, legal, accounting, services, manufacturing, technology, engineering, architecture/construction, etc.). Efforts were also made to recruit participants from a variety of demographic backgrounds and age groups. Following

King's (2006) recommendations regarding sampling size, efforts were made to recruit at least 10 participants for each category with an overall goal of achieving 30 participants.

Participants

Participants were drawn within the three categories primarily from the southwest region of the United States. A few of the participants who engaged in telephone interviews were located in the Midwestern region of the US. All participants were business-owners of some type and each owned a certain percentage of their businesses that ranged from 12% - 100%. Some women entrepreneurs ran their respective business enterprises independently while others were engaged in some form of partnership. A strong attempt was made to sample participants from a wide range of trades and industries. Participant trades varied from conducting direct sales in cosmetics to owning a large property inspection business to running a human resources consulting firm as a sole proprietor. In this sense, there is even representation of participants who work in industries and trades that are viewed as being more masculine (e.g., engineering, architecture, law) and industries/trades that are viewed as being more feminine (e.g., bridal consulting/retail, cosmetics sales, dessert shop/catering). Participants varied greatly with regard to certain demographics such as age, marital status, number of children, number of employees and the age of their business. Table 2 depicts the characteristics of each sub-sample within this study.

Type of Business-Ownership	Type of Business	Race	Marital Status	# Children	Education	Age	# Employees	Age of business
Sole Proprietors	Property Management; Commercial Real Estate Development	C	M	1	Master's	32	0	10
	Landscape architect	C	S	0	Bachelor's	36	1	2
	Copywriter/Editor	C	M	1	Master's	57	0	2
	Commercial architect	C	M	1	Bachelor's	59	0	23
	Dessert shop/Caterer	C	M	1	Bachelor's	49	2	3
	Lighting design/engineer	C	DP	0	Bachelor's	53	1	5
	Corporate wellness	C	M	4	BA	51	0	10
	Creative communications	C	M	0	BA	45	0	17
	Attorney	C	M	1	JD	45	1	18
	Human Resources Consulting	C	M	2	MA	42	0	1.5
	Business-Owners	Advertising/Public Relations	C	S	2	Bachelor's; Master's coursework	60	8
Real Estate		C	M	2	Some College	56	86	20
Building inspection company		C	M	0	MBA; Registered Architect	58	14	14
Civil engineer		C	S	0	Bachelor's	39	8	4
Bridal Consultant/Bridal Gown Salon		C	M	0	Some College	36	8	5
Title company		C	S	0	Bachelor's	46	140	5
Insurance company		C	M	2	Master's	44	7	20
Insurance company/Family medicine practice/Cattle broker		H	S	0	MBA	34	36	12
Leadership coaching and consulting		C	S	0	BA; honorary doctorate	53	32	21
Architect/Engineer	C	D	4	Bachelor's	51	6	13	
Direct Sales Business-Owners	Distributor	C	M	1	Bachelor's	57	0	2
	Financial Advisor/Insurance	C	S	0	BA	27	0	2
	Future director	AI	M	2	ASSOC	29	0	2
	STAR STYLIST	C	M	3	BA	46	0	4
	Ruby-level Independent distributor	C	S	2	Some college	36	0	12
	Top level sales	C	M	3	Some college	36	0	4.5
	Assisted living	C	M	1	BA	31	0	1
	Associate director	H	M	1	MA	38	0	4
	Senior Director	C	M	2	BA	35	0	3
	Senior Sales Rep	C	M	3	BBA	57	0	24

Table 2. Phase II Participants

Transcription

All 30 interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, which resulted in 516 single-spaced pages of text. This process involved transcribing all spoken information within each interview, with the exception of fillers such as “uhs” and “ums.” After each transcript was received, I conducted a thorough analysis of the script by reflexively reviewing my own personal field notes, adding additional impression-based commentary where appropriate in the foot notes, and correcting any missed language or misunderstandings/errors the transcriptionist may have encountered in the transcribing process in an effort to formulate an accurate, detailed account of each interview conducted. Throughout this process repetitive themes began to emerge from the data, which I began to tag for the analysis section in this phase of the study.

Data Analysis

Transcripts and interview notes were analyzed using template analysis, a thematic analysis that is reliant upon a coding template (King, 2006). The crux of template analysis required me to create a list of codes (e.g., a template) that represented various themes that emerged from the data. Analysis followed a “contextual constructivist” framework where some predefined categories were developed in an *a priori* fashion, but additional themes emerged from these predefined categories as data analysis unfolded (King, 2006, p. 256). The general predefined categories of “discursive constructions of entrepreneurship,” “relational tensions of entrepreneurship” and “strategies to manage relational tensions” were developed from the pilot study conducted in phase I and included in the interview guide used in this study with the intention of

modifying and adding higher- and lower-order themes to the template as the texts were interpreted. King (2006, p. 256) refers to this position as the “contextual constructivist” orientation, where the researcher assumes that “there are always multiple interpretations to be made of any phenomenon” which are highly dependent upon the researcher’s position as well as the research context. The reflexivity of the researcher, interpreting the topic from multiple perspectives and focusing on the richness of the emergent thematic descriptions were primary goals in the data analysis of this research endeavor.

Template Analysis and Coding Process

Throughout my data analysis, codes were assigned to portions of the texts to index it as relating to a particular theme or category that surfaced from the data. Codes assigned in this study were interpretive in nature and therefore somewhat difficult to define clearly. To combat this particular disadvantage to thematic analysis and enhance coding reliability, template construction was a collaborative process engaging the assistance of a team of outside experts to verify categories by reviewing subsections of texts drawn from the recorded texts (King, 2006). When researchers were in agreement that primary themes were sufficiently clear and comprehensive, a full template was developed incorporating hierarchical coding and parallel coding. Hierarchical coding allowed for the hierarchical organization of codes with “groups of similar codes clustered together to produce more general higher-order codes” allowing analysis to take place at varying levels of specificity (King, 2006, p. 258). Additionally, parallel coding where the same segment of text is cross-categorized took place as language that exemplified multiple codes/themes surfaced within the collected data.

Again, predefined general codes were established based on emergent findings from the pilot study and included in an initial template. This initial template was revised or modified in a reflexive manner as potential inadequacies were noted during data analysis. For instance, as additional categories or codes surfaced related to the category of “discursive constructions” during data analysis, newly developed codes such as “practitioner-based” definitions were then inserted into the template. And as some initial codes appeared to be less salient as data analysis progressed, these codes were either deleted or categorized under a different higher-order code. For example, at the onset of data analysis “networking” appeared to be a salient theme. Through further analysis I determined that “networking” was more of a social activity for DSOs in a “typical day” and it was re-categorized under the higher-order codes of “discursive constructions” and then “descriptions.”

Additionally some codes required redefinition at higher- or lower-levels when initial definitions of these codes appeared too narrow or broad. “Not being taken seriously” surfaced as strong theme in this study and was initially coded as a higher-order theme. As data analysis continued to unfold, “not being taken seriously” assumed more definitional qualities as women explained this struggle as a core characteristic of doing entrepreneurship. Based on these somewhat narrow descriptions, “not being taken seriously” was redefined as a “definitional” feature of entrepreneurship. Lastly, as some codes initially described as lower-order or sub-categories within one higher code surfaced as more descriptive of a different higher-order code, changing the higher-classification structure within the template took place (King, 2006). I originally

classified “not being taken seriously” as a tension. As “not being taken seriously” is more of a struggle and more descriptive of “discursive constructions” rather than “relational tensions,” I changed the higher-classification structure of the template to reflect this issue.

Atlas TI was used to “index segments of the texts to particular themes, to link research notes to coding, and to carry out complex search and retrieve options” (King, 2006, p. 263). Interpretation of results struck a balance between selectivity and openness. While it was salient to identify and explore themes that surfaced with a great deal of central relevance to the task of constructing a greater understanding of gender, entrepreneurship and communicative contradictions, it was equally important to adopt a sense of openness during interpretation. As to not disregard themes that were of marginal relevance but served a useful role in augmenting the background features of the study, open investigation of “excluded” themes occurred throughout the data analysis and interpretation processes. This openness also allowed coding to move beyond the linear, hierarchical template and evolve into a scheme characterized by complex relationships between higher- and lower-order themes. In this case, a matrix was reflexively created to depict the intricate relational patterns that surfaced between and within higher- and lower-order codes.

In keeping with thematic analysis a hierarchical coding scheme was developed in a reflexive manner. Codes were condensed, collapsed and added throughout the analysis portion of this study and after a final sweep of the data, a hierarchical coding scheme emerged revealing higher-order themes driven by several categories of secondary codes

and tertiary codes. The higher-order codes in this study surfaced as discursive constructions of entrepreneurship, the social dialectics of entrepreneurship and strategies for managing tensions. These broad codes, again, can be broken down by secondary codes, which can be further dissected by tertiary codes. The following example depicts this hierarchical coding scheme.

Hierarchical Coding Scheme Sample

To further demonstrate the hierarchical coding scheme adopted in this study, consider the theme of “discursive constructions of entrepreneurship.” Several themes clustered around this higher-order category including definitions and descriptions participants provided of what the terms “entrepreneurship” and “business-ownership” meant to them. As the predefined code of “discursive constructions” was developed based on pilot study findings, I speculated that all of my participants would define or describe themselves as entrepreneurs and/or business-owners. To my surprise, only the business-owner group defined themselves using these terms. Sole-proprietors defined themselves based on the practice they engaged in and direct sales business-owners defined themselves by titles given to them through parent organizations. As themes from these finding emerged from the data, I reflexively categorized the terms “entrepreneurs/business-owners” and “practice-based” as “definitions” that stemmed from the “the discursive constructions” of women’s entrepreneurship. The following figure is a snapshot of one of the hierarchical themes that emerged within this study (discursive constructions – definitions). Please refer to Appendix C for a visual example

of the entire coding scheme used in this research. Figure 1 presents a snapshot of the hierarchical coding scheme adopted by this study.

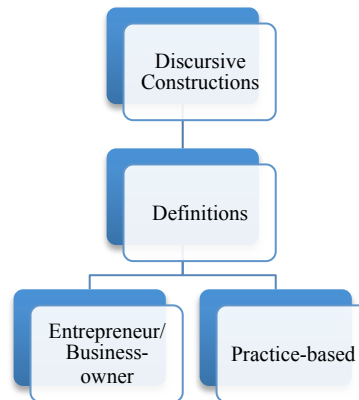


Figure 1. Hierarchical Coding Scheme Sample

Summary

The current project adopts an interpretive approach that prioritizes “participants” rather than the “researchers’ meanings” (Pitts, Flower, Kaplan, Nussbaum, & Becker, 2009). Through an interpretive lens, this study explores the experiences of women entrepreneurs drawn from three categories of entrepreneurial activity. Phase I was a pilot study using a focus group that was designed to refine the focus of the dissertation. Phase II consisted of 30 interviews with women entrepreneurs who engage three categories of entrepreneurial activity: (1) sole proprietorship, (2) business ownership, and (3) direct sales business-ownership. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 report the analyses generated by from the interviews.

CHAPTER IV
THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS AND DIALECTICS OF WOMEN'S
SOLE-PROPRIETORSHIP

In this chapter I address the experiences of women engaged in sole-proprietorship (SP) including the discursive constructions of sole-proprietorship, the tensions women sole-proprietors experience through their work and personal priorities, and how they manage these tensions. Women in this subset of data worked in a “sole” capacity and did not employ workers to assist them in their daily work practices.

The Discursive Constructions of Sole-Proprietorship

Three important themes emerged regarding the discursive construction of entrepreneurship by the sole-proprietors. These themes are: (1) motivations for becoming a sole-proprietor including appealing characteristics of sole-proprietorship, sole proprietorship as a choice, feeling pushed into sole-proprietorship, (2) definitions of entrepreneurship and sole-proprietorship including practice-based descriptors, defining moments of sole-proprietorship and “not being taken seriously,” and (3) descriptions of the sole-proprietor as a “go-between” or “middleman.” The following sections detail these three themes as well as the complex and sinuous nature of what it means to enact entrepreneurship to the sole-proprietor.

Motivations for Becoming a Sole-Proprietor

Sole-proprietors offered various stories when describing what motivated them to become entrepreneurs including choosing to engage in sole-proprietorship for personal

reasons and feeling “pushed” into sole-proprietorship due to discouraging practices experienced in previous working roles. Two primary themes surfaced as women spoke about why they chose to build their sole enterprises: (1) some women chose to become sole-proprietors to continue a family business and (2) many sole-proprietors reported feeling “pushed” or “forced” into sole-proprietorship after experiencing differential treatment while working for firms or partnerships where they “out-earned” their male counterparts. These next sections demonstrate why women chose sole-proprietorship and how they felt “pushed” or “forced” into innovating their own sole practices.

Sole-proprietorship by choice. Some sole-proprietors described the decision to become an entrepreneur as a “choice.” Women who felt as though opening their own business was a conscious choice connected their decision to personal or familial narratives. Many of them had inherited a family business or made the decision to become an entrepreneur because they came from a family where one or more parents modeled the spirit of entrepreneurialism. Additionally, some of the women who “chose” to become entrepreneurs cited personal reasons such as wanting to be their own boss, wanting to work directly with their own clients or gaining personal freedom through business-ownership. Here are a few excerpts from women who “chose” the path of sole-proprietorship because of family history:

I felt like I had the ability. I didn’t know that much about running a business but my dad ran his own business for quite some time, and so I had a resource to ask questions about the business.

– *Owner of lighting design firm, describing being able to run a business because of the entrepreneurial precedent her father set for her*

My family runs a family business. My father was a commercial developer and worked for a company named Dotson out of Rikesdale, that’s no longer around.

He went to work for them in the early 80s and was with them for about eighteen years. When he decided to leave, he formed Rikesdale Properties and started his own commercial development business. He had been doing that. He started that in '98 and then when I graduated from Southwest University and started my Masters, he asked if I would come and see if it was something that interested me. Instead of it really being a test run, I started in June 2003, and by October 2003 he sold me the business.

- *Owner of a commercial real estate development firm, speaking about following in her father's footsteps and continuing his commercial development business*

The first narrative provided by a lighting engineer depicts the “choice” to engage in sole-proprietorship as logical career path because she “felt like [she] had the ability” as she observed her father running a business “for quite some time.” The second story offered by a commercial real estate developer describes how and when her father “sold [her] the business.” For these entrepreneurs, “running a business” and innovating a solo practice were sensible actions inspired by a family precedent and is connected with family identity.

Pushed into sole-proprietorship. The majority of the participants in this group cited feeling “pushed” into entrepreneurship for two reasons: (1) many women in this group described “out-earning” senior partners and employers at previous firms and venturing out on their own as a logical consequence of not being promoted to owner/partner (many of these firms being primarily owned by men) and, (2) sole-proprietors were “nudged” in the direction of entrepreneurship because of unappealing bureaucratic constraints associated with working for large corporations in the past. The following examples demonstrate how women were overlooked for promotions in previous occupations.

I came out of law school and worked for Walter Schmidt who has a large firm in Hartsberg doing personal injury work, and after a year of practicing with him, I decided that I had brought in more business than any of the other partners in the firm, and he was paying 10% of what you brought in, plus your salary. One check from the cases I was bringing in was my entire annual salary in attorney's fees and I just decided that it didn't make any sense. So, I left. I came out and practiced primarily personal injury and delinquent tax work, and I started expanding into family law practice. It was just probably a combination of legislature coming down hard on personal injury attorneys, making it more difficult to practice...And me just being good at doing family law work, being able to do client control. That sort of swayed me more into family law and ultimately I just became a family law practitioner, because I was wedged into it.

– *Owner of a law firm, describing how she was “wedged” into sole-proprietorship*

E: I felt like I was bringing in so much business there. One year I brought in even 45% of the business for the office, and there were two owners. When I talked to them about ownership, one of them was in favor of it, one of them wasn't. And with the 50/50 ownership agreement, if they're both not on board, nothing happens. It kind of evolved from that. I also had clients who were coming to me, wanting - sometimes there's some minority requirements. I felt like I was turning away business. I felt like that was really dumb, because people wanted to just give it to me.

R: Ok.

E: I basically told my previous employers, 'I'm going to do this with or without you. We can figure it out or we can't.' I probably talked to them about it for a year and a half, and then I said, 'Ok, I'm moving on.'

– *Owner of a landscape architecture firm, speaking about how she brought in more business and as a consequence felt pushed into opening her own agency*

These stories demonstrate that women felt “forced” into sole-proprietorship because their talents were underappreciated in previous working roles. In the first story an attorney describes how “it didn't make sense” to work for “10% of what you brought in” when what she brought in was worth more than her annual salary. Because she felt underpaid and underappreciated by this previous employer she eventually moved into opening her own practice. She then describes feeling “wedged” into practicing as a family attorney. The second narrative provided by a landscape architect highlights

bringing in “45% of the business for the office.” After addressing this with the male partners of the agency, one owner was not “on board” with making her a partner so she ultimately decided to move into practice for herself. She also mentions feeling “dumb” for “turning away business” as her services in the landscape architecture field were in high demand by local contractors because of her woman/minority status. Thus, venturing “without” her partners was her only option after “a year and a half” of discussing a potential partnership.

Nudged into entrepreneurship. While feeling discouraged and underappreciated were cited as reasons for “moving on” for many sole-proprietors, others felt like it was a logical next step due to corporate constraints. Many women in this sub-sample previously worked for other firms, agencies and corporations and cited feeling “turned off” by traditional corporate practices. SPs preferred the organizational structure of sole-proprietorship or business-ownership rather than a larger bureaucratic structure where they were “ beholden” to a “boss” rather than the “clients.” These two sole-proprietors describe feeling drawn to entrepreneurship because of the limitations large corporations placed on them:

It was having to be responsible for keeping track of every hour and you know, it was just the bureaucratic aspect of it. The higher up you got into management in a corporate world, the further you got away from actually practicing architecture. They closed the office and several others right after 9/11, because about 70% of their work was Eastern Airlines, and it just stopped. So they kind of circled the wagons. They had an office in London and one in Miami that they closed. It was the best thing that ever happened to us, because we had agreed to do this thinking that there was a lot of security in working in a big corporation. There were paychecks, benefits, all of those kinds of things, and we were so unhappy, both of us. It was the best thing. It’s kind of scary when you go out on your own, and you’re having to find projects and keep the business going, we’re so much more

happier, though. If you're going to work sixty hours a week, you need to be working for yourself.

– *Owner of a commercial architecture firm, discussing sole-proprietorship as the best alternative to working for a large corporation*

I always felt like I was beholden to my clients more than I was to my boss, so maybe that wasn't going to work at the next place either. What the clients wanted was paramount and their deadlines were my deadlines, and as much as that should be what the boss wants as well, sometimes there's a little bit of a cross purpose. I wanted to have one boss – my clients, instead of two.

– *Owner of a lighting design firm, describing feeling more “beholden” to her clients than a corporate “boss”*

These accounts demonstrate how some sole-proprietors gravitate towards the “sole” nature of business-ownership where they can focus specifically on their craft and their clients. For instance, a commercial architect argues, “the higher you go up in management,” “the further you got away from actually practicing architecture.” She further describes feeling so “unhappy” even with traditional corporate perks such as steady paychecks and benefits. She states, “If you're going to work sixty hours a week, you need to be working for yourself.” Working for oneself, allows business-owners to focus on meaningful concerns such as clients and the practice of architecture. In the second narrative a lighting engineer describes her distaste for large corporate structures where workers are bound by bosses and “corporate deadlines.” Being “beholden” to a “boss” confines her as she feels her “client's deadlines” are her “deadlines” (rather than deadlines imposed by an employer). These stories illuminate how some entrepreneurs felt “nudged” into sole-proprietorship because working for a bureaucracy was a “turn off.” These choices, nudges and forced decisions emerged as sole-proprietors described their motivation for engaging in entrepreneurship. Similar accounts emerged as SPs defined what it meant to enact sole-proprietorship and entrepreneurship.

Defining Sole-Proprietorship and Entrepreneurship

SPs largely did not connect with the term “entrepreneur” and oftentimes did not describe themselves as “business-owners.” However, many of them identified with certain characteristics of entrepreneurship such as freedom and flexibility. When asked what they liked most about owning their own business enterprise, nearly all of the sole-proprietors referenced or used these terms. They contended that the freedom and flexibility that accompanies sole-proprietorship often comes with a price that can create contradictions for many women SPs to work through. In many of the narratives provided that highlight this contradiction, women spoke about how the freedom and flexibility gained through sole-proprietorship felt confining as they dealt with client demands and risks associated with building an enterprise while balancing work and personal obligations. Sole-proprietorship, according to these women, is riddled with complexities related to functioning as a sole figurehead at work and at home. Stories that illustrate how women appreciate the freedom and flexibility attained through sole-proprietorship but simultaneously feel limited by this role emerged from this data:

Yeah, my schedule is totally flexible but at the same time, there’s not an hour in the day that I don’t have to be available, which is somewhat difficult. I think that’s probably the hardest challenge for women owned businesses, is that we want to be in this world of business and own our own businesses and run our own show, we still are expected to be a mom at the end of the day. It’s a hard line to draw in the sand on when that switch gets turned on and off.

– *Owner of a commercial development firm, speaking about the limitations that come with sole-proprietorship*

I think the word that comes to mind for me is freedom or flexibility. Within limits, of course.

– *Owner of a human relations consulting practice, speaking about the freedom and flexibility of entrepreneurship as well as the “limits”*

These two quotations demonstrate the “freedom” and “flexibility” associated with doing sole-proprietorship comes with “limits, of course.” In other words, although many women worked very hard to establish prominent and meaningful businesses because of gendered and bureaucratic constraints experienced in the past, these same women experienced different constraints associated with being an entrepreneur. The latter statement provided by a human relations consultant captures this idea succinctly. She states that she enjoys the “freedom and flexibility” of business-ownership, “with limits, of course.” In the first account provided by a commercial real estate developer, she expands this idea by addressing how “flexible” her position as sole-proprietor is, “but at the same time,” she argues, “there’s not an hour in the day that I don’t have to be available.” Other sole-proprietors echoed this theme of “freedom with limits.” These accounts highlight the “limits” associated with choosing to engage in sole-proprietorship and/or being “nudged” into entrepreneurship. Perhaps these “limits” shape the way sole-proprietors view the concept of business-ownership, as many women in this sub-sample provided limited definitions and descriptions of the terms entrepreneurship and sole-proprietorship.

Practice-based constructions. None of the sole-proprietors described themselves as entrepreneurs and many of them drew out distinctions between business-ownership and entrepreneurship. Try as I may to retrieve information that was indicative that participants saw themselves as entrepreneurs, it was very obvious to me after reviewing the data that many sole-proprietors simply do not view themselves as entrepreneurs and construct a very distinct definition of what “entrepreneurship” means to them. Two

prominent themes emerged as women explained how they describe their occupation to others: (1) SPs describe themselves based on their practice, rather than their roles as business-owners and, (2) SPs have a very narrow vision of what “entrepreneurship” is and argue that sole-proprietorship does not align well with this vision.

Nearly all of my participants described their occupation based on their professional practice rather than as “business-owner” or “entrepreneur.” Many women in this sub-sample engaged in professional practices that required some sort of training, license, certification and/or degree(s). For instance, practices represented in this group of business-owners included commercial architecture, landscape architecture, litigation, lighting design, human resources consultant, public relations consultant, corporate wellness consultant, and copywriter/editor, to name a few. Thus, several SPs described themselves by their practice (e.g., “I tell people I’m an attorney”) rather than their roles as business-owners (e.g., “I tell people I own my own law practice”). This practice-based theme surfaced frequently throughout this sub-sample of data:

E: I typically tell them that I’m in industrial property management.

R: Do you say different things to clients and colleagues? Do you tell them you’re a business owner, or do you tell them you’re an industrial property manager?

E: I never reference myself as a business owner. Never.

– *Owner of a commercial real estate development firm, describing herself as an industrial property manager rather than a business-owner*

R: When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you usually say?

E: That I’m an architect.

R: So you don’t usually say that, ‘I’m a business owner,’ or an entrepreneur?

E: No, no. It’s the professional aspect, no.

R: Do you see yourself as an entrepreneur?

R: No.

– *Owner of a commercial architecture firm, describing herself as an architect rather than an entrepreneur*

R: Okay. When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you usually say?

E: That I am a corporate wellness program director.

R: Do you ever describe yourself as a business owner or an entrepreneur?

E: Not really.

– *Owner of a corporate wellness consulting practice, describing herself a program director rather than an entrepreneur*

There is a great deal of overlap between these conversations with three different sole-proprietors. All three dialogues involve a sole-proprietor describing themselves by their practice rather than the title of business-owner, sole-proprietor or entrepreneur. The first sole-proprietor describes herself as “an industrial property manager” and “never” references herself as a “business-owner.” In the second conversation an architect describes herself as “an architect” and attests that she rarely describes herself as a business-owner. She goes on to say that she does not view herself as an entrepreneur. The last sole-proprietor, a corporate wellness consultant, thinks of herself as a “program director” and doesn’t “really” see herself as a business-owner or entrepreneur. These constructions of entrepreneurship and business-ownership are very interesting as they demonstrate that many sole-proprietors do not see or describe themselves as entrepreneurs. Women in this sub-sample provided specific explanations as to why they do not define themselves as entrepreneurs and many drew out distinctions between entrepreneurship and small business-ownership.

To the sole-proprietor, an entrepreneur is a visionary who creates a grand vision and an innovative idea or product, and maintains a large organization with many employees. Several sole-proprietors referenced famous entrepreneurs such as Steve Jobs (Apple, Inc.), Mary Kay (Mary Kay, Inc.) and Sara Blakely (Spanx, Inc.) when

describing “real entrepreneurs.” And some sole-proprietors described keen distinctions between the enactment of business-ownership and entrepreneurship. Consider the following statements where three different sole-proprietors offer definitions of business-ownership and entrepreneurship:

Anybody can have some ideas. Anybody can do their best to bring it out of the ground and make it happen, but an owner runs everything day-to-day. You can start something and hand it off to somebody. That’s an entrepreneur – they start a business, and get it going, then they can sell it and walk away from it. A business owner has to work every day to make sure it’s still there tomorrow, so yes. A big difference.

– *Owner of a commercial real estate development practice, describing the difference between “business-owner” and “entrepreneur”*

I don’t feel what I’m doing is being all that innovative or different. I know a fair number of people that are doing the same thing I’m doing. Maybe that’s just the way I think about an entrepreneur. I always think of an entrepreneur as someone who has some great, new, interesting, unique idea or going out and doing their own thing and forging new paths and stuff like that. Maybe that’s not the right definition of entrepreneur, but that’s usually the way that I think of an entrepreneur. I don’t see myself as really doing that. I see myself as working independently and certainly managing my own business, but I don’t see it as being anything really unique, I guess, because I know so many other people that are doing this, too.

– *Owner of a human resources consulting practice, offering her definition of entrepreneurship*

If I had to pick one, I would probably say small business owner. To me, entrepreneur - I know it’s not right, - but to me entrepreneur implies like the woman who came up with Spanx. Like someone that comes up with something and becomes a bazillionaire, or Steve Jobs or something. I think it’s probably more tangible, that product, versus service. To me, entrepreneur implies product. That’s probably not the truth but it does.

– *Owner of a public relations practice, describing entrepreneurship as product-driven*

Two important features related to the term “entrepreneur” surfaced as sole-proprietors offered definitions of entrepreneurship and business-ownership: (1) there is a difference between entrepreneurship and business-ownership, and (2) entrepreneurship

specifically involves “starting” or innovating an idea or a product and business-ownership involves “running” a business. In the first description, the owner of a commercial property development practice stipulates that “anyone can have an idea” but a business-owner “runs everything day-to-day.” Thus, she describes the distinction between business-owner and entrepreneur as - innovation versus “running things.” In the second account, the owner of a human resources consulting firm states, “I always think of an entrepreneur as someone who has some great, new, interesting, unique idea or going out and doing their own thing.” She then contends, “I don’t see myself as really doing that. I see myself as working independently” and “managing my own business.” So to this sole-proprietor, an entrepreneur creates a unique idea and a business-owner “manages” the day-to-day operations of their business. Lastly, a public relations firm owner clearly defines an entrepreneur as “Sara Blakely” or “Steve Jobs” as these two visionaries created unique “products.” She directly defines entrepreneurship as innovating a “product,” which is not something she offers (public relations consulting is a service-driven practice rather than a product-driven business). All three of these accounts demonstrate that sole-proprietors have clear definitions of entrepreneurship and business-ownership and while many sole-proprietors think of themselves as business-owners who “run things,” they rarely define themselves as “visionary” entrepreneurs. Participants offered interesting descriptions of entrepreneurship and business-ownership as well as intriguing narratives related to their roots as sole-proprietors.

Work with a history. Sole-proprietors provided historical narratives that detailed the evolution of their practices through present circumstances. Many of these

narratives took on a gendered tone as women recounted being treated differently than their male counterparts as they were starting out as sole-proprietors. They would recount these stories with a great deal of enthusiasm and almost wore these narratives as metaphorical badges of honor as they described themselves then and now, and how much they and their perceptions of gender inequities have evolved over the years. It was never stated outright, but it appeared that many of these women considered themselves to be pioneers of sorts, charting out new entrepreneurial territory for the women business-owners of future generations (Gill & Ganesh, 2007). Undoubtedly, these historical narratives detailing sole-proprietor “roots” impacted their definitions of entrepreneurship and sole-proprietorship. Several of these narratives emerged in this study:

That was a really hard challenge, being on job sites when we have projects and we have all of the construction project meetings, 95% of the time I was the only woman on the site.

– *Owner of a landscape architecture practice, describing being the only woman present at certain project sites*

You know, I think it’s changed since I started, even. I started in 1993. Probably when I first started, it was a lot more male-dominated than now. Now the people coming out of school are more than 50% female in the [Southwest].

E: Really.

R: And more than 50% of our judges in Trifork County even are female.

– *Attorney and owner of a law practice, describing the legal industry as “male-dominated”*

When I first started working, which was twenty-five years ago, I told my father when I was thirteen I was going to be an architect, and he was an aeronautical engineer, so I thought I was kind of a kindred spirit. He said, ‘Oh my gosh, you will struggle all your life because it’s such a man’s world.’ I mean, construction in the Southwest back then it was. But I persevered and got through it and you struggle. I think things changed dramatically. I think they’re changing. When I was in school, I was one of three women in my class. Now, women outnumber. It’s generally 51%.

- *Owner of an architecture firm, detailing how she persevered in a man’s world*

Many SPs described past difficulties associated with being the only women present on a job site or at a professional meeting. The above statement provided by the owner of a landscape architecture firm illustrates this particular struggle clearly. She describes being the only woman present at project meetings “95%” of the time when she struck out on her own. She also described this minority status as a “hard challenge.” The excerpt provided by a family attorney and sole-practitioner demonstrates the masculine nature of the legal industry. When she first “started out” the legal industry was “male-dominated” but now at least “50%” of judges in the county where she practices are “female.” The owner of a commercial architecture firm also describes the “construction” industry as a “man’s world.” Several sole-proprietors described the industry they practiced in as “male-dominated” when they started out as sole-proprietors but as time passed “things changed dramatically.”

Historical narratives where women either expressed discomfort with being the “only woman” present at professional events or, “persevering” in a “man’s world” as practitioners and sole-proprietors emerged frequently in the data provided by this group of participants. Based on these accounts, being and doing sole-proprietorship involves “adjusting” to masculine industries and “persevering” as sole-proprietors in a “man’s world.” Several SPs also discussed “being taken seriously” as a discursive theme embedded within these narratives. For many of these participants a delicate balance drives how you interact with different constituents (vendors, contractors, colleagues,

judges, etc.) and that balancing act can hinge largely on what type of industry your business is embedded within, and how masculine or feminine the field is.

Not being taken seriously. Many sole-proprietors struggled with gaining professional credibility (“street cred” as one participant phrased it) with practiced colleagues (both male and female), as outdated gender stereotypes still persist in certain industries. Moreover, women in this group struggled with being taken seriously while enacting what they perceived to be important entrepreneurial practices such as being assertive and fitting in with male colleagues and business-owners. Some of the statements below reflect the difficulties experienced by sole-proprietors as they worked through these prejudices while practicing their trades and enacting business-ownership:

And in a construction trailer, you know, they probably would have discussions about things that they can't have when I'm sitting in the room. Not that that's a good or bad thing, it's just an adjustment. I think it was an adjustment for everybody and it was an adjustment for me, learning to be comfortable in the fact that I'm serving a role. Because I'm managing these projects and required to report back to the owner, I have to know every facet of what's going on and that requires me being in situations that most men aren't used to having a woman there. It was what it was.

– *Owner of a commercial real estate development practice, describing working in situations where she struggled to be taken seriously by her male colleagues*

You know what? I started in this industry twenty-three years ago, and I went to the IES, stands for the Illuminating Engineers Society and it's one of the groups in this industry and I wasn't the only woman in there. I was the youngest one, but there were three in the group of 25, and it really did feel like it was the old boys network and I was trying to crack in. And I wasn't taken seriously.

– *Owner of a lighting design firm, describing not being “taken seriously” by the “old boys network”*

For me, it's a challenge being taken seriously... I don't ever feel like... I do now, but when I originally started, I didn't feel like I was really taken that seriously because I was in a man's business. Men are in the development and construction business.

- *Owner of a commercial architecture firm, describing not being “taken seriously” in the male-dominated construction industry*

By these accounts sole-proprietors struggle to be “taken seriously” as practitioners *and* as business-owners. The first description reflects this struggle as the owner of a commercial property development practice speaks out about “being in situations” where “most men aren’t used to having a woman” present. She later described “listening” and “observing” as her interaction style while in these situations, as her male colleagues needed time to acclimate to her presence. During these situations, “It was what it was,” she contends. The owner of a lighting design firm described being one of few women in her professional engineering society (Industrial Engineering Society). She describes not being “taken seriously” by the “old boys network” that dominated dialogue at these society gatherings. Lastly, a commercial architect speaks about not “being taken seriously” in “a man’s world” as the development and construction industry is male-dominated. These statements demonstrate that women in this sub-sample struggle to be taken seriously as property developers, lighting engineers, architects, consultants *and* as business-owners. And they attribute this struggle directly to being female and doing work as female sole-proprietors. One participant eloquently phrased this struggle as one that involves “selecting voice”:

I feel like one thing that women have to do that men don’t have to do is be conscious of the voice with which you are speaking. We have to have very specific voices for the different elements of our business relationships, especially in the law. If you don’t, then you’re going to either lose credibility, because you’re going to be tagged as a bitch, or you’re going to lose face because you’re going to be tagged as being too weak. I think I have probably three or four different voices that I use to cover those different relationships, probably some of which come from being a woman, because men don’t have to do that. A man can use the same voice to talk to a female court coordinator as they can to talk to

another attorney as they can to talk to their clients. Whereas I have to change how I present myself, in order to maintain good relationships with these people, because any level of consistent aggression is perceived as being nasty.

- *Owner of a family law practice, discussion how she wisely “selects” a “voice when speaking to different constituents.*

The fight to be “taken seriously” according to this sole-practitioner can be directly connected to selecting the appropriate “voice” when addressing certain colleagues. She argues that women “have to have very specific voices for the different elements of our business relationships.” If a woman does not choose her “voice” wisely, she’s “tagged as a bitch” or she loses “face” because she is “tagged as being too weak.” This attorney has three or four “voices” in which she addresses different constituents and she argues that this “voice selection” is directly tied to being a female professional. “A man can use the same voice” to talk to multiple constituents but a woman has to alter how she presents herself in order to “maintain good relationships.” This excerpt illustrates a struggle that is unique to the female sole-proprietor and it highlights another important theme relative to sole-proprietorship: balancing and accommodating a host of different constituents (e.g. clients, vendors, contractors, property-owners, leasing agents, etc.) that frequently present competing demands.

Describing Sole-Proprietorship

The “Go-Between.” Many sole-proprietors inherited businesses from their families or took clients and contacts with them when exiting previous firms where they were “out-earning” male partners. Subsequently, the majority of SPs spent a “typical day” maintaining relationships and connections with a variety of constituents including clients, contractors, vendors, tenants, colleagues and family members. Each of these

constituents presented competing deadlines to the sole-proprietor. In an effort to meet these competing deadlines and maintain business and personal relationships, SPs served as “go betweens” or “middlemen” as they strove to accommodate constituents who required different services from the sole-proprietor. And while a majority of sole-proprietors described “multi-party accommodation” as one of their greatest struggles, they also defined this process as one of their greatest joys. The owner of a lighting design firm described this struggle as accommodating a “cast of characters.” Interacting with this “cast of characters” was one of her favorite aspects of owning her own lighting design firm:

We had three or four meetings in one day, and when you’re on a design team, you’re on a team. It’s not usually just one person you’re meeting with unless it’s the architect and the interior designer and the landscape architect and the structural engineer or the contractor or someone. I term it like cast of characters. It’s a different cast of characters for every project and I love that. I love that these people might be really gruff and get to the point and these people are more southern hospitality and they want to sit and visit for a while. That’s nice, too. These other people really want to ask lots of questions and they’re really probing and they want an education from me as much as they want a lighting design service. That’s cool. I like figuring out the different people.

– *Owner of a lighting design firm, speaking about accommodating a complex “cast of characters”*

This particular sole-proprietor went on to state, “I love the fact that I have these different projects and every day it’s a different kind of meeting, different people you’re working with.” While she provided a specific example of serving as a “go-between” and the joy it brought her in an average workday, other sole-proprietors provided general descriptions of their roles as “middlemen.”

I’m usually in the park at least once a week, sometimes twice a week, either if I have a meeting with a tenant to deal with an issue, or just driving through the park to make sure our landscape companies are doing what they’re supposed to

do, or giving somebody access to a space so repairs can be made or whatever. That's a weekly deal. 70% of my day I'm at a computer working on any given report. A lot of my interaction with tenants or clients is all via phone. I've got one set of owners that are in Atlanta and another set of owners that are in Boston.

– *Owner of a commercial real estate development firm, describing her role as “middleman” between tenants, landscape companies and local and remote clients*

A lot of time during the day I'm returning clients' calls or emails or getting new projects. A lot of our clients are repeat clients, fortunately, so they'll be like 'Here's another one. Here's another project.' I try to get all the proposal stuff to them and get that out. Just coordinating deadlines, coordinating project requirements, attending meetings. I feel like my day is filled with a lot of that. That's why I work at night – to do real work.

– *Owner of a landscape architecture firm, talking about being a “go-between” while coordinating deadlines for multiple clients*

The nature of my job is to really be extremely personable and accommodating. Accommodating to the clients, accommodating to reporters. It's a lot of trying to make things as easy as possible for somebody.

– *Owner of a public relations practice, speaking about accommodating multiple parties as natural part of her job*

These accounts provide further definition to the concepts of “business-owner” and “sole-proprietor.” For SPs, part of being and doing business-ownership and sole-proprietorship involves serving as a “go-between” or “middleman” amongst many different constituents. This is simply the “nature” of sole-proprietorship, as the owner of a public relations practice stated. Serving as a “go-between,” accommodating “clients” and providing “accommodation to reporters” is part and parcel with enacting sole-proprietorship as she works to bridge journalists and reporters with local media organizations. The owner of a landscape architecture firm provides a similar description as she talks about “coordinating deadlines, coordinating project requirements, attending meetings” as common practices in a “typical day.” For this reason she labors in the evenings “to do real work.” Lastly, a commercial property developer spoke very

candidly about accommodating tenants, property owners, landscape companies and a large client-base (both local and remote). This particular sole-proprietor later described herself as a “middleman” between these different clients and colleagues. These examples demonstrate that the “sole” nature of being and doing “sole-proprietorship” involves serving as a connector amongst many different collegial groups where the sole-proprietor’s primary role is to “accommodate everyone.” This “middleman” or connector status applied to the sole-proprietor’s personal sphere as well.

Go between at home. As many of these women operated their practices solely by themselves, they often did not find it financially necessary or feasible to lease physical workspace to conduct their business. Several sole-proprietors operated their businesses from home and for the women who had spouses or domestic partners, balancing work/life obligations while working from home constituted a large portion of their daily efforts. Many women in this sub-sample had spouses who maintained organizational employment with traditional perks (e.g. steady paycheck, separate office space). Since sole-proprietorship was viewed as “flexible” by these spouses (as SPs could set their own pay scale and working hours), the bulk of home and personal responsibilities fell solely on the sole-proprietor’s shoulders. Several sole-proprietors described serving as a “go-between” while working from home as they were primarily responsible for childcare, pediatrician visits, school deadlines, paying bills, caregiving obligations and running their practice because their work was perceived as “flexible.”

Despite family status, if a sole-proprietor worked from home they were primarily responsible for the home “turf” as well as the business “turf.” As guardians of both

home and work domains, sole-proprietors served as connectors or “go-betweens” amongst their business constituents and “middlemen” who shuttled between work and home obligations. This work/home struggle was a dominant discursive theme throughout the sole-proprietor data set. Consider the following narratives that illustrate sole-proprietors serving as a “middlemen” at work and at home:

I work at home. I try to come home. I think as a woman business owner, this is a different challenge that we face. I'll give you an example: Katie gets sick. My husband still gets up at 5:30am, leaves, goes to the gym, does his thing, goes to work all day, and comes home at 5:30pm. His day is not altered in any form or fashion by our daughter being sick. Should I work? If I didn't work for myself and I actually worked for somebody else – and I remind him of this often – he wouldn't get all of his vacation time for vacation if I had a full-time job working for some large company. We'd each have a certain number of vacation days, and each time Katie gets sick one of us gets to take turns taking a day. I think it's a luxury that he doesn't realize he has.

– *Owner of a commercial development practice, describing how she's a “middleman” between work and home obligations when her daughter gets sick*

(After interacting with clients) - And then, this is what makes it fun for me, interspersed in there is all kinds of family responsibilities. Taking my kids to school or driving them to little league practice or running to the dry cleaners or whatever for a personal side I need to get done during the day gets intermixed in there, too, in a typical day for me.

– *Owner of a human resources consulting practice, describing a “typical day” that involves accommodating both work and family obligations*

Stories such as these surfaced as sole-proprietors spoke about maintaining their personal and professional relationships while serving as “middlemen” or “go-betweens” when balancing work and personal demands. The owner of a commercial development agency describes this struggle as unique to the “woman business-owner.” Her husband, who is employed by a large organization has the “luxury” of taking “vacation” days and “going to the gym” whenever he desires because his workdays are more structured.

Because this commercial property developer can work from anywhere and has a more “flexible” schedule, she assumes primary responsibility for her business obligations and attending to her daughter when she falls ill. The second story, offered by the owner of a human resources consulting practice, depicts a “typical day” where she solely assumes countless responsibilities related to her business that is “interspersed” with “all kinds of family responsibilities.” These stories highlight a theme where SPs serve as a hub or connection point in two different and competing realms – work and home. Furthermore, these stories underscore distinct tensions between work and personal accommodations that sole-proprietors seek to balance.

The Social Dialectics of Sole-Proprietorship

Sole-proprietors reported experiencing a unique dialectical tension related to enacting entrepreneurship in a “sole” capacity. The following sections articulate this tension as a work – home dialectic. Additionally, the tension management strategies sole-proprietors invoked to balance this work - home dialectic are explained.

Articulating the Work – Home Dialectic

Women participants in the sole-proprietor group frequently expressed feeling torn as they served as “middlemen” while accommodating multiple parties. This concern manifested into a work – home tension that women struggled to resolve. Two themes characterize this tension: (1) sole-proprietors are charged with wearing many hats and are solely responsible for the success or failure of their businesses. In this role of wearing many hats, SPs strive to accommodate a host of different people with competing demands that only the sole-proprietor can meet and, (2) this can prove to be

very challenging as sole-proprietors navigate personal and professional spheres while assuming multiple roles as work and home are often wrapped into one physical entity. The following sections describe these features and expand on definitions of the “work” and “home” poles of this dialectical tension.

The work pole. Tensions related to multi-party accommodation emerged in this subset of data as women described a “typical day.” This multi-party accommodation required sole-proprietors to serve as “go-betweens” or “middlemen” as they shifted “hats” while moving in and out of different conversations with different “casts of characters.” Many participants in this group discussed how maintaining connections through multi-party accommodation was a key construct of their jobs and one that they truly enjoyed. However, this dimension of enacting sole-proprietorship facilitated a pronounced tension where participants sought to meet the needs of all parties involved in a business transaction or project. As previously referenced, a typical day for the sole-proprietor involves accommodating a variety of stakeholders including clients, tenants, owners, vendors, contractors, consultants, judges, colleagues and customers, etc. Thus, a great deal of what the sole-proprietor does in her daily work routine is meet the needs of these stakeholders by serving as a nexus of communication between various constituents or professional connections. This places them in an exhausting role of accommodating competing interests and initiating tough conversations about deadlines and work demands with constituents on a fairly regular basis. The tough conversations and accommodating practices can be defined as the “work” pole of the work – home dialectical tension that surfaced in accounts provided by the sole-proprietors. Consider

the following descriptions provided by two entrepreneurs where they describe the “work” dialectic at length:

I’m the middleman between a tenant and an owner, so you’ve got a set of lease documents that’s kind of your bible that you go off of. You try to build relationships with tenants and try to keep them happy, and at the same time you’re trying to manage your owner and keep them happy, and that’s hard, trying to keep everybody happy and follow the rules.

– *Owner of a commercial development business, describing works to accommodate and keep everyone happy*

I’ve got four properties that I manage. I’ve got a huge project. I’ve got an association that I run. I have a business – my business. I have to make sure my business is run, make sure all of my expenses, all of my stuff is getting taken care of. People ask for things in any given day, so yeah. Managing my time. Being a sole proprietor, that is the hardest thing about it is managing your time. Figuring out when to ask for help or to figure out a way to get everything done.

– *The same owner of a commercial development business, describing how she feels torn between managing her business and keeping everyone happy*

As women described the “work” dialectic of the work - home tension where they served as “middlemen” and “go betweens,” they frequently used the terms “accommodation” and “accommodate.” The usage of these terms coupled with the statements above, indicates that women feel a strong “push” to be accommodating within the professional relationships they build and maintain as business-owners. Thus, pleasing, meeting the needs of and accommodating a diverse “cast of characters” are communicative activities that fuel the process of sole-proprietorship for women because they feel an intense desire to “accommodate” their business constituents.

Additionally, these narratives expand on the exhausting nature of “accommodating” for the sole-proprietor. The owner of a commercial development firm describes her work as functioning as a “middleman” where she strives to keep everyone (her tenants and property owners) “happy.” She then goes on to explain that while

keeping everyone “happy,” she manages four properties, is currently working on a complex project, runs an association and “I have a business – my business.” These statements depict a sole-proprietor who feels torn between the concerns of professional constituents and running a business enterprise. SPs described accommodation activities as emotionally draining. For instance, the owner of a public relations business attests to feeling “burnt out” from business-ownership where she is torn between multiple competing concerns:

You just get tired of being so accommodating to people. You take a lot of crap and you’re supposed to do it with a smile on your face and say, “Sure, let me see if I can help you figure it out.” Honestly, probably all business owners feel that way. They’re constantly trying to be accommodating, but I just want to do it in another way. I think I’m close to being burnt out.

– *Owner of a public relations business, describing how is burned out from accommodating multiple constituents as a component of business-ownership*

Again, as women who practice sole-proprietorship are “one-woman” businesses, they assume sole responsibility for accommodating competing demands from a host of professional “characters” while simultaneously accommodating needs that surface in their personal lives. The “work” pole certainly presented a challenge for sole-proprietors as they sought to accommodate the complex and varied concerns related to their work and personal lives. The tensions associated with accommodating business and personal relationships can be described as nested for sole-proprietors who worked from their residences, as work tensions were nested in family tensions and sole-proprietors would seek to manage this combination of tensions simultaneously.

The home or life pole. Sole-proprietors found it difficult to juggle many conversations with multiple parties, including parties embedded within their personal

lives. Overwhelmingly this group described the tension between “work” and “home” as a natural part of sole-proprietorship that presented forceful pushes and pulls within and between each pole. These pushes and pulls were especially poignant amongst the participants with children, spouses and domestic partners (7 out of 10 in this group). Several SPs described “accommodating” business constituents while simultaneously feeling “pulled” in multiple directions by spouses, domestic partners, children, friends and family. This tension seemed especially pertinent to sole-proprietors as they described a physical connection between the work ideals and family ideals. For the sole proprietor these competing ideals are integrated as SPs often worked out of or within close proximity to their homes. Several narratives were provided by SPs where they described feeling torn between work and personal obligations.

I have so many examples. I could start with this morning. Trying to get myself and animals fed and my child that has special needs ready and everybody out the door. My husband and his stuff and my child in college. We talked about it and have to go there this weekend. I have one that’s getting married and another that’s started her residency. I’ve got all these other people and then I’ve got to switch from looking at everybody else to looking at ok, here is the task that is at hand. And then I have people coming to me, telling me everything. I mean probably more than I really need or care to know, but I have to have a sense of a safety net talking to them about the most important thing is their health and how that filters out. And then in the middle of all of that, I had something happen to my glucose monitor and I’ve got to go deal with some lady who wants to make some report to the FDA that is not even relevant. And then I have the CFO come in to ask me a question about a report. So... there you go.

– *Owner of a corporate wellness consulting practice, describing how she feels torn between work demands and the demands of her differently abled child*

Well, I think the area where it gets tough for me sometimes is just the competing priorities between family and work. For example, and this happens all the time in my corporate world, if I have an early morning call, an early morning meeting that I’m taking the call from home, let’s say, and it’s overlapping with getting my kids on the bus, it’s very hard to manage those two conversations at the same time. I don’t hesitate to interact with people in any way. It’s just a multi-tasking

challenge more than anything else. I have to constantly remind myself, and my husband, although he's really pretty good about it, but I have to constantly remind us that I do have a full-time job. It just looks different because I happen to be at home more.

- *Owner of a human resources consulting practice, describing how “tough” it is to meet the needs of her business while simultaneously caring for her children*

Personally, professionally, every aspect. Now a year ago, I was a single girl living in a house I'd been in for 13 years, in love with a man who I didn't know if we were ever going to get engaged, and in that amount of time, he sold his house, we sold my house and we bought a house. His mother died, and we emptied that house, and then we got married. I tell him sometimes, I feel like everything in my life is half-assed. We're halfway unpacked, we're halfway settled in. I'm keeping the balls in the air with my clients and I went to a meeting today at 11:30 that I was not near as well prepared as I wanted to be.

- *Owner of a public consulting practice, describing how she feels like she is only “halfway” balancing her work and family obligations*

These examples demonstrate a work – home tension that appears to be unresolvable for the sole-proprietor. In each of these statements women present “work” ideals where they feel compelled to attend to their everyday work practices as sole-proprietors. Simultaneously, they attest to feeling pulled towards their children, unpacking their houses and picking their kids up from the bus. These descriptions demonstrate the “home” component of the work/home dialectic. Sole-proprietors feel torn between the competing ideals engrained in work and home because they care about both of these priorities tremendously. They describe spending a great deal of effort nurturing and growing their business relationships, while simultaneously nurturing and developing personal relationships. Women engaged in sole-proprietorship found it extremely difficult to accomplish both of these activities (nurturing business and personal relationships) simultaneously as these activities required “accommodation” from the sole-proprietor in competing ways.

This work – home dialectical tension can also be described as a work – life tension as a woman’s family status did not seem to determine whether she experienced this tension or not. Sole-proprietors in general felt very torn between work and personal obligations. For instance, the owner of a landscape architecture firm who described her family status as “single with zero children” spoke about experiencing “struggles” related to her “personal time and personal relationships” while simultaneously accommodating the “core” business relationships she maintains as a sole-proprietor.

E: I think there’s personal struggles. Personal time and personal relationships.

R: How personal relationships?

E: I think there’s so much time dedicated, especially to a young business. I have to be very... what’s the word I’m looking for? Intentional? About developing and keeping personal relationships, because it’s easy to neglect them. It’s not normal for a woman to do that. I think it’s more acceptable for man. Does that make sense?

R: So your business is essentially your relationship and it’s hard to juggle that big, core relationship around all the other relationships like family, friends, that kind of thing?

E: Yeah. I feel like those just get neglected.

– *Owner of a landscape architecture firm, describing how her personal relationships get neglected because of work demands*

This particular business-owner struggles with “developing and keeping personal relationships” because business demands force her to “neglect them.” “It’s not normal for a woman” to neglect her personal sphere, she argues. However, it’s more “acceptable” for a man to focus on his practice and neglect personal obligations. This conversation demonstrates that the work – life or work – home dialectical tension is not directly tied to family status, but rather one’s gender. The work - life tension as distinctly related to gender and sole-proprietorship emerged frequently as women described feeling pulled between accommodating business relationships while

simultaneously serving as a figurehead in their homes, marriages and personal relationships. Sole-proprietors found this dialectic difficult to balance as they demonstrated they could not attend to both priorities simultaneously. Participants often described concentrating on work obligations during their personal time, focusing on personal obligations at work, and maintaining an overall feeling that something was “slipping” regarding each of these priorities. Although women felt an intense desire to attend to both sets of priorities with their full attention, they found this dialectic to be unresolvable. They were never able to fully accommodate their personal and professional relationships simultaneously, but they did find some success in managing (rather than resolving) the work – home dialectic in interesting ways.

Managing the Work – Home Dialectic

Across this sub-sample of women interviewed, several strategies emerged as “go to” coping mechanisms for women business-owners as they juggled the many responsibilities associated with work and home. These strategies were delegating, compartmentalizing and “managing it all” and are similar to those defined by the dialectical perspective as spiraling inversion, segmentation and integration (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007; Montgomery, 1993). A few sole-proprietors implemented a combination of these strategies as well. The following sections detail how women enact versions of these three tension-management strategies.

Delegating. One tactic for managing relational dialectics occurs when parties “tack back and forth through time, alternating an emphasis on one dialectical voice with an emphasis on another dialectical voice” (Baxter, 2004, p. 15). Frequently sole-

proprietors would delegate work responsibility to others (e.g. employees) or home responsibility to others (e.g. spouses) in their stead, while they focused on the alternate pole or tacked back and forth between each pole. This strategy resembles what communication scholars refer to as spiraling inversion. Baxter contends that spiraling inversion occurs when a long distance couple “[tacks] back and forth between spending time together” and then “spending time apart” (Baxter 2004, p. 15). This allows the couple to attend to “integration” concerns (e.g. doing things together) and “separation” concerns (e.g. doing things apart) in an alternating manner (Baxter 2004, p. 15). A version of spiraling inversion would occur when sole-proprietors described alternating emphases on work and home tensions by tacking back and forth between these two poles. When sole-proprietors enacted this strategy they would alternate between poles in a shifting routine, but would ultimately favor one dialectic over another (Baxter & Braithewaite, 2007; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). One particular sole-proprietor, a family attorney, solicited help from a part-time employee and her husband as she sought to strike a balance between work and family concerns:

My theory always was that female attorneys have two choices: They can exert managerial influence by being a bitch, or they can exert managerial influence by engendering loyalty. So what I tend to do with all my several employees in my lifetime is engender loyalty. With Sandra – Sandra should be making \$60k a year. She’s not making that with me, because I let her bring her kid up here. Because I let her leave whenever she wants to. I made a conscious decision that there was something more important to her than... I can’t pay her, well, I could pay her \$60k but I don’t. She only works 3/4s time because she wants to get home and spend time. I’ve found someone that’s the same. I have someone I can delegate to who is extremely driven and trustworthy and so we just set up lists and we just work our way through it. Then we exchange and make sure it gets done.

– *Owner of a law practice, describing how she balances work and family by contracting a part-time employee*

E: I sit down with my husband, even though he has the most flexible schedule of all of us, and I literally have to have conversations with him where I'm like, "Look, I don't mind the gender role reversal. I know what I signed on for when I married you but when I come home, I expect this stuff to be done. I don't expect to go get her project stuff from Michael's so she can build her solar system or whatever the hell it is. That stuff should be done."

R: Yeah.

E: We do have this. It's one of our biggest fights.

R: Just balancing the different role responsibilities.

E: Yeah. My father was definitely the provider, my mother was a stay-at-home mom. When my dad came home, the house was clean and his dinner was made, all the errands were run, and I'm sort of expected to clean my house. Don't expect everything else. It can be contentious, but it's worked out so far.

– *Owner of a law practice, describing how she balances work and family by negotiating gender roles and family responsibilities with her husband*

Both of these quotes demonstrate how one sole-proprietor chose to tack back and forth between work and home tensions. While at work, she could focus on top priorities by delegating additional tasks to a "driven and trustworthy" part-time employee ("3/4s time"). This strategy enables this sole-proprietor to smoothly transition back and forth between work and personal responsibilities, allowing her to feel as though she is attending to competing priorities embedded in her professional and personal relationships. Even though sole-proprietors ultimately favored one poll over another (usually business over personal relationships), the act of delegation provided them with a sense that they were fully attending to both business and personal concerns in a reasonable and effective manner.

The sole-proprietor referenced above also attests to soliciting the help of her spouse at home. Since her spouse works from their home he is viewed as having a "flexible" schedule, so caring for their preteen daughter is primarily his responsibility. This sole-practitioner argues that when she returns home from work "the project stuff

from Michael's should be purchased, the house should be clean and dinner should be made." "This stuff should be done," she states. This demonstrates that she has coordinated assistance at home by delegating certain tasks (e.g. school projects, cooking, cleaning) to her husband. Again, this delegation at work and home allows this sole-proprietor to shift back and forth between the two realms with relative ease, which gives her the sense that she is attending to multiple, competing priorities as effectively as possible. Interestingly enough, this sole-practitioner describes this strategy as "gender role reversal" implying that there is one linear way of enacting gender roles in relation to work and home responsibilities. A few other SPs provided accounts where they described shuttling between work and home with the aid of delegation efforts. Others opted to communicate boundaries to their clients in an effort to "draw lines" between work and family space.

Compartmentalization. Some sole-proprietors elected to engage compartmentalization as a strategy for managing dialectics. These participants would often manage personal and professional tensions by focusing on each pole while in the appropriate, separate domains. They did this by drawing boundaries around their workload. These participants rarely tacked back and forth in an effort to juggle or multi-task their way through these competing poles, but rather, kept them very separate or compartmentalized. Many sole-proprietors work from home but they are required to conduct a fair amount of business outside of the home sphere. The nature of this form of business-ownership calls for more of a segmenting or compartmentalization strategy, where work concerns are physically separated from personal concerns. This

compartmentalization technique resembles what communication scholars refer to as segmentation (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Braithewaite, 2007; Montgomery, 1993). This strategy is somewhat consistent with segmentation as defined from a social dialectics framework (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Braithewaite, 2007; Montgomery, 1993). Baxter, et al. contends that segmentation occurs when individuals who are experiencing relational tensions such as work – family concerns, will attempt to emphasize certain dialectics in certain domains. Consider this example of how one sole-proprietor segments her professional and personal relationships:

E: But now I set pretty good boundaries with my clients, and also too, I don't take on everything that comes my way. I don't chase everything that comes my way. I can usually tell in about 30 days, but I tell clients 90 days, if it's going to work or not. The type of relationship I have with my clients, it's kind of like dating. If we don't communicate decently, or if we don't respond in the same time frame, sometimes it's just not right, it's just not a right fit. So I can either usually tell within about 45 days or so if this is going to work, or if it doesn't. If it does work, then we're clients for years and years and years. It's either long term, or really short term, because it's just not sympatico.

– *Owner of a public relations consulting practice, describing how she balances everything by setting boundaries with her clients*

This sole-proprietor, the owner of a public relations practice, describes in detail how she sets “pretty good boundaries” with her clients. Her boundaries address the amount of time she will work with a certain “type” of client while balancing a certain “type” of workload. She argues that she can tell within a certain amount of time (30 – 90 days), whether or not working with a certain client is going to progress smoothly. If she feels like her current workload is too demanding or a particular client is “just not sympatico” with her consulting style, she will finagle a “really short term” business relationship with that client. Picking and choosing clients and drawing boundaries

around one's workload are examples of segmenting work and personal obligations. This sole-proprietor feels that if she doesn't manage her client base wisely by tracing boundaries around client and workload requirements, efforts delegated to her personal responsibilities get "half-assed" as she later phrased it. Women frequently described feelings of discomfort associated with accommodating personal and professional relationships "half way." Compartmentalization is a strategy that this sole-proprietor was comfortable with as tracing lines around "workload" allows her to fully attend to the work obligations within those boundaries. This strategy also offers a sense of comfort to this sole-proprietor as she ensures that work and home do not cross these subjective lines. Not very many sole-proprietors enacted compartmentalization as a strategy for managing work – life tensions. The majority implemented a different technique referred to as "managing it all" (Baxter & Braithewaite, 2007; Baxter, 2004).

"Managing it all." The majority of sole-proprietors attempted to satisfy both work and home poles simultaneously by "doing" or "managing it all." Sole-proprietors often described "doing it all themselves" because they were solely responsible for their business and personal obligations. Many sole-proprietors with children found integration to be the only strategy available to them as they were viewed as having a more "flexible" form of employment and were more likely to bare primary caregiving responsibilities in conjunction with business-ownership obligations. These women were also more likely to pull "all-nighters" to ensure that everything that needed to be accomplished in a given day, would indeed be accomplished. In a relational context where two parties are struggling with a dialectic tension, oftentimes a tactic is invoked

where one or both parties attempt to satisfy both polls simultaneously. This diachronic activity is referred to as integration in a social dialectics framework (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007; Baxter, 2004). Baxter, et al. contends that integration occurs when individuals who are experiencing relational tensions such as attending to work concerns while simultaneously attending to personal concerns, will attempt to fulfill both polls at the same time. Simultaneously fulfilling both poles can be accomplished in a variety of ways including compromising certain aspects of either or both polls (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007; Baxter, 2004). Stories of integration emerged frequently as many sole-proprietors described “doing” or “managing it all”:

When you’re a sole proprietor and you work for yourself and you own your own business, you just make it work. I’ll take my daughter to the office. I’ll take her to the office and get done anything that I need to do in house. But I’ve got business set up that I can function from anywhere I’m at. As long as I’ve got an internet connection, I can do my business, with the exception of accounting stuff, cutting checks, things like that. My day-to-day reporting, my overseeing of things, though. Every tenant, ever owner’s got my cell phone. There’s no off switch for my day.

– *Owner of a commercial property management business, describing how she balances work and family demands by bringing her child to work with her*

My husband and I have had that conversation because I think so many women, at least my age, with kids and careers, are so used to multi-tasking it’s their second nature. Maybe what we need to do more of is delegating, finding someone else to do some of the things. We almost have an innate sense sometimes to try to do it all ourselves, and that’s what makes us crazy.

– *Owner of a public relations consulting practice, describing how balances work and family through multi-tasking and pulling all-nighters*

I try not to limit what I do in my day. I literally have a mantra that I have in my head when things like that start happening. I think to myself, “Ok, just bring it on.” I really sort of think that I’m superwoman. Tracy will tell you. I start thinking that I’m superwoman. I start to feel like, “Oh, four appellate briefs in the next two days? I can do that. Screw this, I can do that.”

– *Owner of a law practice, describing how she balances by “doing it all” as “superwoman”*

These three narratives present a common theme that highlights “managing it all” as a common tactic for balancing the work and family tension. Each narrative presents a slightly different spin on “integration” however. The owner of a commercial development practice describes bringing her daughter to work with her because she has her “business set up” so that she “can function from anywhere.” Sole-proprietorship allows this business-owner the flexibility to work from home and care for her daughter simultaneously, or bring her daughter to “the office” where she can accomplish both roles (sole-proprietor and caregiver) in tandem. Another sole-proprietor, the owner of a public relations consulting firm, argues that women “almost have an innate sense sometimes to try to do it all ourselves, and that’s what makes us crazy.” She also champions “delegating” as a strategy for balancing the many tensions related to enacting sole-proprietorship. This same SP also implemented a version of segmentation as she sought to balance work and personal concerns demonstrating the use of multiple coping tactics.

As referenced by one of the excerpts above, women sole-proprietors enact “multi-tasking” and “managing it all” almost as though these activities are “second nature.” Women who enact sole-proprietorship felt a strong need to accommodate *all* of the priorities related to their business and personal relationships. “Managing it all” by accommodating competing concerns, enabled SPs to attempt to control every feature of their lives in an effort to restore some sense of a “perfect” balance. Sole-proprietors, by nature of their sole position, are solely responsible for their professional relationships and for the most part in complete control of their businesses. Many of these women

found it difficult to release control through delegation or compartmentalization, and found that “managing it all” allowed them to manipulate the intricate details associated with their professional and personal obligations in an effort to achieve “perfect” businesses and homes. Interestingly enough, sole-proprietors did not provide accounts where they achieved “perfection” related to work and home ideals. “Managing it all” was a constant struggle for many SPs.

The third narrative provided by an attorney and owner of a family law practice describes a constant urge to enact the role of “superwoman” where she can accomplish an inordinate amount of work related to her practice while simultaneously fulfilling her roles as mother and wife. In this regard, she is describing trying to “manage it all” like a “superwoman.” This particular sole-proprietor was previously cited as enacting delegation at both work and home, allowing her to transition back and forth in a seamless manner. She is another example of a sole-proprietor who enacted a combination of strategies to alleviate the pushes and pulls associated with work and family priorities. All three of these descriptions highlight a theme where SPs feel as though they have to “manage it all” as they balance work and home and that sole-proprietors maintain complicated work and personal lives where implementing multiple management techniques is commonplace.

Some sole-proprietors contended that the urge to “do it all” and invoke creative tension-management strategies is directly related to gender. The same attorney and owner of a family law practice expanded on this connection as she described a combination of management techniques to balance work and home concerns. She

explains, “even though I have a husband who is essentially a stay-at-home husband, he’s an artist, I feel obligated to do it all.” In other words, even though she has structured separate work and home environments where she has delegated additional assistance in both realms, she still feels the need to “manage it all.” Fulfilling these complex roles has led to a great deal of stress for this sole-proprietor that she argues probably wouldn’t occur “if I was a guy.”

E: I can’t go home and just sit down if there is something that needs to be cleaned. I feel like everything I have around me has to be perfect in some form. I’ve got a good strong business and I run it myself, and I’ve got to go home and I’ve got to take care of the house. He’ll do all of that for me. It’s not like he objects to that role reversal.

R: Right.

E: I feel like I’m pulled in all sorts of different directions, because I try to fulfill all of these different roles. Probably if I was a guy, I wouldn’t worry so much about it.

– *Owner of a law practice, describing how women have an innate obligation to accommodate both work and family obligations*

Narratives provided from this particular sole-proprietor were especially compelling because she constructed a strong connection between the work - home dialectical tension and gender roles and expectations. She tersely describes being aware of restrictions related to the enactment of roles such as woman, sole-proprietor, attorney, wife and mother, and even though she is keenly aware of these restricted roles, she confesses that she cannot help but be “controlled by them.” Despite her professional tenure and success, she still experiences “those pressures” related to “doing it all” or feeling an uncontrollable desire for perfection. Gendered expectations and pressures, according to this sole-proprietor, determine how women manage their work and personal

obligations and how they feel about themselves as they balance the pushes and pulls associated with these poles.

I think gender roles are something you can either choose to be controlled by or you don't, and even though I'm cognizant enough to be aware of them, I can't stop myself from being controlled by them. I might be a well educated 45 year old woman and yet I still feel those pressures.

– *Owner of a law practice, agonizing over gender roles and the delicate balance of work and family obligations*

Summary

This chapter analyzes the data generated through interviews with sole-proprietors and addresses three areas: (1) the discursive constructions of sole-proprietorship, (2) the social dialectics of sole-proprietorship, and (3) strategies for managing the tensions associated with sole-proprietorship. Many SPs felt as though they “chose” to be sole-proprietors while others were “pushed” or “nudged” into it. Those who felt “pushed” spoke of working previously for male-dominated organizations and firms and out-earning their male counterparts or seeking flexibility that many masculine firms did not appreciate. Sole-proprietors also addressed their work histories as business-owners from the initial development of their proprietorship until the present. Many of these women addressed gendered issues as social expectations for women entrepreneurs have evolved over the decades. Women spoke of overcoming gendered stereotypes and described their personal evolution as entrepreneurs with pride. Very few women in this study described or viewed themselves as entrepreneurs but rather, by their chosen practice, craft or trade. And most of the women in the sole-proprietorship category valued the freedom and flexibility that came with the territory, but they also described the limits that accompanied the flexible nature of sole-proprietorship. Additionally SPs spoke

about being taken seriously, while many of them do not see themselves as entrepreneurs thus not embracing and valuing the seriousness of that role themselves.

Sole-proprietors also described “maintaining” relationships, both work and personal. The “social dialectics of sole-proprietorship” proved to be a very rich theme where a work – life dialectical tension emerged. Women described this tension as struggling to “accommodate” work concerns while simultaneously fulfilling their “duties” as wives, mothers, friends and family members. As sole-proprietors with seemingly “flexible” work schedules, the bulk of work and personal responsibilities fell on their shoulders. SPs described, “wearing multiple hats,” “juggling multiple roles,” and working with a “cast of characters” as entrepreneurs.

Lastly, sole-proprietors gravitated towards three different strategies for managing these tensions. A few women employed part-time assistance or delegated personal responsibilities to their spouses. These participants would tack back and forth between the work and family poles while employees managed administrative work. Some of these women worked with their spouses to coordinate a work/home balance that allowed them to shuttle back and forth. While segmentation was not a popular strategy for the sole-proprietor, one participant did provide an account of creating “boundaries” that enabled her to compartmentalize opposing spheres. By far, the most popular strategy for the sole-proprietor was integration. By nature of the sole-proprietor’s position and home-based work, they were solely in charge of managing business and personal responsibilities. These sole-proprietors would attempt to “manage it all” or become “superwoman” as they attempted to resolve the pushes and pulls of work and family

simultaneously. Lastly, a few sole-proprietors described implementing a combination of strategies such as delegation and integration and segmentation and integration as they sought to balance work and family priorities.

CHAPTER V
THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS AND DIALECTICS OF WOMEN'S
BUSINESS-OWNERSHIP

To be classified as women business-owners, female entrepreneurs were required to have two or more part- or full-time employees and/or interns. In this chapter, I address the experiences of the women engaged in business-ownership (BO) including their discursive constructions of entrepreneurship, the tensions women business-owners experienced in their work, and how they managed these tensions.

The Discursive Constructions of Business-Ownership

Four important thematic areas emerged regarding the discursive construction of entrepreneurship by the BOs: (1) gendered discouragement and discrimination, (2) work history and motivation for becoming a business-owner, (3) continuous role-shifting to manage organizational and relational challenges, and (4) gendered definitions of entrepreneurship that downplayed the influence of gender and involved “not being taken seriously.” The following sections detail these four themes.

Gendered Discouragement and Discrimination

A general theme emerged from business-owners regarding how their past experiences—both family and work experiences—actively discouraged them from becoming professionals and entrepreneurs. While several women spoke about discouraging events they faced from their family members such as their fathers, others spoke specifically about negative experiences they encountered while functioning in

previous jobs. However, this negative stereotyping and discouragement served as a catalyst, moving these women to work harder and persevere through professional prejudices as they evolved into entrepreneurs.

A few women provided accounts of being discouraged against business-ownership by family members. Business-owners were usually told by these family members that they were incapable of becoming entrepreneurs because of their gender or that becoming a business-owner would be eliminating jobs for men who needed to support families. Consider the following story from an architect and owner of an architecture firm who battled discouragement from her own father:

(On her history as an entrepreneur): I was raised in a family with six sisters. That's because there's proof there's a God. My father was a firm believer that women should never work. Limited education, just enough that you could speak intelligently at cocktail parties and read a recipe book, that was it. I fought upstream the entire time and when I was twelve I kept applying at colleges and he was so upset. He told me I was going to be taking the place of a man who needed to feed his family. Me going to college would result in some family starving to death. Well, when he realized I wasn't giving up, he said, "Fine, you can go for two years. I'll pay for your courses, and if you don't hook a man in that length of time, you're on your own." And I just looked at him and said, "You think that's why I want to go to college, to hook a man? I want to be an architect." And he's like, "No, you're a woman, you're not going to do that." – *Architect and owner of an architecture firm, speaking about discouraging familial pressures based on gender*

Discouragement that stemmed from the home served as merely a beginning point for many of these women as they also described experiencing prejudicial practices in their later roles as employees. The following two statements address how two different entrepreneurs responded to discouraging practices in previous working environments:

E: It's better than it was in the 80s, when I'd actually have men on the phone, yelling at me that I shouldn't be taking a job that was meant for a man with a family.

R: Wow.

E: Yeah. It's better than that. It's a lot better, but there's still a little bit of that out there.

– *Owner of an inspection services firm, speaking about being discouraged from entrepreneurship in the past*

I'm so aware of how they do things and did things and the reaction to them and how I did things and their reaction to me. It changed me. I changed my behavior, I changed my clothes. I changed a lot of things because of that. I always wore shoulder pads. I always wore suits. I take over a room when I go into a room. I'm loud. I project my voice much more than I used to, those kinds of things, because otherwise I was dismissed. I think that's part of the reason that I'm, you know. I spent a lot of time focusing on what did I need to do. What part did I need to change to compete with that and then what did I not want to have to do so I could do it my way.

– *Owner of a title company, speaking about how she changed her verbal and nonverbal demeanor after facing discriminatory practices in her industry.*

In the first statement, an inspections services firm owner describes how she was treated in the 1980s versus how she perceives the treatment of working women and women business-owners currently. Although she states that she thinks, "it's a lot better" now, later in the conversation she addressed differential treatment as one of her prime motivations for becoming a business-owner. She became weary of swimming up a bureaucratic stream where upward movement became stalled, so she found an inspection services niche, opened up her own firm, and never looked back. The second narrative, provided by the owner of a title company, presents an example of how one entrepreneur responded to negative messages she received because of her gender. She describes changing her entire communicative demeanor in response to certain "reactions" she observed from her male counterparts. In order to compete with "the guys" she began wearing suits with shoulder pads and projecting her voice more assertively. She also later contended that she became weary of this "act" and that is what pushed her into an

entrepreneurial partnership. Her response demonstrates that differential treatment led to particular responses, including the changing of one's demeanor and eventually business-ownership where women can behave as they please.

These statements demonstrate that women see themselves as entrepreneurs at least partly because of the gendered treatment they faced throughout their personal and professional histories. These discouraging experiences, as a part of their personal and professional histories, shaped their descriptions of what it means to be and do entrepreneurship. Being and doing entrepreneurship, according to many women business-owners, involves experiencing unfair hardships and discouragement and struggling to move past those setbacks. The primary strategy women described to rise above the "struggle" was opening up their own businesses.

Work History and Motivations for Becoming a Business-Owner

The work history of women business-owners influenced the kinds of reasons they offered regarding what motivated them to become entrepreneurs. Two primary themes emerged as women spoke about why they chose to start their own business enterprises: (1) women felt pushed or forced into business-ownership because of differential treatment they faced as female employees working in masculine firms or industries, and (2) women chose to engage in business-ownership because it was a natural next step to avoid retirement, or continue a family business.

Pushed into business-ownership. Women business-owners provided several descriptive examples of feeling "pushed" into business-ownership due to discouraging and at times, discriminatory practices, that occurred in different ways that ultimately led

to women feeling underappreciated as a female employees. Many of these women also described a general lack of fit within previous working positions where differential treatment occurred. One particular narrative detailed how a participant experienced explicit discrimination in a male-dominated industry (engineering/construction) and felt compelled to begin her own business to escape a particular firm where she was being treated unjustly because of her gender.

E: I worked for C & B and brought in Elizabeth Arden to them. They came to me and, I did Elizabeth Arden and Saks Fifth Avenue, loved them both. They came to me one day and one of the Senior VPs asked me, “What would happen to your projects if you decided to stay home with your children?” which offended me, and I said, “Don’t you mean if I decide to quit?” And finally we settled on what would happen to my projects if I got hit by a bus. It was the only thing we could mutually agree upon. From that point forward, I had to take a male counterpart with me to all my projects.

R: Wow. So did that inspire you to open up your own business?

E: Oh, absolutely. I probably quit about six weeks after that. I wasn’t going to have that at all. I was bringing in the highest percentage of profit in the company, to the point where I was accused of falsifying records.

– *Owner of an architecture firm, describing how she felt pushed into opening up her own business after having children.*

This particular business-owner speaks very specifically about out-earning her male counterparts to the “point where [she] was accused of falsifying records” after a tough conversation with a male partner about appropriate work/family boundaries. This conversation with her male business associate “pushed” her to leave that agency and start her own architecture firm where she felt more comfortable working and attending to her growing family.

Many women in this sub-sample argued that this overt form of discrimination rarely occurs in the modern workforce but a “ceiling” of some sort still exists. A civil engineer describes this ceiling in detail:

I will say this: There is a ceiling. You don't always see it right off the bat. As soon as you get out of school, I think that most of us woman are... I got out of school, I thought, no, I'm equal. Everything is even-steven, it's fine. But you start getting up there and people start surpassing you. Depending on your personality, you may or may not get to that next level. So, there were instances of me getting passed up or getting an associate, this guy got made an associate and I wasn't. Or getting opportunities for marketing or whatever. It was, "Oh well, she's the young one, she can't do this."

– *Owner of a civil engineering firm, describing how she felt underappreciated and how that led to business-ownership for her.*

These statements demonstrate that BOs maintain a strong distrust for large, masculine firms as they have experienced discouraging and differential practices first-hand in these types of agencies. Entrepreneurship for these women was preceded by accusations, tough conversations about work and family obligations and "ceilings," and these women carry the stigma of these experiences with them as they communicate and organize within their current entrepreneurial roles. This distrust for masculine institutions has interesting implications as many of these women eventually opened up new business enterprises and began to engage in commerce with the same male firm owners that drove them into entrepreneurship in the first place.

Choosing to become business-owners. Some business-owners within this subset of data "chose" business-ownership as it surfaced as the logical next step in their careers. In these cases, circumstances led to these women becoming business-owners in an organic fashion, as they chose to engage in entrepreneurship due to opportunities occurring at the right time and their being in the right place to take advantage of these opportunities. For instance, some women identified niche industries based on previous work experiences and happened to be in the right place at the right time financially to capitalize on this newly discovered calling. Still other women described

entrepreneurship as a sensible alternative to retirement. The following accounts are examples of these types of choices:

We took this step because it was an exit strategy. It still is an exit strategy. We needed someone who could either resell. In real estate, there's no returning. You've got to get in the car. You've got to go show. There's realtors that are 80 that are still happy to get in the car. We were looking at building a company that would either be sellable or could pay us and be managed by our employees, where we didn't have to be in all the time. We wanted to still be able to be in it because we really don't want to retire. That was our motivation though.

– *A real-estate agency owner, describing why she chose to open her agency with her husband*

I dabbled about ten years ago, when I got married. Just a little bit. I planned a friend's wedding, and kind of helped with some other stuff, but I was a flight attendant so I couldn't really do what I wanted to do. Then my best friend got pregnant and I planned her baby shower. I went into an invitation boutique, and they wanted to charge me \$.50 a bow, per bow, on an invitation, and I was like, 'OK, I have my own two hands, I can do that.' And I got in the car and told my now husband that we were in the wrong business. He's like, "OK, what do we need to be doing?" I said, 'We need to open a bridal store.' He said, 'OK.' We went across to a restaurant, drew it on a napkin and opened six months later.

– *A bridal boutique owner, describing why she chose to open up her business*

This form of "choice" is a striking dimension of the BO's construction of entrepreneurship, as many of the stories reflecting a "choice" to create business enterprises address developing a "niche" business idea with the help of male colleagues or spouses. This is very reflective of the literature examining the financial backing of women-owned businesses where statistics demonstrate that women business-owners in particular are less likely to receive start-up capital in the form of bank or credit union loans (Mattis, 2004). Women entrepreneurs are more likely to delve into their own personal finances (e.g., retirements funds, savings/checking accounts and credit cards) to build their businesses or rely on funding from personal sources such as friends, spouses and family members. Many times these personal sources are male as they're more likely

to gain access to the funding necessary to begin and develop these business ventures (Mattis, 2004; Hisrich, 1990). This demonstrates that although some business-owners “chose” to become entrepreneurs, even their choices come with limitations. Women entrepreneurs spoke about “not being taken seriously” by financial institutions such as mortgage lenders, banks and credit unions.

Women also provided narratives that described opening up or continuing their businesses because of a family precedent. In these situations women either chose to open up their own businesses because entrepreneurship was modeled by certain family members, or they elected to continue a business previously established by a family member. Women who chose to continue a family legacy of business-ownership described a “pioneering spirit” or entrepreneurial mentality that was passed down to them by family founders. For many of them opening up a business venture or continuing a family enterprise was the logical next step in their professional development and they spoke very passionately about this family – entrepreneurship connection. The following narratives that describe this “entrepreneurial spirit” emerged within this subset of data:

My grandmother started our business in 1964 and my brother and I took over her business. She is 97 and still alive, and it takes our two brains to make her one brain. She rocks still. Truthfully, my family is a matriarchal, strong line of women, with my grandmother starting the business in 1964, that kind of pioneering spirit. Becoming educated in the insurance industry and having her as a support person, it made sense that that would be a logical thing to continue to support, because she had worked so hard to create the foundation. So that’s how it started for me.

– *An insurance agency owner, describing how her family models a pioneering spirit*

My mom, she made me up my own little checkbook. I used to pay checks with my mom and she showed me the bill and we'd write the checks together. I'd put them into little envelopes and send them out. I just loved business. I loved handling money and business. And that's what I do.

– *A multi-business owner, describing how her mom inspired an entrepreneurial spirit in her*

Well, my dad owned his own business for a while. It started off good. It didn't end well. My brother owns his own business. My other brother has a side business. I just always thought, "Well, if I could ever do it for myself..." My perception back then was if I could do it for myself, I'm in charge. I could make more money that way. I could run it instead of always having to work for somebody else.

– *An owner of a civil engineering firm, describing how it was logical for her to continue the entrepreneurial spirit modeled by her father and brothers*

These stories are especially compelling because they demonstrate an identity-based dimension of the business-owner that isn't directly referenced by the other groups examined in this study. Many women entrepreneurs eventually go into business for themselves because that form of employment has been modeled and encouraged by family members including mothers, grandmothers, fathers and brothers. Thus, "being" and "doing" entrepreneurship comes somewhat naturally to these women as they have inherited a "pioneering spirit" as one participant phrased it. It appears that entrepreneurial identity for some business-owners is tied to family identity. This is especially encouraging when compared to the historical narratives where family members discouraged women from succeeding as workers and business-owners. In these stories of "choice" entrepreneurial families produce both entrepreneurial sons *and* daughters.

Role-shifting and Managing Organizational and Relational Challenges

I asked participants to describe what a typical day was like for them as business-owners. Every entrepreneur in this sub-sample either began laughing when I posed the question or simply responded by stating, “there is no typical day.” For some women business-owners, it was easier to describe a particular week or month as activities varied greatly from day-to-day. This is particularly interesting as it highlights that work for business owners involves continually shifting in and out of various professional and business-management roles in order to manage both organizational and relational challenges.

Role shifting. Women business-owners serve as the hub of their organizational universe requiring them to do a little bit of everything. Many women entrepreneurs chartered their own businesses due to a specific practice they were professionally certified and/or degreed in such as architecture or civil engineering. Practicing as an architect or civil engineer would oftentimes require women entrepreneurs to enact different professional roles. For instance, when an architect meets at a construction site with contractors, city officials and/or clients, she obviously plays the part of “architect” at this project gathering. However, when this same architect works directly with her employees to oversee a residential or commercial project she shifts into the role of business-owner which involves many roles such as project manager, creative director, personnel manager, or bookkeeper. The following two excerpts address how women entrepreneurs shift in and out of these professional roles throughout an average workday:

R: Ok. Is every day kind of different, or do you typically have kind of a standard day, day in and day out?

E: No, it depends. If we're in construction phase, then I'm adamant about that. I'm on the site, whatever it takes. If we do a 2am concrete pour, then I'm there. If it's during construction, I'm on the site. If we're not in construction phase, then I'm in the office, marketing or designing.

- *An architect and owner of an architecture firm, describing her “typical day” as an architect on a construction site and back at the office*

It really varies because I have contractors who are out doing the work, and then in some cases I'm doing the work. It's either helping clear the path for people that are working for me on things that they're doing, or I'm actually working with a client, or doing research on stuff.

- *A communications consultant, describing how sometimes she does the work, and sometimes she leads those who are out doing the work*

These descriptions demonstrate that business-owners are constantly alternating in and out of different roles including the role of expert consultant, engineer or architect and business-owner. If a client requires interaction with a business-owner, she shifts into a “client-centered” role. If an employee needs the business-owner to solve a problem, she shifts into “boss” mode. If there is specific work to be done by the business-owner herself, she shifts into “architect” or “civil engineer.” An average day of work for the woman business-owner requires her to constantly move in and out of specific roles related to her overarching status as entrepreneur. This constant shifting can become very cumbersome when factoring in work and personal obligations such as the roles of mom, spouse, friend, etc. and can be especially problematic for the BO as she is the control board for her entire work/home system.

Organizational and relational maintenance. Ongoing role-shifting requires specific communication strategies to maintain organizational and relational order. While business owners spend a great deal of their time interacting to form new relationships with clients and customers and maintain existing relationships with colleagues and

personal connections, the business-owner is unique in that she spends a lot of her time focused on maintaining relationships with employees. Business-owners spoke of conducting weekly meetings in an effort to coordinate various employee activities, providing solutions to the numerous problems or issues employees would bring them, manage employees at various project sites and/or shift in and out of different types conversations with employees (e.g., conversations that addressed task issues vs. more emotional conversations). Stories about how women balanced organizational effectiveness with employee relationships surfaced:

I talk to the inspectors every morning. The staff in general. We all sit together in the front and everybody talks to each other, which I think is a marvelous way to get everybody marching in the same direction and reminding them every day what we're all about, which is services, services, services.

– *Owner of an inspection services agency, discussing how she connects with her employees through meetings*

I probably spend the bulk of my time talking to our people, versus talking to outside people. But we make recruiting calls. I'll go on recruiting calls and customer calls, but the bulk of my time is spent really on operations of the business. That's sort of my function within the company. I would probably spend the bulk of my time talking to our people or our underwriters, other people in our industry, and probably, maybe 10% of the time on customers, and maybe 20% of the time on recruits.

– *Owner of a title company, speaking about how the bulk of her time as business-owner is spent on internal operations and employees*

These descriptions reflect how women “manage” their employees throughout daily operations. Business-owners dedicate a large portion of their efforts towards communicating with and organizing employee production. Maintaining strong and open lines of communication and subsequently positive relationships with their personnel is a top concern for the business-owner. And although production and task-driven functions are a strong focus of these efforts, business-owners also struggle with demonstrating care

and concern for their employees. Through this form of entrepreneurship the business owner experiences pushes and pulls between concerns for production issues and concerns for employee issues.

As business-owners, women also spoke about interacting with new clients and customers in an effort to maintain their business. Many of them provided narratives that described emotional customer service encounters with clients/customers and others described the difficulty of meeting the demands of different clients in conjunction with juggling conversations with employees and other business constituents. It was apparent in these narratives, however, that these women value their customers and clients as they described building their client-bases from scratch. And interestingly enough, even though participants described client encounters as being one of the more stressful aspects of being a business-owner, they also described these interactions as their favorite part of “doing” entrepreneurship. These narratives provided by the owner of a premier bridal salon demonstrate the “highs” and “lows” of maintaining relationships with customers:

But then there’s days that are so emotionally draining that you can’t believe society. The mothers that look at their daughters and they’re like, ‘Now you know the doctor said you were obese,’ in front of three of her friends and three of Mom’s friends. She was probably a size 8 or 10. And what the doctor said was, ‘You are borderline diabetic, we should probably get a handle on this now.’

- *Owner of a bridal boutique describing her least favorite aspect of being a business-owner (interacting with clients)*

I like the moment when the girls find the dress, but I more like it when we become friends and you get to know a personal relationship.

- *The same owner of a bridal boutique, describing these interactions as also being the favorite aspect being a business-owner (interacting with clients).*

These stories reveal contradictions associated with maintaining relationships with clientele. Many entrepreneurs in this sub-sample described how much they loathed

dealing with tough or “high-maintenance” clients. They would then contradict this distaste for negative customer service experiences by stating that they loved the moment when they finally sealed a relationship with a client by pleasing them. This contradiction demonstrates the highly interpersonal nature of being and doing entrepreneurship, as well as the relational focus these women maintain as they work with clients, constituents and employees.

Gendered Definitions of Entrepreneurship

Women in this group also provided thick descriptions of what entrepreneurship meant to them. Freedom and flexibility emerged as appealing characteristics of business-ownership and the terms, “pride,” “potential,” and “risk” emerged in the descriptions provided by the business owners.

Consider the following general definitions of entrepreneurship that some business-owners provided:

I would say that entrepreneurship to me means freedom because it is something that either makes or breaks you and it’s your own baby and it’s your own fault if it fails, and it’s your own pride if it succeeds. It’s yours from the get-go.

– *The owner of an insurance agency, describing entrepreneurship using the words pride and success*

R: What does being an entrepreneur mean to you?

E: To me, it means I have an unlimited potential.

R: Unlimited potential?

E: I can do anything that I set my mind to do. I’m not limited in any way. I’ve been self-employed my entire life because I never want to be limited by what I can accomplish.

– *The owner of real estate agency, describing entrepreneurship as unlimited potential or freedom*

It means that my day gets to be different every single day. It means taking a risk but getting the associated reward. Having some control over your own destiny.

- *The owner of a title company, describing entrepreneurship in terms of risk and reward*

It means I have the freedom to do whatever the heck I want. I can turn work away if I choose. If somebody comes to the door and wants to use me, I can say, 'No.' That's what it means.

It a sense of pride. I've heard it probably described... the best way I ever heard it described was that you're willing to work 80 hours a week to avoid working 40 hours for someone else.

The majority of business-owners blatantly described themselves as entrepreneurs or business-owners, and there appeared to be great deal of similarity in the terms used within these descriptions. Most of them spoke of "having unlimited potential," being able to "do whatever the heck I want to" or "turn away work if I choose." Freedom, in this sense, was a strong component of the definition of entrepreneurship to the business owner. They also described "risk" and "pride" as characteristics of entrepreneurship they identified with. These themes of "freedom," "risk" and "pride" are reasonable as women in this sub-sample described assuming a great deal of risk to become business-owners and gain the freedom to "work 80 hours a week to avoid working 40 hours for someone else." Business-owners took great pride in the choices they made and struggles they overcame to become entrepreneurs.

Three specific elements of entrepreneurship related to gender also surfaced: (1) entrepreneurship as "genderless," (2) "true" entrepreneurship where women assertively affirmed what constitutes "true" or "real" entrepreneurship, and (3) women "not being taken seriously" as entrepreneurs.

Genderless entrepreneurship. In posing the question, "What does being a woman entrepreneur mean to you?" an interesting theme surfaced in the data. Many of

the women from this sub-sample appeared edgy when I posed this question. Several of the business owners worked in masculine fields such as construction, corporate training and engineering and were adamant that their success as business-owners had nothing to do with their gender. In fact, the county where this data was collected maintains an exhaustive list of minority/women-owned businesses to allow organizations to contract out with women- and minority-owned companies who provide their contact information to this online database. Several of these women were quite resistant to working with the Chamber of Commerce in this region who maintains and posts the online minority/women-owned business list. They were very opposed to identifying their businesses as woman-owned businesses or even themselves as women business-owners through a public database. As such, a new theme within this subset of data emerged where women entrepreneurs defined themselves as entrepreneurs as opposed to “women entrepreneurs.” The following conversations and quotations demonstrate this resistance to the “woman-owned business” label:

R: Are you part of the Minority Women Business owned group?

E: No, not at all. I don't believe in it.

– *Owner of an inspections services firm, stating she doesn't believe in labeling her business as “woman-owned”*

I went to one of those mentor-protégé things they had at the Chamber of Commerce. The guy that did it is a black man and he said, “I had a professor tell me in school, he said, ‘You can either be the minority that owns a business or you can be a business owner who just happens to be a minority.’ And the way that you establish yourself will determine how much work you get and where you grow.” Being a minority owned firm, it's really... Eventually, you should be big enough that all your work is not that. You should be able to do a lot of client work as well as being able to do some work with other firms. I think when we first got into it, we thought, “Well, we're a minority owned firm and we'll be a

sub to everybody.” Next thing you know, we’ve been in on a couple of projects and we’ve won them, and we were the prime, and we used other people as our subs, and all of a sudden, we realized that no. We really are a firm first and a minority owned, second. So I think that’s one of the biggest challenges is trying to figure out how you’re going to... which one are you going to choose.

– *Owner of a civil engineering firm, stating she believes in the label of “the best business” rather than “the best woman-owned business”*

The one thing I don’t like, I’ve been on projects before and different agencies will show up and make sure that minorities are being represented. That’s probably one of the grossest feelings I ever encounter on a job site. People staring at me as if the government gave me that job, or the government made them hire me. I truly believe those agencies cause discrimination. I get that job because I’m the best there is at it, not because anyone told me it was mine. Women, minorities, everybody has succeeded for centuries, long before any government told them they were entitled. I think that’s a negative. I think people wonder. You’d have to look at a doctor and wonder, “Ok, did they just pass her? Was she part of an affirmative action? Were they looking for a quota?” I think that hurts women when you do that. There’s things... it balances. It’s not equal, but it’s equivalent. Women can get away with doing certain things men cannot. Men can get away with things women cannot. So it’s just a matter of what you make out of it.

– *Owner of an architecture firm, asserting that women should seek equivalence rather than equality*

As evident by these narratives many BOs discussed the local chamber of commerce and affirmative action agencies with disgust because these agencies highlight an unnecessary quality - gender. Several women argued the word “woman” should be separated from the title “business-owner” as gender has little or nothing to do with entrepreneurial success. These women contended that women-business owners who call attention to their gender for a variety of reasons such as complaining are doing themselves and other women business-owners a great disservice. Business-owners are business-owners regardless of gender and should simply be the best at what they do,

plain and simple. They should be relying on the skills, services and/or products they offer their clients and not their “biological sex” to be successful entrepreneurs. Here are some excerpts from women who would address this issue specifically by championing genderless entrepreneurship:

R: Sure. What do you think your greatest struggle is as a female entrepreneur?

E: People thinking that very thing – that I get my projects because of my gender.

- *Owner of a civil engineering firm, stating that her greatest weakness lies in the connection between gender and business-ownership*

Just get in there and do it. If you’re good, you’re going to be good. You don’t gotta label it. I work with more men than most women do and I mean, I drive semis. I drive better than my brothers. Quit making it a competition. Just do it.

- *Owner of multiple businesses, asserting that women should strive to be the best at what they do, not the best woman business-owners*

I’ve been in business twenty years. It is better. I would say, and again, this is where I go back and say the biggest disservice that we can give women is for them to hold their hat on or use the excuse of, “I didn’t get that because I’m female,” is the most dangerous thing we could offer, because the truth is, that human being that shows up and meets with that person has more to do with it than if they’re female or male. It really does, and if they start saying, “I didn’t get that job because I don’t happen to be a man,” then they’re really losing their way for empowering themselves to do what it takes to succeed. Because it’s not going to change whether you’re female or male but you certainly can show a lot of credibility, a lot of strength, a lot of courage – the things that they’re really wanting to hire in that person. If you demonstrate that well, I honestly don’t think I’ve ever been turned down for a promotion because I’m a woman. I really believe it’s because I didn’t go in saying, “Well, I’m a woman.” I went in with, “This is the problem and these are the solutions that I have in mind,” and if you help people with their problems, that’s what they’re hiring you for, typically. In our kind of an industry, in the service industry, there’s a problem or they wouldn’t have called. There’s something they’re trying to fix or get accomplished, and if you provide that solution, I don’t think they care what you are, frankly. I do see women fall in that trap and I think that’s actually a slippery slope and not one that’s really serving women well.

- *Owner of a communications consulting firm, asserting that solving problems is a genderless quality that most companies are looking for*

These are powerful stories that support a separation of gender from work practices, such as business-ownership, in different ways. In the first conversation an inspection services firm owner describes her “greatest weakness” as being perceived as a woman entrepreneur. The owner of multiple businesses (including a cattle-brokerage, a dispatching services organization, insurance agency and family medical practice) asserts that women should focus more on “just [doing] it” and “[being] good” at what they do, and less on being woman business-owners. The third narrative, provided by the owner of a communications consulting firm describes calling attention to one’s gender as “dangerous” and a “disservice.” All three of these stories reveal that many women business-owners prefer to be perceived “the best” as opposed to the best woman-owned business. And women business-owners work diligently to be “the best,” in an effort to overcome weaknesses associated with being a “woman” or “minority” business-owner.

True entrepreneurship. In providing discursive constructions of themselves as entrepreneurs, women also offered succinct answers to the prompts “How do you describe what you do to others?” and “Do you see yourself as an entrepreneur and/or business-owner?” Nearly every one of the business-owners (8 out of 10) either envisioned themselves as entrepreneurs or described themselves as business-owners. These findings are very compelling as it demonstrates that women have very specific definitions of what it means to be an entrepreneur or business-owner. Two emergent ideas related to these findings are worth teasing out: (1) many women business-owners in this sub-sample were embedded within what many perceive to be masculine industries, such as construction and engineering, and (2) many women in this sub-

sample maintained characteristics, such as an employee base and physical storefront often associated with “true” or “real” entrepreneurship.

The majority of business owners (8 out of 10) owned businesses in male-dominated fields such as construction, engineering, and commercial construction. I found it very peculiar that not only did these women view and describe themselves as entrepreneurs and/or business-owners, they did so in a very matter-of-fact fashion. This leads me to believe that the gendered context in which these business-owners are embedded is linked to discursive constructions of entrepreneurship and/or business-ownership. Following this logic, women who own businesses in more masculine industries or fields are more likely to envision and define themselves as entrepreneurs/business-owners as the nature of their field requires them to be more “self-aggrandizing” as one participant phrased it. When working in a more masculine industry, perhaps being “self-aggrandizing” and exuding more confidence via assertive behaviors are keys to survival in a man’s world. Consider the following conversations where participants positioned themselves as entrepreneurs or business-owners in a very straight-forward manner:

E: When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you usually say?

R: I say I run a business. It’s pretty standard. I own a third-party private building inspection company. That’s my elevator speech.

– *Owner of an inspection services firm*

E: Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?

R: Oh yeah.

– *Owner of a real estate agency*

R: When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you usually say?

E: I own an architectural engineering firm.

R: Ok. Do you tell different stories to different people? Do you tell colleagues one thing, maybe, and to friends another, just to kind of simplify the process?

E: No. It's uniform. I'm an architect and a mechanical engineer. I'm the only licensed architect and licensed professional mechanical engineer. There are electrical, structural, civil but not mechanical.

– *Owner of an architecture firm*

R: Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?

E: Yes.

– *Owner of a communications consulting firm*

R: When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you usually say?

E: I say that I'm a business owner in the insurance industry. If they ask me what I do, then I like for people to know that I own a business and that I'm not just an employee somewhere. It's a matter of pride for me.

– *Owner of an insurance agency*

R: Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?

E: Absolutely.

R: All right. When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you usually say?

E: I tell them I'm a civil engineer. Depending on what their level of interest is, if they know what a civil engineer is, I tell them it's my business and I own it and I give them more details.

– *Owner of a civil engineering firm*

R: Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?

E: Yes, I do. I do.

– *Owner of a title company*

Two of the participants in this group neither saw nor described themselves as entrepreneurs or business-owners. And interestingly enough, one of these participants owns a very successful PR firm in the region where this data was collected and the other business-owner owns a premier bridal boutique in the same region with a significant wait list for brides who want to view her gowns and accessories. Both of these businesses and business-owners are very well respected in their communities and own highly lucrative enterprises. However, both businesses are not embedded within

traditionally masculine fields like engineering, construction and corporate consulting.

Public relations firms notoriously employ a diverse employee base and work with clients and colleagues from a variety of industries (including graphic designers, copy-writers and advertisers). A bridal boutique is also going to work with a more “feminine” pool of employees, clients and vendors. Here are the answers these business-owners provided to questions addressing how they describe themselves professionally:

R: When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you usually say?

E: You know, I’ll always start with the same answer, which is, “I’m in public relations.” Then they’ll either move on because they don’t really care, or they already know, they get it. Or they have no idea and they say, “You know, what is that?” So then, depending on the person, their industry, are they friends, is it a potential client, is it a friend from the past or somebody I want to be friends with, I’ll adjust the answer. Sometimes it’s as long as what I just said to you. If it needs to be fairly academic, “What is PR?” I’ll get into that, because I love to talk about that, because it’s so different than advertising or marketing. Although the way I look at it, those disciplines are components of relating the different publics. So the short answer to your question is my short answer, when asked what I do, is PR, and then I’ll adjust the long answer.

R: So you don’t ever describe yourself as a business owner?

E: Never.

R: That’s very funny.

E: I don’t know why. Isn’t that interesting?

R: That is very interesting.

E: People will say, “Where do you work?” and I’ll say, “At a PR firm.” I don’t even say, “I own a PR firm. I run a PR firm. I’m queen of a PR firm.” I just say a local firm, a small firm.

– *-Owner of a public relations firm*

R: When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you usually say?

E: I tell them I’m a Bridal Consultant.

R: You don’t say you’re a business owner?

E: Nope. I don’t walk around with that ‘Look at me’. This is what I do. I just put girls in dresses, and that’s just kind of where I’ve always sat. I’ve never had that, ‘Hey I own a business,’ whereas Mikayla of M Photography will walk over and go, ‘Yeah, I own... I do this, I’m good.’ I don’t have that confidence. I say, ‘I just work at a Bridal Boutique. That’s all I do. I work there, a lot.’

– *Owner of a bridal boutique*

Another possible reason why these constructions of entrepreneurship and business-ownership were so distinct, could relate to the physical location of the enterprises owned by these women. Again, all of the participants in this group maintained some sort of physical space away from their personal homes where they conducted their routine business practices and each of them had an employee base ranging from 6 – 140 workers. Perhaps leasing or owning physical workspace and/or maintaining an employee base are defining features of business-ownership or entrepreneurship to these women. Moreover, it is possible that women in this group view and describe themselves as business-owners and/or entrepreneurs because their businesses maintain characteristics of what society defines as a “true business” such as an employee base and physical space (e.g., a storefront). In these “true” businesses, behaviors such as leasing/owning, bookkeeping, payroll and the management of employees are exhibited that impact definitions of business-ownership amongst BOs.

Not being taken seriously. As business-owners were primarily embedded within what many perceive to be more masculine trades such as construction and engineering, several women in this group described feeling as though they had to work harder to gain the same level of respect earned by their male counterparts. They also spoke of the financial difficulty they experienced in getting their respective businesses off the ground, which they attribute to their gender. Women BOs consistently defined a general struggle to “be taken seriously” by their clients, colleagues and peers. Consider the following statements and conversations that reflect this struggle to “be taken seriously”:

R: Are there any particular struggles that you think women entrepreneurs face, specifically?

E: Let me think about that, because having some female clients that I'm coaching on a particular issue they have, I wonder how much of it is women or how much of it is entrepreneurial. I'm not sure I can distinguish that specifically, but I will say that sometimes women have challenges of being respected or taken seriously.

- *Owner of a communications consulting firm, speaking about some of her clients (women business-owners) struggling to be taken seriously*

A general lack of respect. I just think we have to work a lot harder to get respect from our peers.

- *Owner of an architecture firm, describing how she has to work harder to be taken seriously by her peers*

I think personally, it was hard getting people to take me seriously as a business owner. They really wanted to look to the guys first.

- *Owner of a civil engineering firm, describing not being taken seriously because people look to male business-owners first*

E: We still get calls and if I happen to answer the phone, you know. I still get this vibe sometimes that, 'Well, is there someone there I can talk to?' You know, they've got a technical question. 'Is there someone there I can talk to?' It's like, you're talking to me.

R: Like you're the administrative assistant or something?

E: Yeah, or Bonnie will get a call and transfer it to me and say, 'Well, I was looking for somebody to talk to ask about permitting.' It's like, 'Well, I'm it.'

- *Owner of an inspection services firm, describing when clients and colleagues expect to talk to male business-owner when calling her firm*

These discussions and narratives provided by different entrepreneurs essentially highlight the same theme – women business-owners struggle to be taken seriously or earn the same level of respect as their male counterparts. Society still expects a business or firm-owner to be male. Clients, colleagues and peers expect to speak to a male entrepreneur when contacting a business (as described by the inspections services owner) and they consistently “look” to men first as business-owners (as stated by the civil engineer). Subsequently, women have to “work harder” to earn “respect” or “be taken seriously” in a business-ownership or entrepreneurial role (as described by the communications consultant and architect). Many of these women argued this struggle to

“be taken seriously” has detrimental effects, including making it more difficult for women business-owners to obtain monetary backing from banks and financial institutions when seeking to establish and build their own enterprise. Two business-owners described the specific financial hardships women business-owner face when striving to start a new business venture:

I think it’s harder in some ways. I think the banks don’t take us as seriously for sure. And I think even when you’re in the interpersonal relationships and these situations, I think people get a lot feistier with me, because I’m a woman, than they would if I’m a man. I think I have to really be right and be able to defend my position when I have to. I think we get a lot more flack than guys do.
– *Owner of a title company, speaking about how it’s more difficult for women to get financial support from banks*

Starting a business is tough, financially. I took my retirement money and spent it all. It was a big risk. That’s what it takes for small business, when somebody starts a small business. Where do you get working capital from?
– *Owner of a real estate agency, speaking about how it’s more difficult for women to get financial support from banks*

These statements are extremely telling. In the first narrative, a title company owner who works directly with lenders and banks speaks about the difficulties women have in obtaining bank loans. In order to be “taken seriously” women have to act “feisty” and assertive to secure loans from mortgage companies, credit unions and banking institutions. The second description provided by the owner of a real estate agency supports this contention as she talks about dipping into her “retirement money” to fund her business. “[Where else would] you get working capital from?” she asserts. As both of these women engage in businesses that have been directly impacted by the tumultuous mortgage and real-estate crises over the last six years, they have first-hand knowledge of what kinds of borrowers are more likely to receive start-up monies for

homes, commercial properties and businesses. According to these accounts, men are more likely to secure these types of loans as “preferred” borrowers. This is consistent with business and entrepreneurial research that describes securing start-up loans as a crippling hardship for many women entrepreneurs (Mattis, 2004; Hisrich, 1990). BOs worked through many obstacles including discouraging practices, “not being taken seriously” and tensions related to managing an employee base, client base, production base and business overhead.

The Social Dialectics of Women’s Business-Ownership

Business-owners described a production – people dialectic they grappled with as they attended to task concerns while simultaneously demonstrating care for their employees. The following sections articulate this production – people dialectic and describe the unique strategies business-owners enacted to manage this dialectical tension.

Articulating the Production - People Dialectic

Women business-owners described feeling “pushed” and “pulled” between concerns for production-related tasks such as meeting deadlines, placing inventory orders, bookkeeping, and interacting with clients and concerns related to their employee base. This production – people tension was described in different ways by several women who engaged in business-ownership. Some women provided general descriptions of this dialectic where they succinctly described the tensions they felt as they were pulled towards employee concerns and pushed back to more task-related

concerns. This description from the owner of a public relations firm is an example of the basic dilemma posed by the production – people dialectic:

The client needs the project completed and delivered day after than tomorrow. The vendor has had a printing press breakdown. An employee has a sick kid. I'm constantly balancing everybody's different priorities. Basically, to meet the client's deadlines.

– *Owner of a PR firm, describing the nuts and bolts of why she feels “pulled” as a business-owner*

This example demonstrates how a business-owner often feels torn between task-related or production concerns such as project completion and concerns for their people (e.g., an employee with a sick child or a vendor with malfunctioning equipment). This was a constant struggle for the business-owners as they expressed the urge to attend to business-related concerns while simultaneously accommodating and demonstrating care for their employees. Business-owners care about their businesses and the production activities that sustain these businesses and increased profits, and they simultaneously care for their employees. At times, they found it difficult to attend to production-related issues while simultaneously demonstrating concern for their employees (people). Balancing these opposing ideals proved to be difficult for the BO. They described the production – people dialectic as a “best friend – boss” issue. The following narrative provided by the owner of a bridal salon illustrates her frustration with managing employees and separating “personal from business” or “boss” from “best friend”:

And that's the thing, because there's days that I'll wish it was just me again. I really do, because I hate employees. Not that I hate them personally. I hate that they keep me up at night, they don't do what they're supposed to do. That is one of the worst things about this business. It's not the 70 hours a week -I could care less. It's not being away from my family - I don't want to have kids. It's the employee part of it. It's not that I don't know how to manage them, but I don't

know how to manage them. I don't know how to separate personal from business but not be an impersonal boss. That's the worst part.

R: So it's the managing of the relationships – friends vs. your co-worker?

E: It's really more of the managing the employees, because these are not my friends. It's just trying to be a personal boss, but not being a best friend boss.

– *Owner of a bridal salon, describing how she feels torn between being a “best friend” and being a “boss”*

To the business-owner, “bosses get things done” and “best friends” seek to please and accommodate their personal relationships. Business-owners encountered unique pushes and pulls associated with “getting things done” as a boss and pleasing and accommodating their employees like a “best friend.” The narrative above demonstrates this “boss/best friend” dialectic as one entrepreneur attests to struggling with being an “impersonal boss” where focus is divided between production concerns and caring for her employees. This particular example highlights some other important issues. In the first part of this narrative, the owner describes staying “up at night” due to employee concerns. She struggles with managing her employees and ensuring that they are doing what “they’re supposed to do” without appearing like “an impersonal boss.” The production pole can be seen in how she discusses managing people to follow orders and the people pole is depicted through concerns about being “an impersonal boss” who appears as though she only cares about production. She succinctly defines this tension in the latter part of this transcript as feeling torn between being “a personal boss” and “not being a best friend boss.” Consider the following narrative from the same bridal salon owner as she describes attending to the “production” pole and a second narrative provided by a real-estate agency owner which better illustrates the “people” pole of this tension:

I have that syndrome of I want everybody to like me and I don't like getting onto people. Even that conversation, that little conversation to me is confrontation, and I get all like this about it. I just can't do it. This business is so detail oriented and I hate being on them all the time. I hate it, but I'm like, 'OK, well you didn't write down how long her veil is.' 'You didn't write down what color. What's the color sample? I don't know that. You need to do this, you need to that, have you done this?' I feel like a mother because I'm sitting here all the time, 'Have you done this? Did you do this? Have you done this? Did you do this?'

– *Owner of a bridal salon, describing how she attends to the “production” pole of the production – people dialectic*

I'm too tender-hearted. When I have agents that I need to fire, that's hard to do and I think that would be from a woman's perspective, because my husband's sitting over there like, 'Just fire them.' And I'm like, 'But I don't want to, I feel bad.' I think there's just that nurturing spirit that a lot of people have. I just want to comfort and do all that I can for them and it's hard for me to.

– *Owner of a real-estate agency, describing how she attends to the “people” pole of the production – people dialectic*

The first statement demonstrates the production pole of the production – people dialectic as the owner of a bridal salon describes being attuned to production features of her business. The second statement demonstrates the people pole of the production – people dialectic as the owner of a real-estate agency describes having a “nurturing spirit.” This dialectical tension illustrates that business-owners feel pulled between rational ideals related to their business and the emotional acts of nurturing or demonstrating care for their employees. To the woman business-owner, both of these competing activities (production behaviors and nurturing behaviors) are pivotal to the success of her business.

The excerpt provided by the bridal salon owner depicts this concern as she describes grappling with production related issues such as details, documentation, and methods. She argues she feels like a “mother” when she nags her employees to double-check the details and methods (e.g. attending to production issues such as veil length and

fabric color). This narrative illustrates the “production” pole of this dialectical tension where the bridal salon owner is focused on production-related issues. The second example illustrates how a real-estate agency owner feels about firing people. She describes firing as “difficult” because she is “tender-hearted” with a “nurturing spirit” and she wants to “comfort” others and “do all that I can for them.” All this “comforting” is hard on her, she argues, while her husband has no issues with “just firing them.” She struggles with comforting her employees and even demonstrating care as she contemplates “firing” some of her staff because accommodating and enacting care towards her people are important features of enacting business-ownership and sustaining a successful business enterprise. These two poles, production and people, define one another, and in a workplace context you cannot have production without people to organize and conduct work-related tasks. Similarly, in a business organization you need production-oriented tasks to organize and direct employees.

Many business-owners described this production – people tension as being specific to small business-owners. Large corporations and the individuals that run these big businesses do not experience a tension related to accommodating the competing concerns of production and people. Individuals who work for large corporations engage in more “linear” forms of work where they have the luxury of “staying in one lane” while they focus on production issues (e.g., delivering packages as a FedEx employee). Small business-owners, on the other hand, are concerned with a bigger picture related to “running a business” where “the variables change” and there are “no white lines” or “cones.” This key distinction demonstrates that women business-owners engage in

varied work practices while attending to the competing needs of both task-related issues and issues related to demonstrating compassion for their employees. They do not have the luxury of focusing on one pole of the dialectic as their work practices, concerns and expectations are in a constant state of flux. The following conversation with the owner of PR firm demonstrates the flux between production and people issues:

R: Do you ever feel pulled in multiple directions?

E: The better question is, “Have I ever not felt pulled in multiple directions?”

R: Why do you feel pulled in multiple directions?

E: When you own your own business, nothing’s linear. If you work at FedEx, delivering packages or managing logistics or whatever you’re doing, you’re one small part of a big organization. You’ve got your lane to stay in. When you’re running a business, the variables change, even if we have wise methodologies and we have the lanes and structure. There are no white lines. There are no cones.

– *Owner of a PR firm, describing how her work is different from the work of a manager or employee of a large corporation.*

A few other participants in this sub-sample described the production – people tension as uniquely “female.” Men, according to a few business-owners, are less concerned with accommodating people (e.g., if someone needs to be fired, then “just fire them”). Men are also less likely to “bend over backwards” to accommodate a client or employee and are more likely to provide succinct feedback because they are not concerned with accommodating people or sparing their feelings. This gendered explanation was not a very popular account, however, as business-owners appeared more comfortable separating gender as a concept from the idea of business-ownership. The following is one of a few explanations tying the production – people dialectic to an inherently feminine tendency to “accommodate”:

R: What’s your greatest struggle as an entrepreneur?

E: I think part of that female thing, though, sometimes can be that - and this is maybe about me personally; I don't know if it's about women, but since you're doing the study, if you hear this across the board, that would be interesting - I will find myself sometimes being too accommodating. I will bend over backwards to do something that I really wonder if a guy would do or even a bigger company would do.

R: Yeah.

E: We will work ridiculous hours when I'm not sure another supplier would do what we're doing. In fact, I know some suppliers wouldn't do what we do. It's that over-accommodation female thing.

R: Is it typically to meet the needs of a client, or an employee?

E: A client. Well, it can be employee, too, in terms of being too nice or not giving someone feedback because when you overly accommodate, you don't always tell a person.

– *Owner of a corporate communications and leadership consulting firm, describing how “over-accommodation” is a “female thing”*

Managing the Production - People Dialectic

Women business-owners described managing this production – people dialectic using two tactics: (1) managing it all – where BOs attempt to satisfy both poles simultaneously or, (2) delegation – where BOs tack back and forth between the two poles of production and people.

Managing it all. Women business-owners, in their attempt to “integrate” or fulfill both of the poles of production and people, typically compromise or sacrifice something related to their personal well-being. They compromise their sleep by pulling all-nighters in an effort to meet everyone's needs and/or they will combine work with pleasure (e.g., traveling with family to out-of-town jobs) in order to accommodate everyone, ultimately compromising or sacrificing elements of each pole. Women spoke of this strategy as “doing it all” and described several tactics that enabled them “do it all” or fulfill both poles. This strategy is similar to integration, from the dialectical perspective (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007). In a relational context where two parties are

struggling with a certain dialectic, oftentimes a tactic is invoked where one or both parties attempt to satisfy both poles simultaneously. This activity is referred to as integration in a social dialectics framework (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007; Baxter, 2004). Baxter and her associates contend that integration occurs when individuals who are experiencing relational tensions such as attending to production concerns simultaneously attend to people concerns. Simultaneously fulfilling both poles can be accomplished in a variety of ways including compromising certain aspects of either or both poles (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007; Baxter, 2004). Consider these scenarios where women describe attempting to achieve it all:

I pulled an all-nighter Monday night. Client called at 5 o'clock Monday and wanted something that required me to be up literally all night long. In my profession, in architecture, that's not uncommon, but it's... I see that in... I keep referencing my forum group because that's where we go and talk about things like that. If we have someone whose got an employee that wants to take off all the time and you're having to make up for them, or you've got someone who's having personal issues or right now the big deal is they want to take care of family, elderly parents, and what that does to your schedule.

– *Owner of an architecture firm, describing how she pulls “all-nighters” to satisfy employee concerns and task-related concerns.*

In the family business where I'm at, my grandmother being 97 is phasing out. I work with a brother that's not technologically up to date and he is a figurehead executive and I'm the grunt and the business owner. I clean the toilets. I mop the floors. I take out the trash. I write the insurance. I talk to the customers. I solve their problems. I work on the computers. There's nothing that I don't do in that office. I have a tendency to take on more myself and I don't know how to let go. I'm really focused and almost obsessive compulsive with it.

– *Owner of an insurance agency, detailing how she does everything in the office including relating with customers, solving problems and mopping floors.*

The more overwhelmed I'm feeling, when I start feeling that I'm really pulled, then I'm the one that will be at the office at 6 in the morning and stay until ten at night, because I just have to get it manageable again, and if it takes me two weeks of twenty hour days then that's just what it takes. I don't like it when it's

like that, but I'm committed to the process of what we're doing. When I start feeling overwhelmed, my answer is to get over there to have that time before everybody does start pulling on me, to get done some of the things I have to get done. It's a very productive time for me. Much better early than late, because late always has a glass of wine with it, which makes it not quite as productive as it could be.

– *Owner of a real estate firm, speaking about how she gets to work early and stays late to deal with employee/client concerns and work-related concerns.*

These narratives provide insight as to how three different entrepreneurs manage the production – people dialectic through integration or “doing it all” in an effort to fulfill both poles simultaneously. In the first excerpt an architect describes “pulling an all-nighter” because there is work to be done in order to meet client deadlines while employees are “having personal issues.” In order to accommodate the strict work demands and the employee's needs, she works all night to meet the deadline. In the second statement an insurance agency owner describes how she “does it all” while she's at the office, from managing employee and client concerns to “[cleaning] the toilets” and “[mopping] the floors.” And this particular business-owner admits to having a “tendency to take on more” than she can handle because she is “obsessive” about meeting everyone's needs. The last quotation illustrates how a real estate agency owner feels pulled by work and people during the day, but because she is “committed to the process” of dealing with production and people-related issues she pulls “twenty hour days.” All three of these examples demonstrate how business-owners attempt to fulfill both production and people concerns simultaneously throughout their work days and nights. Rather than letting something slip in one area, they sacrifice their own personal time and well-being to manage this tension.

The “managing it all” strategy implemented by business-owners is similar to the strategy invoked by sole-proprietors with one key distinction – employees. Business-owners described feeling very torn between production and people concerns and as the CEO of their respective businesses, they were solely in charge of fulfilling obligations related to business and production issues as well as their production base (employees). Because of this position, they described an intense desire to accommodate production and people concerns in an effort to please everyone and continuously organize “perfect” business-enterprises that maintained increased profits. Thus, “perfection” for the business-owner involved striving to be the “perfect boss” and the “perfect best friend” simultaneously in a business where all production concerns were managed and employees were happy. Like the sole-proprietor, the business-owner did not offer any examples of when “perfect” production standards and “perfect” relationships with employees were achieved simultaneously. The production – people dialectic was a constant struggle for the business-owner.

Some business-owners argued that this strategy to “manage it all into submission” is uniquely feminine as women have a tendency to want to accommodate. As women attempt to “do it all” they are ultimately accommodating everyone but themselves. And although business-owners rejected a connection between gender characteristics and entrepreneurial struggles, a few women in this sub-sample argued that women manage relational tensions such as the production – people tension by accommodating, “doing it all” or integrating. The following statement depicts this view

of integration as a feminine strategy, and is provided by the owner of a communications consulting firm who consults several women entrepreneurs as a part of her business:

E: I think many, many more women would be willing to do that than men.

R: Do you really? I've wondered that.

E: I do. Because I think it's back to the female thing, the accommodating thing again, the need to please again, the need to stand out above their competition. For all those reasons, I think it really drives women to really sometimes do just extraordinary things to win the business, earn the business and keep the business.

– *Owner of a communications consulting firm, describing "doing it all" as innately female*

This dialogue centralizes the strategy of integration that some women business-owners enact, as uniquely feminine. This consultant argues that women in particular are prone to attempt to fulfill competing tensions because this "accommodating" strategy is a "female thing." This provides an interesting perspective on the management technique of "doing it all" as it demonstrates that some women view "pleasing" everyone as a way to "stand out above their competition." These acts of "pleasing" and "accommodating" were described by another business-owner (the owner of an insurance agency) as "babysitting." As "babysitters," women business-owners would "accommodate" competing concerns by ensuring that everyone was well cared for and happy, to the detriment of their own happiness. They would babysit by accommodating employees during personal hardships, mopping the floors, cleaning toilets, keeping the books, resolving employee conflicts and interacting with clients. This was not the only metaphor used to describe how women business-owners manage work and employee concerns. "Fire-fighting" as a metaphor surfaced as a descriptor for another strategy used to balance the production – people dialectic.

Delegation. Business-owners also implemented delegation to manage the production – people dialectic by tacking back and forth between working with their employees to accomplish tasks and promote relational development, and then focusing on production issues separately. By pacing back and forth between these two forces, women argued they were able to advance their business efforts and employee/client relations in patterned ways. Women who invoked this strategy would delegate tasks and responsibility to employees when seeking “space” to accomplish professional obligations such as bookkeeping, payroll, inventory and making contact with clients (where they would focus on the production pole). Delegation allowed sole-proprietors to tack back and forth between people concerns and production concerns more smoothly and enabled business-owners to believe that nothing was “slipping” regarding “boss” and “best friend” ideals. Baxter describes this strategy as spiraling inversion by relying on the integration – separation dialectic to demonstrate how this strategy works. She explains that long distance couples exhibit spiraling inversion by “tacking back and forth between spending time together” and then “spending time apart” (Baxter 2004, p. 15). This allows the couple to attend to “integration” concerns (e.g. doing things together) and “separation” concerns (e.g. doing things apart), in a back and forth manner (Baxter 2004, p. 15). Integration in this example, serves as one of the poles of the integration – separation dialectic rather than as a strategy for balancing relational tensions. The following statements demonstrate how women would delegate responsibilities to certain employees as they tacked back and forth between these two poles:

They always say that entrepreneurs’ biggest failing is to try to do everything themselves. I’m in a business where I can’t do everything myself. I have people

here that do things that I can't do. I have to rely on them and I think that's very different from working by yourself.

- *Owner of an inspection services firm, describing “doing it all” as a poor strategy and delegating as more effective*

There's the beauty of it not just being me. We pick up the phone, we call each other and say, 'Ok, I've got three people wanting to meet today and I can only talk to two of them. Who is going to grab a third for me?' and someone will say, 'Oh, I've got that slot open. I'll grab the third for you today.' So that piece of it helps, but it's managing the company versus each individual person's success.

- *Owner of a title company, speaking about dividing and conquering in an effort to attend to both production and people*

By delegating responsibility to employees, BOs could focus on “fighting” production-related “fires.” Thus, the “firefighting” metaphor fits as a description for this strategy. “Firefighting” through dividing and conquering appeared to be a more reasonable strategy for some business-owners who had essentially given up on achieving the “perfect businesses.” In the first statement, an inspection services BO initially describes, “doing it all” as a poor strategy for balancing the production – people tension that many entrepreneurs experience. She refers to “doing it all” as an entrepreneur's “biggest failing” as it is impossible for a business-owner to truly “do it all.” She argues it is more important to “hire people” who can solve certain problems so that her time is free to address other business or production concerns. In the second excerpt the owner of a title company describes, “fire fighting” as a metaphor for delegation beautifully. She talks about the many problems or fires that surface in an average workday, then details how she collaborates with her employees on a strategy for handling the various problems separately. In other words, she coordinates “who is going to fight what fire and when.” She then describes managing the first two fires (e.g., client calls), and then delegating the third fire to a co-worker. She refers to this strategy as “managing the

company versus each individual person's success." In other words, through this delegation strategy she is able to attend primarily to the production component of business-ownership (e.g., her own client calls).

These examples both demonstrate a tactic where women use delegation (e.g. delegating work tasks to employees) so that they could attend to "putt out" production-related "fires." Through delegation (rather than "doing it all") business-owners could tack back and forth and attend to multiple competing "fires" (e.g., client calls, employee concerns, work tasks, etc.). A few participants argued this strategy was very effective, but not a common management technique for women entrepreneurs. Women, they argued, are more likely to accommodate everyone or "do it all" themselves. According to these business-owners, this "doing it all" strategy is at times innately feminine, and highly ineffective. The following narratives provided by the owner of a title company and a civil engineering entrepreneur demonstrate that some business-owners prefer to delegate and "tack back and forth" rather than "do it all."

I'm not willing to work at midnight anymore. If it can't get done, then it either waits or it goes to somebody else. Some of it, I'm figuring out I have to hire a person and I need to hand some things off to that person, which is really difficult, I think, and really hard for women, because they have to prove themselves all the time and they don't want to look like they can't handle all the things that are on their plate. They feel like it's some sense of weakness or loss if they hire a person and hand things off. Or they're afraid the other person isn't going to take care of it as well as they would.

– *Owner of a title company, describing why she thinks women are hesitant to divide and conquer*

My business partner finally convinced me to hire somebody to be an admin and I thought, "Oh well, she will probably work eight hours for me, it won't be that much." As soon as she came in there, and started doing stuff, I thought, man, I have a lot of things I could get off my plate and give to her, and that's the whole trying to hold onto stuff. I don't want to give it away. It's so much nicer.

- *Owner of a civil engineering firm, addressing the decision to hire an admin to assist her as she manages multiple tensions*

In the first quotation, the title company owner describes why she will not “work at midnight anymore.” She argues that it’s unnecessary to work long hours to fulfill competing tensions when you can delegate authority to employees, which will enable her to devote more time to production “fires” that only she can resolve. She further contends that this delegation strategy is difficult for some women entrepreneurs because they “don’t want to look like they can’t handle all the things that are on their plate” because that is essentially a sign of “weakness or loss.” In the second narrative, a civil engineer states that her male business partner convinced her to hire an “admin” to manage some of her excess workload. Initially she envisioned this “admin” working “eight hours” a week for her, but she quickly figured out “it’s so much nicer” when she doesn’t “hold on to stuff.” Delegating, in other words, allows her to attend to the various production-related issues that surface through her role as a business partner. Both of these narratives champion “tacking back and forth” as a superior strategy for managing the tensions that drive women’s entrepreneurship and downplay “managing it all” as an ineffective strategy that is inherently feminine.

It is important to note that Baxter & Montgomery contend that while spiraling back and forth between two poles, relational partners will often gravitate towards or favor one particular tension. This praxis pattern is described as, “a spiraling inversion with respect to which pole of a given contradiction is dominant at a given point in time” (1996, p. 62). In the case of business-owners, women who implemented delegation would ultimately favor the “production” pole of this dialectical tension and oftentimes

neglect the “people” pole. They indirectly explained that by delegating responsibility to workers, they could “free” up their time to handle important issues that only a business-owner could attend to. Business-owners who implemented this delegation or spiraling strategy mentioned conducting meetings and sending out “group memos” to appease “employee” concerns, but primarily focused on production efforts.

Summary

Unique findings surfaced in the data women business-owners provided in this study. For the most part women in this group, the business-owner sub-sample, either felt *pushed* into business-ownership through discriminatory practices in previous occupations or *chose* to pursue entrepreneurship to extend a family business or because they discovered a niche business idea in previous working roles. Most of the women who chose to become a business-owner did so as a partner or co-owner with a spouse or a male colleague. Women business-owners also identified with the role of both business-owner and entrepreneur and the constant characteristics of business-ownership such as freedom and flexibility. However, this group in particular rejected the connection between gender and business-ownership or entrepreneurship. Women in this group did not believe in highlighting their status as a female business-owner, rather, they sought affirmation in being the “best” at what they did above and beyond gender. Thus, these women spoke of maintaining a genderless business.

Participants in this group primarily experienced the production – people tension that requires one to attend to and nurture people while simultaneously taking care of business or task-related concerns. In navigating these two competing, women strove to

“have” or “accomplish” it all in creative ways that are consistent with what is termed integration from the social dialectics perspective (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Braithewaite, 2007; Montgomery, 1993). This pursuit of “it all” ultimately led to many of these participants sacrificing some element of the competing pulls of attending to others’ needs versus attending to my personal needs. Other women found tacking back and forth between production and people to be a more effective strategy for attending to work-related concerns and employee concerns. This delegation strategy can be likened to “spiraling inversion” from the social dialectics framework (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Braithewaite, 2007). Women who enacted a version of spiraling inversion argued it was much more effective than “doing it all,” and that accommodating competing concerns through sacrifice and “doing it all” was a uniquely feminine trait.

CHAPTER VI
THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS AND DIALECTICS OF DIRECT SALES
BUSINESS-OWNERSHIP

Direct sales business-owners (DSO) maintain a unique set of entrepreneurial characteristics that are distinct from those associated with sole-proprietors (SP) and business-owners (BO). Direct sales and multi-level marketing have a very different structure than the sole-proprietor's business or the business-owner's enterprise because the entrepreneurial work of a DSO is couched within a pyramid framework, embedded within a larger, parent organization. While the work of SPs and BOs is concentrated on a product or service created directly by the SP or BO, DSOs differ as the product or service they sell was innovated by someone else (the founder of their parent organization). DSOs are not "original" entrepreneurs themselves, although they do engage in entrepreneurial work.

Direct sales business-ownership is a concept that allows women to purchase a piece of the entrepreneurial pie, typically in the form of some sort of product kit or start-up stock that is viewed as an initial "investment," and essentially become small business-owners by selling various products *directly* to customers. Mary Kay, Inc., for example, requires their DSOs to make an initial investment and purchase an inventory cosmetics kit in order to host cosmetics parties and social events where DSOs sell their products directly to customers. DSOs do not invent the products they sell; they market and sell products invented by a parent entrepreneur such as Mary Kay.

DSOs own a portion of a larger parent organization that has been developed by a founding entrepreneur such as Mary Kay of Mary Kay, Inc. or Jessica Herrin of Stella & Dot, Inc. Parent organizations, such as Mary Kay, Inc., are known as multi-level marketing or MLM organizations that assume a team-based, multi-level, or pyramid structure (Biggart, 1989; Sparks & Schenk, 2006). DSOs maintain a peculiar organizational position within the pyramid-shaped hierarchies of these businesses. For example, in this study female DSOs often described themselves using their position in the organizational framework of their company. They used job titles such as “Superstar Director” and “Ruby-level” sales positions, which reflected where DSOs fell in the team-based, multi-level pyramid structure of their organization. The number of team recruits beneath the DSO and the number and amount of sales transactions per month are the primary determinants of one’s compensation and hierarchical position in the multi-level pyramid structure.

Every DSO interviewed maintained a certain number of team members or recruits beneath them in the pyramid structure and each DSO earned a percentage of what these recruits sold per month. If the recruits were to enlist other team members beneath them, they would in turn earn a portion of those sales per month and rise to a new level in the pyramid structure. These recruits are known as “downlines” or “lowerline” organizational members within the MLM business structure (Sparks & Schenk, 2006, p. 163). Many of the DSOs that I interviewed were direct sales owners/agents themselves, but also maintained a certain team-base beneath them of which they personally recruited that entailed “mentoring” and “leading” according to

certain practices encouraged by the parent company. In this capacity direct sales business-owners also serve as “sponsors” or “uplines” which “tie MLM members across organizational levels (Sparks & Schenk, 2006, p. 163). These distinctions were constant across the interviews conducted as participants represented a wide range of products sold through multi-level, team-based, direct-selling tactics and products/companies included jewelry sales, cosmetics, life insurance, assisted living space, handbags and health products.

In this chapter, I address the experiences of the women engaged in direct sales business-ownership (DSO) regarding the discursive construction of entrepreneurship, the tensions the women experienced in their work, and how they managed these tensions. The following sections address the discursive constructions of DSOs, the tensions DSOs experience, and the strategies they have developed for managing these tensions.

The Discursive Constructions of Direct Sales Business-Ownership

Four important thematic areas emerged regarding the discursive construction of DSO identity: (1) the attraction to direct sales, (2) work as forming connections and managing networks, (3) not being an entrepreneur, and (4) DSO work “not being taken seriously.”

Attraction to Direct Sales

The DSO identity is grounded in “choice” as women in this sub-sample chose to become involved with direct sales versus being forced or pressured into this kind of entrepreneurial activity. DSOs were highly aware of their choice to pursue direct sales and the freedom associated with it. Many of them viewed the “choice and freedom” of

direct sales ownership as the primary incentives for entering into this form of entrepreneurship. For many of these women, the freedom to temper their family life with additional income was an opportunity that was too good to pass up. Other DSOs contended they fell in love with the products offered, and wanted to receive these products at a discounted rate while earning some income and maintaining a flexible lifestyle. Still other DSOs argued they chose to enter into direct sales because they identified with either the company or the founder or the values espoused by the company or founder or both. The narratives that describe why DSOs chose direct selling as a form of business-ownership address—affinity for the lifestyle of direct sales, affinity for the product or service sold, or affinity for the organization or founding entrepreneur— and reveal different identity-based dimensions of the direct sales business-owner.

Flexible life style. Some of the stories DSOs provided when explaining why they chose to start their own business centered on flexibility. As DSOs were not tied to an employee base or physical office space like business owners or a variety of competing constituents such as sole proprietors, direct sales owners maintained a very flexible lifestyle. They could sell and recruit and earn as little or as much commission as they chose with minimal consequences. Unlike business owners and sole proprietors, where income is not necessarily steady and there is more at stake (e.g., payroll, overhead, etc.) during the “feast or famine” of profit generation, the DSO had many choices as to how she arranged her daily schedule and how much she *chose* to work and earn in a given month. For example, if she chose to host several events and focused on marketing her product and recruiting for her team base, the DSO could earn quite a bit of

monthly income. If she chose to do the bare minimum in sales, marketing, and recruiting, the consequences included breaking even income-wise for that particular time period or observing a dip in monthly income. Several accounts demonstrate women's affinity for the flexible lifestyle of direct sales:

Well, I guess the reason I started my business years ago was because I had three sons, three young sons, at home, and I had been a stockbroker before and my husband and I had our own stock brokerage business. He still does that. But I needed something that was going to be very flexible because I had three kids in two years.

– *A Mary Kay sales consultant, speaking about the flexible nature of direct sales*

I have always owned some type of business, and it was becoming difficult once I had my son. My goal was to be a mom. Once he was about 18 months, I could see myself a little bit... I loved being a mom, but at the same time, felt there was a little bit more that I needed to do for myself. That's when I ran across Stella & Dot on the Rachel Ray show and I just connected there. It said for \$199, you can start your own business. And at that point, I felt like it said it was flexible and I felt like I needed something like that. I could still be home, tending to my child, and still be able to do something that I wanted to do.

– *A Stella & Dot Sales representative, speaking about the flexible nature of direct sales*

These examples demonstrate that the DSO had to balance multiple roles as both a family member (e.g., spouse, partner or parent) and as a professional where sacrifices in one realm such as one's professional identity had to be made in order to accommodate one's "personal identity." Many DSOs, as evident in the above examples, chose to work "part-time" and/or from home in order to accommodate demands related to their personal identities because their roles as "moms" or "spouses" held higher priority than their professional roles. These examples also demonstrate that the DSO's identity is fluid and shifts in tandem with the complexities of life and work. Many of the women interviewed in this subsample (including the Mary Kay sales consultant cited above),

attested to doing direct sales only “part-time” in the beginning until personal demands subsided when their children grew up and became more self-sufficient, and then their professional identities in the form of their businesses “took off.”

Several of the women in this study also described their work and personal identities as “hats.” One participant was attracted to becoming a Stella & Dot rep because she could wear her “business lady” hat even though she was a new mom, again, demonstrating the multiple nature of the DSO identity grounded in choices and options for managing work/life conflicts. This “hat” metaphor also highlighted that many women in this study found it difficult to wear both “hats” at once, perhaps because the “hats” or roles they are wearing competed with one another.

If women chose to focus more on family and personal priorities, they were aware that this decision came with reduced direct income, commission and overall earnings. If a certain DSO chose to focus primarily on work obligations, there were many opportunities to build a business network and generate income but these opportunities would require sacrifices in the personal and family realm. While business owners and sole proprietors provided narratives of what flexibility and freedom meant to them as characteristics of entrepreneurship, there seemed to be a more heightened sense of awareness of the work/family trade-off amongst DSOs. Many DSOs spoke specifically about this trade-off:

For me it means being able to be in control of my destiny. If I do the work and I put the work in, I can get the results, instead of having to give that back and having my employer tell me how much they think I’m worth as far as time is considered, and having me have to do my job over my family time.

– *Stella & Dot sales agent, addressing the choices that she is in control of when balancing work and family as a DSO*

You can make it your own. That's important to me, because it's secondary to my family and my family life. It does not come before they do.

– *Mary Kay consultant, addressing her active decision to prioritize family over work.*

R: Ok. I get the impression that you chose to get into the business for the flexibility, the work/family flexibility.

E: Absolutely. I needed a flexible schedule. That way, I'm still able to be a home mom for the kids all the way through and be very active in their school life, and one of the few moms that was able to do that.

– *An Advocare sales agent, her need for a flexible schedule so that she could spend more time with her children*

Flexibility and freedom were by far the most popular topics when DSOs were asked what they valued as entrepreneurs and/or business-owners. A few women also addressed this value as an obstacle to success in the direct-sales industry. At times, they argued, this theme of flexibility required a certain “mindset” that other forms of work didn't entail. Self-motivation and prioritizing one's time were the keys to success when enacting business-ownership as a DSO. This is an important distinction when addressing the constant themes of flexibility and freedom as well, as many DSOs provided detailed narratives of some of the struggles they faced as business-owners such as maintaining a team-base. Direct sales has an exceptionally high “drop-out” rate as many women who engaged in direct-selling never really took their positions seriously and subsequently did not learn to manage their time effectively or self-motivate. The concepts of freedom and flexibility have that particular drawback, according to an Advocare sales agent:

One of the biggest things to me is that I'm my own boss. That is one of the biggest positives to it, but it can also be the biggest drawback, because I don't have anybody telling me what to do every day. It's a lot of freedom, because I can set my own schedule and I can attend the events that work for me, but at the

same time, I have to be motivated, self-motivated, to do it. That's one of the biggest things for me about being an entrepreneur.

Affinity for the product or service. Some DSOs identified with the actual products or services they sold as well as the flexibility direct-sales opportunities offered. While some DSOs expressed that they enjoyed selling a product that made women happier and more confident, others spoke about enjoying the products themselves. They stated that they were more committed to selling a product or service that they would purchase and use themselves, and appreciated receiving certain products at a discounted rate as direct sellers. Many of these women coupled their affinity for the flexibility and freedom associated with selling products or services to their passion regarding the quality of the product or service they sold. For instance, DSOs addressed their appreciation or "love" for what they do and what they sell and how this appreciation affirms their identity as DSOs under particular companies.

I liked what I saw, as far as the product. I actually called into their home office and they hooked me up with somebody else who is more around this area. But because I originally found out about it from my friend in Nashville, I decided to sign up under her. That's it. I had not been to a trunk show. I wasn't looking for a job. It was completely random.

– *A Stella & Dot representative, speaking about her affinity for the jewelry she sells*

Well, first of all, I tried the products twelve years ago and fell in love with it. I needed energy because at that time, my kids were one and a half and three years old, so once I tried the products, it was pretty much a no-brainer.

– *An Advocare sales representative, speaking about her affinity for the healthcare products she sells and flexibility*

I absolutely love, love, love the product. Direct sales was really - at that point in my life with kids and basically just a high school education and no capital or no money to start any other kind of business - Direct sales was really my only option.

– *A Scentsy sales agent, speaking about her love for the product she sells*

These narratives demonstrate that for some DSOs, identifying with the product they sell is an important aspect of their professional identities. For many of them, “loving” and using the products they market coupled with the flexible lifestyle afforded by direct sales business-ownership enabled them to adopt: (1) a professional identity where they could sell products that they appreciated and that met customers’ needs, and (2) a professional identity where they could slip on their “mom” or “spouse” hats with relative ease. Working outside of the home was not an option for these women as they were more comfortable selling products they identified with and work circumstances that accommodated their competing and fluctuating family and personal obligations.

Attraction to founder or company. Other DSOs expressed a great deal of appreciation or affinity towards the company they worked for and/or the founding entrepreneur. Some DSOs confessed to conducting a great deal of research on the company they chose to sell under prior to joining, and others confessed to agreeing with the espoused values upheld by their respective companies and/or the founding entrepreneur(s) in general. Many of these values included bolstering the success of working-women and religious or faith-based values. For example, Mary Kay, Inc. and ThirtyOne, Inc. are two organizations founded on Christian principles and virtues. Some DSOs shared these values and cited them as strong incentives for selling under their respective companies. DSOs provided several statements that reflected appreciation for their company and/or the values espoused by the company or founder:

E: Thirty-One as a company has been around for ten years and Cindy Monroe, our founder, she was a working mom and a girlfriend of hers and she, they were out shopping and they thought, “We could try to make this.” So they started... She had a background with direct sales from her college time, and she really

liked the concept and how direct sales works and the freedom that it gives women in managing their own income. She wanted to base the company in that direction, to go that way. So they started it in her basement and we've been going strong for ten years now. They've had to uproot out of Tennessee, where they started, and they're now located in Ohio. That's their headquarters. Thirty-One, do you have any kind of speculation on where we got our name?

R: No.

E: No, okay. Well, the name comes from the proverb 31 in the old testament of the Bible, and her sister had suggested, "Why don't you look at this?" and she loved it. Just because the proverb 31 talks about the virtuous woman and her motto was to celebrate, encourage and reward, and she just wanted to celebrate that with her company, the virtuous woman, and provide women an opportunity to provide for their families through this company.

– *A ThirtyOne owner, speaking about her affinity for the ThirtyOne company because of the religious values ThirtyOne and the founder uphold*

I think we have this example at Stella & Dot with Jessica Harrin. She started weddingchannel.com out of Stanford Business School and ended up selling that for ninety million dollars when she was 29 years old or something like that. That's what they're doing. That's what Stella & Dot is doing for women, is saying, "You can do whatever you want."

– *A Stella & Dot stylist, speaking about her affinity for the company's CEO*

Well I know like with the other Mary Kay ladies, it's kind of the same thing of you having the control over your life and not... I know Mary Kay Ash was really big on women's success and not having somebody else, you know. When people pay you, they don't pay you what they think you're worth, and that was really big to her.

– *A Mary Kay consultant, speaking about her affinity for the founder Mary Kay Ash, her contribution to women's success, and what makes Mary Kay a unique and successful organization to work under*

These examples illustrate how DSOs relate to or identify with "doing" direct sales and "being" business-owners for their parent companies. While some statements ranged from generic "I liked what the company stood for" exclamations, other DSOs addressed very specific dimensions of the companies and founders they identified with. For instance, several Stella & Dot stylists attested to identifying with the values that founder Jessica Harrin espoused. Jessica Harrin started her own wedding website

venture in the late 1990s, then sold her website (weddingchannel.com) for a great sum of money and started a new business venture – Stella & Dot, Inc. Her story is truly one of “humble beginnings” that many DSOs (specifically, Stella & Dot reps) identified with. Mary Kay championed that women should “create [their] own success” because bureaucracies cannot and will not reward working women as they should. This theme also resonated with many DSOs, particularly Mary Kay representatives. Another example is provided by Cindy Monroe of ThirtyOne, Inc. who demonstrated “true grit” by starting her own business with a girlfriend that began with making handbags in her basement. ThirtyOne representatives identified with this “grit” as well as the spiritual values behind Cindy Monroe’s company as it is named after the “virtuous woman scripture” - Proverbs 31. These values attest that women can be both virtuous and enterprising. The identities of many DSOs were strongly rooted in the corporate and religious values espoused by their parent company as well as those held by the founders themselves (e.g., Mary Kay, Cindy Monroe, Jessica Harrin, etc.).

Work as Making Connections and Managing Networks

A second set of themes emerged highlighting the high levels of networking, marketing, socializing, and direct-selling that characterize the work of DSOs. DSOs primarily focused on forming new connections with clients, interacting with their team members, and managing their existing network of clients and colleagues.

Although DSOs rarely innovate the actual product or service they sell, they do have to work diligently to create the client-base they sell to. Depending on the product or service they are selling, developing a client base can be a very daunting task. For

instance, when selling a product such as Mary Kay cosmetics or Advocare health products, direct sales owners worry less about constantly building a new client-base because the products they sell are consumable. This requires clients to become repeat customers as they continue to consume the products they've chosen to purchase. When selling assisted living space, life insurance, jewelry or handbags, customers will only consume a certain amount of these products before becoming saturated. Repeat clients and steady sales can waiver depending on the type of product a direct sales owner is trying to market.

Socializing and acquiring new business can also vary for different versions of direct sales business-ownership. These activities typically require DSOs to form connections with new customers and recruits, and interact with team members on a fairly regular basis. For forms of direct sales that involve selling products or services that are limited, forming new connections with new clients and recruits is a very competitive, constant and ongoing process. The importance of forming new connections and interacting with steady clients and team members is illustrated by a ThirtyOne agent who highlights the highly interpersonal nature of being a DSO:

Oh my gosh, and it's a constant source of finding new people. Sometimes, if you are not comfortable connecting you'll get yourself in a kind of rut, because you have to find new people. I just connected with a school and I'm going to do a charity event. I know a direct charity and I'm doing a good thing by giving, but the other thing is that that's going to be a whole new group of people that I may not know, to connect me to other people. It's constant. If you stop trying to connect, your business goes down a little bit, and it's hard to get back up. You have to get in the groove of things again.

Forming new connections and interacting with team members surfaced as a defining feature of what it meant to be a business-owner for DSOs. For the direct sales

owner, forming these new connections and interacting with existing clients and team members was accomplished via distinct methods. The DSO was constantly forming new connections with potential clients and recruits and interacting with the recruits beneath them by providing guidance, leadership and mentoring opportunities to ensure the success of these “lower-line” direct-sales-owners. Interacting with these recruits to ensure they’re remaining active in their direct-selling efforts is crucial because an individual DSO’s financial success is highly dependent on the success of their “lower-line” direct sales owners or their “team members.” Since one’s individual sales can determine their financial worth, marketing for new customers was also a constant process.

These activities, recruiting, marketing and mentoring were performed in one of two ways depending on the culture of the parent organization. For some companies, it was important to form these connections and opportunities for interaction face-to-face. The following statements address the face-to-face component of forming new connections:

Typically on the days that I do work, a lot of it is networking. I try to get out of the house. I’ll take goodie bags and things out to businesses, banks, dry cleaners, things like that, to generate new leads. And then I also have times where I have my actual appointments, where I go host the parties. That’s where the actual income comes from.

– *A Mary Kay consultant, speaking about how she forms new connections with customers by attending events and visiting local organizations*

I would have a networking event maybe once a week. I would try and find an opportunity to do some sort of a booth at a gym or a 5k race. And typically, once a week, I would have what we called a nutritional mixer, where we just have people in-home, kind of to learn about the products and the opportunity. I would have maybe one of those a week and maybe a training that I would either be

doing for my team or that I would be attending with people, because we also have corporate sponsored events that we go to.

– *An Advocare agent, speaking about how she forms new connections with customers and interacts with team members through training*

I would say 40% of my conversations are with team members and then the other 60% are spent in either getting a potential hostess, you know, not getting her, but calling and asking if she'd like to book a party. Then once that party is booked then having conversations with her, which is called hostess coaching, getting her ready for her party and making sure that she and her party will be successful.

– *A Stella & Dot agent, speaking about how she divides her time forming new connections with customers and interacting with team members*

For other organizations networking through social media was highly encouraged.

Many DSOs worked from home or remote locations as opposed to a physical storefront or office space. These DSOs spent a great deal of their time marketing, recruiting and forming new relationships remotely through social networking websites such as Facebook. For these women, social networking websites were platforms that naturally enabled them to reconnect or form new connections through the social and interactive tools offered by these sites while conducting virtual work that allowed them to balance work and home more effectively.

DSOs spoke about spending a great deal of their time building connections with new customers, marketing through status updates, and reconnecting with recruits through “team profiles” while waiting for their children to be released from school, during their “slow hours” or children’s naptimes. Many of the team profiles served as a connection base for DSOs, their team members, “higher-line” managers and even CEOs of certain companies. Social networking was referenced as a primary tool for building and maintaining personal and professional relationships for the DSO. The following

narratives provide more detail as to how DSOs “talk” to different audiences while relying on social networking sites:

I talk to customers, clients. I reach out to potential people that I think might be interested. It’s a lot of follow-up with customers who... I go back through any of my orders and I will see who really loved it and follow up with them, whether it’s through email or sending them a link to a video of new things that have come out. It’s not always calling on the telephone. It’s probably more email, Facebooking, even texting with things like Red Stamp.

– *A Stella & Dot agent, speaking about how she connects and interacts using group texts and Facebook*

Yeah, it’s huge. We connect with customers. We connect with our teams that way. My team has a Facebook Page, so that if I am not available to answer my phone or they have something they want to share with the rest of us, they can just go to our page and post it. Social media is huge. I spent a lot of time on Facebook and some people think that that’s completely wasting time, but it’s really not in this business. You can meet customers that way. I have a page for my business, for my sales part of the business, and like I say, as well as a team page.

– *A Mary Kay consultant, speaking about how she relies on Facebook for individual sales and interacting with her team.*

On Facebook, we have a Superstar Director page, where we communicate with all of the executives at Scentsy, and they want to hear our ideas, what’s working, what’s not when we’re showing. That kind of thing.

– *A Scentsy consultant, speaking about how she uses Facebook to interact with executives and team members.*

Not Being an Entrepreneur

Some DSOs did identify with the title of entrepreneur, while others did not, and a great majority of this group provided ambivalent responses to questions about their role as entrepreneur. Their ambivalent responses are of great interest because it appears as though these women did not view themselves as entrepreneurs until I solicited their participation in this study. Although I never directly referred to participants as entrepreneurs, the recruiting materials I used incorporated the language “entrepreneurs”

and “entrepreneurship.” Many of the DSOs inquired as to why I asked them to participate in this study, as they weren’t entirely certain they were truly entrepreneurs.

A few others felt strongly that they were entrepreneurs. The following accounts are some of the stronger, affirmative responses to being an entrepreneur and business owner.

Being an entrepreneur to me, I think to be quite honest with you, I think it runs in my blood, for me specifically. I mean, all my family, we’ve always owned businesses. I think for me, personally right now, to be an entrepreneur that definition has changed a little bit. An entrepreneur before was building things from the ground up. I’m talking, start from the beginning, building whatever idea it was that you’re going to do from the ground up. When I became a mom, I felt like, “Why do I need to reinvent the wheel?” I don’t have time to do that. I’ve got to focus on getting something done ASAP, making a profit quickly. That’s why I went into direct sales. I felt like the foundation was laid out for me. I don’t have to create that. It’s done. All I need to do is just start selling stuff and I’m going to start making a profit. It’s why I went this direction, but for me, the word entrepreneur has changed. I don’t think it’s changed in a bad way, but changed because of the state of where I am right now in my life.

– *A Stella & Dot agent, speaking about how she identifies with being an entrepreneur even though she did not invent the actual product she sells*

R: Ok. What does being an entrepreneur mean to you?

E: It means someone who has a vision for their future and they just want to build a business the way that they want to and have people join them in their vision.

R: Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?

E: When I first started my business, no. I didn’t have that vision. I just needed some extra income for my family. Now, I’m in a totally different place in my life and yes, now I think so now.

R: Do you consider yourself a business owner?

E: Definitely.

– *A Mary Kay rep, speaking about how her business-ownership role has evolved over time*

R: Ok. So what does being an entrepreneur mean to you?

E: It means being able to give my children choices that I was never able to have. It means personal responsibility for my future: nobody can ever fire me. If I want to work really hard in this business and make [money] then I can. If I want to step back and make more of a part-time income, I can. But entrepreneurship really means being able to give my children choices that I was never able to have. It’s for their future.

R: Ok. Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?

E: Absolutely.

- *An Advocare agent, speaking about what entrepreneurship means to her in terms of its flexibility*

These women identified with the term entrepreneur for very different reasons. In the first account, the Stella & Dot agent described her former definition of an entrepreneur where an innovator invents something from “the ground up” whereas her new definition still includes the notion of ownership, but it can now be viewed as selling and marketing a product or service someone else had invented. She never really felt compelled to “reinvent the wheel” so she just started “selling stuff” and “making a profit.” For this particular DSO, creating business in general (“selling stuff”) and earning a large sum of income (“making a profit”) equated with being an entrepreneur. In the second excerpt, the Mary Kay rep repeated this notion of “entrepreneurship” or “business-ownership” as developing over time as one’s business unfolds and grows in new directions. In the last example, an Advocare agent states that she considers herself an entrepreneur because she is creating opportunities for her children through her work. All of these examples define entrepreneurship as the act of creating opportunities for direct-sales owners themselves and their loved ones, rather than the act of inventing specific products or services.

However, this was not a very common definition of entrepreneurship. Many DSOs provided either mixed or negative responses to questions that probed whether they considered themselves to be entrepreneurs or business owners. In four separate interviews, two Stella & Dot sales agents, a Mary Kay consultant and a ThirtyOne stylist

affirmed that they really did not consider themselves to be entrepreneurs even though they should, because on some “smaller level” they function as business-owners.

R: Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?

E: Probably no. Not necessarily. I wouldn't, just like when you said, “Do you ever describe yourself as that.” I would say no.

R: Okay. Do you think of yourself as a business owner?

E: Yeah, I guess so, on some level. On maybe a smaller level, because I really run my own business through Stella & Dot.

– *Stella & Dot sales agent*

R: So when people ask you what you do for a living, what do you usually say?

E: I tell them that I'm a Mary Kay consultant.

R: You don't say, “I own my own business,” or “I'm a business owner”?

E: No, I really don't. I probably should say that, because I do.

– *Mary Kay Consultant*

R: What do you think you've learned from our conversation today?

E: I mean, I know I own my own business, but to look at me like owning my own business, that really struck me. That's probably the biggest thing I've learned. Even though it is a direct sales and a lot of people use it as more of a hobby or just to make a few extra dollars here or there, I am doing this full-time and it is a business. I guess because it's easy and fun that I don't think of it like that. So that was eye opening.

– *ThirtyOne stylist*

R: Do you ever describe yourself as a business owner?

E: Probably not outright, but I think now that you've asked me, I guess I would be a business owner. But I would say, I do. Because I tell people all the time about my parties, I love owning my own business.

– *Stella & Dot sales agent*

Several DSOs in this sub-sample did not identify with being a business-owner or entrepreneur. These women identified with titles closely aligned with the corporate umbrella they worked under such as “stylist,” “agent,” or “rep” as these titles reflected their actual work practice. Consider the following responses from DSOs engaged in selling life insurance and assisted living services:

R: Okay. When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you usually say?

E: Just that I help individuals and business owners in uncovering their financial goals and utilizing tactics and strategies to really help them meet those goals. Whether it be personally, professionally, or financially.

R: Do you ever say you're a business owner, or a contractor, to anyone?

E: No. I don't really know if I view myself as that. I'm building my own business in that I'm building my clientele but I'm not... so, no.

– *Northwestern Mutual insurance agent*

R: When you were doing direct sales and people asked you what you did for a living, what would you usually say?

E: I would tell them I was more of a helper than a sales person. Because I view it that way.

– *Assisted living leasing agent*

These accounts suggest DSOs do not see themselves as entrepreneurs, even though on some “smaller” level, many think they should, because their profession is viewed as a “hobby” or they are viewed as “helpers” or “consultants” by the individuals that constitute their personal and professional realms. If clients, friends, relatives, recruits and DSOs working under other companies view their occupations as hobbies and their roles as subservient, then so do the direct sales business-owners.

Not Being Taken Seriously

The idea of direct sales business-ownership as “true” or “real” entrepreneurship was a difficult concept for many DSOs to grasp. Again, because direct-sales is labeled as a “hobby” or a “supplementary” career, rather than business ownership, DSOs hesitate to define themselves as entrepreneurs, business-owners or small business-owners. Because of this nebulous “direct sales” label that many DSOs carry as business-owners, several narratives were provided that depict the struggles these women experience as they strive to overcome stereotypes associated with these labels and

ultimately be taken seriously as business-owners. DSOs struggled with being taken seriously by several constituency groups: (1) customers and clients, (2) friends and family, (3) DSOs themselves, and (4) DSOs who work for “other” parent companies.

Not being taken seriously by customers/clients. Many customers and clients view the work of DSOs as being secondary, part-time jobs to supplement their full-time income and perceive direct sales as more of a “hobby” or secondary interest. DSOs are aware of these perceptions and argued that this type of mentality (direct sales as a secondary job or hobby) perpetuates a stereotype that positions DSOs as desperate housewives who need a “hobby” to fill their time or direct sales as a secondary job meant to support one’s “real job.” As a result, DSOs had to put in extra effort to appear credible to their customers and build a client-base, in order to work directly against this stereotype.

DSOs struggled with customers not showing up for appointments, cancelling events and rejecting their sales efforts, in sum, not taking their roles as business-owners seriously. This created a unique challenge in the plight of the direct-sales business-owner. Several of the DSOs interviewed contended that to be successful business-owners, women needed to learn to let go of these personal emotions and assume a more business-minded mentality. This particular challenge is reflected in narratives provided by DSOs who engaged in the direct sales of consumables (home fragrance products and cosmetics).

I think that direct sales women entrepreneurs have a hard time at first, getting friends and family to take them seriously, and especially if they’ve tried more than one opportunity and they haven’t been successful.

- *Scentsy sales agent, struggling with not being taken seriously by her friends and family*

Dealing with the rejections and the no-shows and those types of situations can wear on you and make you question can I really do this? Why did they cancel on me? Is it me? Is it me?

- *Mary Kay consultant, addressing the struggle of not being taken seriously by clients, while trying to not take it too personally*

Not being taken seriously by family and friends. Other DSOs spoke about the “not being taken seriously” by family and friends, which is grounded in larger societal perceptions of the value of their work. These women addressed themes related to common stereotypes associated with direct sales ownership (e.g., the high drop out rate and direct sales as a secondary career or hobby). These women argued that in general, many audiences do not view direct sales as a “real job” including their own friends and family members. For instance, DSOs argued that there is a misconception about how much income they earn through direct selling opportunities. Many of these women earn high amounts of monthly income as well as corporate incentives attached to selling more products and recruiting more direct sales owners. These women attested to bringing in as much income as their husbands with full-time corporate positions and gaining incentives such as cars, luxurious vacations and free products. Along these lines, DSOs felt as though “outsiders” expect direct sales owners to eventually fail due to companies that have deteriorated or “run their course” in the past and the high drop-out rate related to the direct sales and multi-level marketing niches.

In that sense, I think people are... It can be a struggle. People don't look at me and think that what I do is a real job. Honestly, I think a lot of people go, “Oh, whatever. She peddles a little bit of jewelry. She doesn't really make any money,” because they really don't know.

- *Stella & Dot sales agent, arguing that direct sales is a “real job”*

Well, when they ask what you do and you say, “I’m a Scentsy consultant.” Most people, when they hear that, they simply think fail. That’s all they think about.

– *Scentsy sales agent, addressing the stereotype that most direct sales positions will end in failure*

One lady, I can’t even think of the word she used. Schlep? I can’t even pronounce the word. She said something like I’m just taking this jewelry everywhere and why would I want to do that. She said, “Don’t you have a Master’s degree? Couldn’t you do something else? Aren’t you wasting your time?” and I thought to myself, in my head, “I probably make more money than you do.”

– *Stella & Dot sales agent, addressing expectations associated with direct sales, education and income*

Language such as “peddle” and “schlep” suggest that clients, family and friends don’t view their work seriously. This is a constant struggle for DSOs. Even though these women have invested into successful parent companies and are enterprising business-owners, they do not receive the same level of professional respect that BOs and SPs seem to earn. This is largely due to the reputation multi-level marketing has assumed over the decades that incorporates characteristics such as high turnover and failure rates. A lack of respect for this form of business ownership is evident in words and phrases such as “fail” and “waste of time” as DSOs describe how they think others, including personal acquaintances, view their business practices.

DSOs don’t take themselves seriously. There is a high turnover rate in direct sales. Many of the DSOs attribute this to not taking the role of direct sales ownership seriously. For example, many women entering this profession view it as “easy money” when in reality, there is a lot of hard work involved in coordinating sales events, team-based training events, and marketing opportunities. This creates yet another stereotype that many DSOs view as a misconception about what their work truly entails and

extends this issue of “not being taken seriously” by the DSOs themselves, as many DSOs treat direct-sales as secondary or supplemental work and therefore do not “give it a shot” or their full efforts. Consider the following excerpts from DSOs working under Stella & Dot and an assisted living community, two very distinct forms of direct sales ownership.

Mine is probably getting people on my team, who sign up, who say they really want to do this, to follow through with it and grow their business. I think a lot of people give up before they’ve given it a shot.

– *Stella & Dot sales agent, addressing how direct sales is hard work*

The job retention was awful. People who had been in the industry a long time, they would bounce from community to community which is really sad.

– *Assisted living leasing agent, addressing the high turnover rate in direct sales*

DSOs don’t take other DSOs seriously. There is even stereotyping that occurs within the direct sales industry as to what brands should be taken seriously. While some DSOs expressed concern that stereotypical perceptions exist about the kind of work they do, others contended that their particular brand of direct sales ownership was better than some other brands. Women in this latter group mentioned companies such as Pampered Chef, Amway and Avon as examples of inferior brands to work under, brands that appeared to be less respectable. Although many DSOs stated they struggled with being taken seriously by outsiders, they themselves do not take certain forms of direct sales ownership seriously.

Ideas related to “real” entrepreneurship surfaced in the pilot study portion of this analysis, so these findings weren’t entirely surprising. However, I was taken aback when I learned that DSOs discriminate within their particular industry, and further define

what they view as “real entrepreneurship.” “Real entrepreneurship” or “real work,” according to the DSO, involves working for a reputable multi-level marketing corporation and not just any company (e.g., Avon). These accounts provided by a Stella & Dot rep and a Northwestern Mutual agent demonstrate how direct sales business-owners label DSOs who engage in multi-level marketing for other, less reputable companies.

I think the perception of direct sales, for some reason, is taken... I don't want to say that one company is better than another, but I don't want to be associated with selling Avon. I just don't. There was a jewelry company that was purchased by Avon, they used to be known as great, and now they're kind of like eh. I don't mean that in a bad way, Avon is a very successful company. But when I think of Stella & Dot I think that they're a little bit above that.

– *Stella & Dot agent, comparing Stella & Dot to Avon*

Well, if I think about Mary Kay and Stella & Dot and compare it to the business owner on Thursday, I definitely think they're in a different category. There's just a certain level of professionalism. Yeah, we're all making money. I feel guilty saying that, kind of. It's probably really just me generalizing how I feel about some of the multi-level marketing.

Northwestern Mutual agent, comparing her organization to Mary Kay and Stella & Dot

The Stella & Dot representative does not mince her words when describing direct sales efforts of “other” DSOs who work for Avon. Avon's former line of accessories and jewelry was “eh” whereas Stella & Dot is “a little bit above that.” This undoubtedly demonstrates that this Stella & Dot DSO has learned of and is perpetuating stereotypes and labels associated with doing direct sales for companies that are “eh.” The second quotation provided by a Northwestern Mutual agent positions her line of work (selling life insurance policies) above the work of Mary Kay and Stella & Dot DSOs. These statements depict that women engaged in this form of business-ownership believe that

there is some sort of “caste system” to doing direct sales, where some agencies (e.g., Avon, Stella & Dot, Mary Kay) are “beneath” others (Northwestern Mutual) in terms of prowess, reputation and success. Interesting definitions surfaced as DSOs attempted to describe their form of business-ownership as well as interesting tensions associated with the highly interpersonal component of doing direct sales and being a direct sales business-owner.

The Social Dialectics of Direct-Sales Business-Ownership

The tensions that direct-sales business-owners experience are grounded in the highly interpersonal nature of work these women perform. A large part of the DSO’s day is spent forming new connections and networks, maintaining existing relationships and circling back and forth between work and family obligations. These activities define what it means to do entrepreneurship according to the DSO. They also lead to particular dialectical tensions that DSOs struggle to manage. Two important tensions emerged in this analysis of women engaged in direct selling: (1) the leading – mentoring dialectic, and (2) the individual business – family – team base trialectic. This section describes these tensions, the relational and organizational structures that fuel them, and the management strategies DSOs use to work through the pushes and pulls associated with leading-mentoring and work - family tensions.

The Leading-Mentoring Dialectical Tension

DSO’s described a leading – mentoring dialectic as they leveraged relationships with their recruits. The following sections articulate the leading – mentoring dialectic

and describe the management strategies incorporated by direct sales business-owners as they sought to balance this dialectical tension.

Articulating the dialectic. DSOs spoke at length about their conflicting roles as leaders and mentors to the team members they recruited to sell beneath them within their multi-level, team-based organizational structures. Leading was associated with more production-oriented activity from DSOs whereas mentoring required more relationship-oriented practices. This dialectic poses challenges for the DSO as she vacillates between leading through production-oriented activities like “checking in” and mentoring by demonstrating care for her recruits.

The leading component of this dialectic often required women to “check in” with their recruits and ensure that their team-members were working towards their proposed goals. This required monitoring, assessing and motivating team member performance to ensure a high level of productivity. Leading in this sense resembled coaching, and is a practice encouraged by many direct-sales organizations, but often not addressed through targeted training practices. Many examples of leading through “checking in” emerged as women spoke about leading their recruits and team members including this statement by a Stella & Dot agent:

Well, if it's a consultant, I would call her and I would say, “OK, what have you got going on today? Well, do you think that's going to get you to where you want to go by the end of this week? Or is that in line with what you told me you wanted to do last week?” So I'm encouraging her to do what she said she was going to do.

– *Stella & Dot sales agent, explaining how she motivates and leads team members*

This statement demonstrates the tension to lead through “checking in” behaviors, as a Stella & Dot sales agent describes holding one of her recruits accountable for this lowerline’s work progress. “Checking in” is a priority for the DSO because the profits obtained by her lowerline recruits directly impact her monthly income based on the structure of MLM organizations (Biggart, 1989; Sparks & Schenk, 2006). Furthermore, MLM organizations founded by parent entrepreneurs require these activities from higherline DSOs so that profits remain consistent and pyramid structures remain intact (Biggart, 1989; Sparks & Schenk, 2006). Thus, DSOs felt “pushed” to engage in leadership activities such as “checking in.”

The mentoring component of this dialectic is more relational in nature, and includes acts such as molding or teaching. *Molding* and *teaching* are relational acts that are appropriate given the egalitarian structure of team leaders and recruits and involves paying attention to recruits, mentoring them through their personal and professional accomplishments and hardships and generally “being there for them.” Recruits need molding or teaching regarding a variety of direct sales practices, including better business practices such as: effective marketing strategies, skills for building client networks, organization of work/family priorities, budgeting, taking inventory, etc. “Being there” for recruits also involves responding to personal issues team members are grappling with or the professional sales goals they are striving to achieve. Mentoring recruits through personal circumstances and the improvement of sales practices directly impacts the higherline DSO as enhanced family circumstances and sales practices leads to higher commission for everyone involved. For instance, this Mary Kay agent explains

the struggle of “being there” for her “girls” as they face family issues and professional aspirations and constraints.

I’m listening to my girls and their excitement, and they’re all in a different spot. I feel like I want to help this one get to here, and this one over here get to there. This one is having family issues right through the conference. I feel pulled in what I want to help them achieve and how to go about doing it.

– *Mary Kay agent, describing how she feels pulled into “being there” for her recruits*

This account illustrates the mentoring tension that DSOs experience as they attend to the relationships they manage with their lowerline recruits. The mentoring tension is unique in that MLM organizations “push” DSOs to collaborate with one another (Biggart, 1989; Sparks & Schenk, 2006). This “push” for collaboration amongst lowerline recruits and higherline representative is what separates the MLM organization from single-level marketing organizations where competition is encouraged amongst sales agents (Sparks & Schenk, 2006). MLM organizational founders subscribe to the idea that collaboration, rather than competition, improves the overall bottom line. Thus, “being there” for lowerline recruits is an acculturated activity that DSOs learn through socialization by parent entrepreneurs and higherline organizational members where collaborative, mentoring ideals and practices are instilled into DSOs (Biggart, 1989; Sparks & Schenk, 2006). Many DSOs described “being there” for their recruits, and wanting to help them “achieve” their goals and aspirations as well as overcome trying personal circumstances while simultaneously being expected to lead through “checking in.” This dialectic can be characterized by the competing concerns of productivity and care. DSOs are aware that low productivity on behalf of their recruits can lead to lower commission so there is a strong incentive to motivate or lead recruits to work and sell

more efficiently. Simultaneously DSOs are required to demonstrate caring and compassion for recruits as recruits have their own “family issues” and concerns related to the growth of their businesses. The complexity of this dialectic and how DSOs choose to manage it can be attributed to the organizational and relational structures that guide the DSO – recruit relationship (Sparks & Schenk, 2006).

Managing the dialectic. Struggling to lead and mentor one’s recruits towards success required DSOs to navigate the leading (checking in) and mentoring (“being there”) dialectic. For many women the mentoring component of this dialectic was emotionally draining and required a specific management strategy. DSOs contend that recruits frequently expect instant gratification from the mentoring efforts bestowed by the DSOs. This forces DSOs to “turn off” the mentoring process during crucial moments, or draw boundaries as to how and when they mentor. These themes of “turning off” and drawing boundaries emerged within this analysis:

I’ve had people say, “You’re making money off me.” Well, I’m not making money off you. I’m coaching you. That’s why we call it coaching commission. You’ll have different personalities on your team and they have this expectation. So they feel like they text you, they expect to be texted back right away. Sometimes, it’s just not possible. They’re texting at 7 o’clock at night or when I’m eating dinner, my phone is off. I’m not answering your text. I’ve had to set a little bit better guideline when I first get somebody on the team and say hey, I don’t mind you texting me all day, but if I don’t answer after seven, it’s because I’ve turned off my phone. It’s family time. I just set a boundary.

– *Advocate sales agent, talking about how she “turns off” the leading and mentoring processes at a certain crucial points*

I draw a soft line. I usually try to tell them from the very beginning. “Ok, I am your business coach and I am your cheerleader and I am the person who you can come to if you have issues, but I’m not the person who is going to do the work for you. It is your business and you are responsible for doing the work. If you decide to work, great. If you decide not to, you’re not going to make anything.” I try to explain that to them from the very beginning.

- *Mary Kay rep, speaking about how she manages the leading – mentoring dialectic through drawing lines*

These quotations demonstrate similar approaches to managing the leading – mentoring dialectic. In the first statement, an Advocare agent explains that at a certain point she chooses to “turn off” her phone and end communication with her recruits during her personal time. The second excerpt addresses how a Mary Kay rep communicates to her recruits exactly what her role is and what is required of her role as she leads and mentors them to success. She states that she isn’t going to micromanage or “do the work” for each of her recruits, but she will “cheer” them on. Both of these examples demonstrate that DSOs draw boundaries around their roles as leaders and mentors and they try to communicate these boundaries in a succinct fashion to their recruits. One agent communicates when she “turns off” as leader/mentor, and the other DSO communicates exactly how she defines and enacts leading and mentoring. This management strategy highlights the flexibility, freedom and choice associated with being a direct sales business-owner as DSOs have the ability to choose when and how they balance this dialectic. Both “turning off” and drawing “soft” boundaries with recruits demonstrate that DSOs establish limitations when it comes to mentoring. Whereas some DSOs establish the limitation of “leading” up to a certain point (“I won’t do the work for them”), others limit when and how recruits can seek out leadership or mentoring from them by providing limits on their availability. This strategy also enables DSOs to control the loose organizational properties associated with direct sales as a form of entrepreneurship (Sparks & Schenk, 2006). By drawing lines around activities that prioritize their lowerline “recruits” and their personal priorities, DSOs feel as though

they are controlling and managing each each set of ideals without sacrificing standards related to their professional and personal relationships. For the DSO, these lines make their work appear clean, separate and manageable .

Two primary features of doing and being direct sales business-ownership invite the leader – mentor dialectic into the work practices of DSOs: (1) organizational structure and, (2) relationship structure. First, one explanation for the emergence of this dialectic is the pyramid structure that DSOs are embedded within. In a multi-level marketing or pyramid structure, classical employee-employer relationships do not exist (Sparks & Schenk, 2006). DSOs are *all* independent business-owners regardless of their position in the multi-level marketing structure. This impacts the way DSOs “manage” their recruits (Sparks & Schenk, 2006). A second reason for the emergence of this dialectic is that a more symmetrical relationship typically exists between a DSO and her recruits due to the independent nature of direct sales (Sparks & Schenk, 2006). Based on this symmetrical relationship, leading and mentoring are more appropriate acts to motivate and encourage fellow business-owners. DSOs spoke specifically about the challenges associated with managing these tensions within the structure of doing direct sales:

E: The last probably two years have been a struggle for me, [learning] how to just truly become a leader that people want to follow, and how to create that team mentality, which again, is very different than someone who is working at a...

R: Like a sole proprietorship.

E: Right. Because their employees come to work every day because they want a paycheck. The people on my team are in business for themselves, and so I cannot require them to come to meetings or trainings. It is all on them what they want to do. That is a challenge, learning how to motivate people and just being a good leader myself so that they want to do that.

- *Advocare sales agent, addressing the tension of leading and motivating individuals who are entrepreneurs themselves*

As far as having employees in the business, I have four members. Even though I am here for them and I mentor them and their success is my success, they still have their individual business, so I'm not there telling them, "You have to do this and you have to do that." If you tell me your goal, ok, you want the free car, then out of personal experience, this is what you need to do to get to that point.

Whether they do it or not, that's on them. I'm not going to make them feel bad for doing that, because it's all on them. Where as if I owned the business and I had employees that I was paying, then I would have expectations for your job position, and if you're not doing those, then I have a problem with that. I think that's probably the biggest thing I can think of.

- *Mary Kay rep, addressing how leadership and mentoring are a unique component of DSO work*

The Business – Family – Team Base Trialectical Tension

The leader – mentor dialectic is nested within a larger, more complex trialectic that DSOs struggle to manage. DSOs described experiencing a unique triangular set of tensions grounded in concerns for their own individual businesses, concerns for their families and concerns related to their "lowerline" recruits. The following sections articulate a business – family – team base trialectic and present strategies incorporated by DSOs as they struggled to balance this trialectical tension.

Articulating the trialectic. A trialectic surfaced as women spoke about attending to the needs of their families, needs related to their individual business and needs related to their team base. Trialectics is a "growing body of alternative thinking" utilized as a theoretical framework in some organizational change research (Ford & Ford, 1994, p. 757). According to this literature, dialectics present a way of thinking about two competing forces (such as conflict and cooperation) through a diachronic lens, which limits the way we conceptualize complex systems of competing forces (Ford & Ford,

1994). Trialectics as a framework allows us to examine tensions that sustain complex, “ever-changing” systems where competing forces are constantly in motion (Ford & Ford, 1994, p. 765). The three forces that fuel the system of trialectical tensions that DSOs grapple with, are: (1) family, (2) the DSOs’ individual, personal businesses, and (3) the team-based component of the DSO’s work practices. Family concerns surfaced as a trialectical force when DSOs described feeling “pulled” towards their family obligations (e.g. household chores, caring for young children, caring for spouses, etc.). DSO work also requires that women market their individual businesses and attend to inventory, stock and customer issues. In an average workday, DSOs described feeling pushed and pulled between “vacuuming” and “picking up kids” and answering emails from clients or submitting product orders. Thus, DSOs are in a constant state of managing their family affairs while simultaneously attending to their individual businesses. The third force within this work – family trialectic involves a DSO’s team base or lowerline. As DSOs vacillate between the needs of their family members and personal business issues, they are also pulled in a third direction – towards issues related to their recruits (e.g. leading and mentoring lower-line recruits). Regarding this third pole, DSOs are in constant motion, swinging back and forth between family concerns, individual business concerns and team-based issues. Consider the following examples of how an Advocare agent and Stella & Dot representative feel pulled between these three competing forces of family, individual business and team-based issues:

Well, there’s lots of examples. I think every single day, I feel like I should be vacuuming over doing this. There’s things where I have the whole mommy guilt or clean house guilt versus making money and being productive that way. But then at the same time, I have right now, I think 50 people underneath, which is

nothing compared to other girls I know. But trying to communicate and catch up and stay involved in all 50 of their lives can be really challenging.

– *Advocare agent, addressing juggling her business, her team and her family*

Trying to balance my personal business as well as helping coach these stylists on my team to promote. That's probably where I struggle and feel pulled the most is when I have to do both of those things because then something has got to give. I'm doing my personal business and then I'm not here making dinner for my kids, or I can't drive the soccer carpool, that type of thing.

– *Stella & Dot agent, addressing her struggles with family, individual business and team base tensions*

These narratives demonstrate a complex, triangular set of tensions that include individual business obligations, personal obligations and priorities related to mentoring and leading lowerline recruits. This is an interesting set of separate yet connected tensions that make up a trialectic where “family” serves as a central force. Although DSOs describe feeling “pushed” and “pulled” between these three poles, they consistently describe “family” as their top priority. This is very consistent with the descriptions DSOs provided about motivations for engaging in direct sales. Nearly every participant in this sub-sample had one or more children, and all of them described direct sales as an appealing form of business-ownership due to the flexibility and freedom it offered them as they earned income while caring for their families. Because flexibility and freedom associated with family concerns motivated them to engage in direct sales, it is not surprising that DSOs organize their individual and team-based business concerns around their families. These findings are very interesting as they demonstrate a unique set of tensions associated with the traditional work – family dialectic. Thus, a trialectic is proposed where women feel pulled between the three

separate poles of family, individual business and team base. Figure 2 illustrates the business – family – team trialectic.

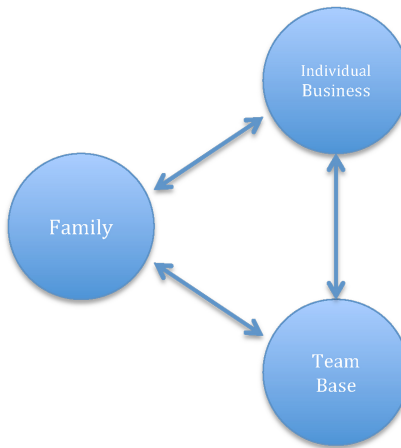


Figure 2. Business – Family – Team Base Trialectic

Managing the trialectic. Although the work – family trialectic includes two distinct tensions, the interdependent relationships linking the three poles of family, individual business and team base appears circular. DSOs are required to maintain a successful team-base to succeed themselves as direct sales business-owners and they are also directly dependent on their personal businesses (fostered by recruit and team-member sales) to provide needed income for their families. Women in this particular category are in a peculiar position where their business relationships define success, and these particular relationships sustain their family income, and the kinds of relationships they have with their family (Sparks & Schenk, 2006). As professional and personal growth is dependent on income generated at all levels in the multi-level marketing

scheme this creates a unique circle of interdependence amongst DSOs, their team members and their family members. If growth stalls in one particular realm of the DSO's work or personal life, the entire ring of relationships will suffer. For example, if family issues surface for the DSO, her individual sales will falter as she attends to her top priority: family. She may earn some commission from her lowerline recruits, but this income typically isn't enough to offset the financial loss related to hindered individual business efforts as she focuses on her family concerns. Less income from individual sales typically leads to a lower combined family income where DSO family members then have to make sacrifices. In this example, if a DSO experiences personal hardship that affects her individual business, efforts directed at leading and mentoring recruits suffers as well. The same logic can be applied to a different scenario, where perhaps a DSO cannot seem to manage her team base well. If her team base doesn't increase, neither does her monthly income. And typically funds gained from individual sales are not sufficient in generating a substantial monthly income. In this case, the DSOs family makes personal and financial sacrifices as she grows her team base and her individual business efforts suffer as she focuses on building the number of lower-line recruits beneath her in the multilevel marketing structure. The DSO is the central figure in this ring of relationships, influencing family growth, individual business growth and team-base growth. Figure 3 depicts this complex system of relationships.



Figure 3. Ring of Interdependence in Direct Sales

Several interesting descriptions about how DSOs managed the tensions associated with the work – family trialectic surfaced as DSOs described how they juggled their individual business and family concerns with the concerns of their recruits. This ring of relationships, as one participant phrased it, can resemble a circular merry-go-round at the playground.

You don't know how to balance home, work, your business, your kids, your team, what they need. Oh wait, I still have to sell \$500, I still have to be a consultant, too. It's hard to find that balance at first, but once you do, you get it. It's kind of like those merry-go-rounds at the playground when you're a kid. When you first get started you dig your shoulder in and really work to get it going. But then, once it's going, you just have to give it a shove every now and then and it keeps moving.

– *Scentsy agent, discussing the circular, merry-go-round model*

In order for the merry-go-round to continue spinning, one particular person has to be in charge of pushing everyone along. As a central figure in this ring of relationships,

the DSO is always the “pusher.” She “pushes” with great force in the beginning until she becomes accustomed to the cyclical rhythm of the merry-go-round. At that point, she can hop on and just “give it a shove every now and then” to keep going. In this metaphor, however, if any riders fall or jump off of the merry-go-round including the DSO herself (the pusher), the ride is over. Again, this appears to be a unique form of interdependence driven by marked relational tensions experienced by the DSO. DSOs also described a creative strategy for pushing through the tensions associated with the work – family trialectic and this “merry-go-round” of interdependence.

DSOs would engage in a compartmentalization by focusing on each pole of the business – family – team base trialectic separately, while in the appropriate domain. For instance, DSOs accomplished compartmentalization by explaining to their families that they needed work time (where they would then focus on individual sales) and then explain to recruits or customers that they needed uninterrupted personal time (allowing them to attend to their family obligations). Terms such as “time management,” “prioritizing,” and “compartmentalizing” surfaced as they described their chosen methods of attending to these trialectical forces. Additionally, many DSOs were adamant that communicating this compartmentalization system with everyone involved was key to the fundamental success of this strategy, demonstrating that the enactment of this strategy depends on effective communication. This compartmentalization strategy resembles what some scholars refer to as segmentation (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Braithewaite, 2007; Montgomery, 1993). The strategy invoked by DSOs is somewhat consistent with segmentation as it defined in a social dialectics framework (Baxter,

2004; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007; Montgomery, 1993). Baxter, et al. contends that segmentation occurs when individuals who are experiencing relational tensions such as family – individual business and family – team base concerns, will attempt to emphasize certain dialectics in certain domains. Several statements were provided to demonstrate “segmenting” through effective communication, including narratives provided by two separate Mary Kay consultants:

And communication is big, too. Because if your family has a similar goal... Like with my kids, I say, “Mom’s going to be very, very busy this month, and we’re going on vacation next month. So I’m going to try to make a bunch of money so we can go on vacation, so try to think of something you want to do on vacation.” “Well, I want to go to [Sea World].” “Ok, fine well, I’m going to pay for that.” And they’re like, “Ok, do you have any appointments on the book?” You know, so they’re all excited about it. It’s just how you communicate that to your family.
– *Mary Kay consultant, talking about how she involves her children in the “segmentation” process*

Well for instance, I’ve learned to put on my family schedule like games, and events that we do as a family in my calendar, but my family also knows that Thursday night is my meeting night, so if something is going up on that, that’s just too bad. I’ll have to make it up to you with ice cream or something. I guess just the communication to your family as, “This is my business. This is what I’m doing. Just like dad has his job and he can’t call in sick, this is my business. This is the schedule. I’m going to make the things I know that I can make, but if it lands on a Thursday night, I can’t go. If it lands on a conference – we have two day conferences in Dallas – if it lands on that, sorry, I can’t make it. They know, though, that they’re my priority because I put them in my calendar first. And then I pencil all my other stuff around. That’s pretty huge and it takes that pressure off of feeling like you’re neglecting your family, because you’re not. You put them first and foremost.
– *Mary Kay consultant, speaking about how she prioritizes her “self interests” by penciling them in first*

These statements clearly indicate that DSOs manage a complex and competing set of interests related to their personal businesses, families and recruits/team-members.

This system of interdependence is characterized by the pushes and pulls DSOs

experience while attempting to balance multiple competing, yet interdependent, relational forces. DSOs deal with this “messiness” by “chopping up” their priorities and segmenting efforts devoted to each pole of this trialectic. The above quotes demonstrate two things about how women in this category of business-ownership manage the messiness associated with doing direct sales: (1) communicating with everyone involved in the ring of relationships is key, (2) it is paramount to prioritize family over individual business and team base concerns.

In the first quote, a Mary Kay rep states that she engages her children in the segmenting process by informing them that if they want to go the “Sea World” then “mommy has to work.” The children then respond, “Do you have appointments in the books?” By initiating these two conversational themes, she accomplishes keeping her family informed, but she also receives permission from her family to engage in “work” practices” which places their concerns before her work concerns. In the second statement, a different Mary Kay rep talks about “penciling” everyone in. Through the “penciling” process she engages her family in the segmentation strategy (keeping them informed about separate work and family priorities), but *always* pencils her work obligations around her children demonstrating she is prioritizing her family over business-related issues.

As stated earlier, this segmenting strategy appeared rehearsed until I discovered that many women engaged in direct sales business-ownership receive training or mentoring on selective prioritization from their parent companies. So in a sense, these descriptions of segmenting personal and professional spheres were indeed rehearsed

scripts that participants repeated as routine principles for success upheld and instilled by parent organizations (Sparks & Schenk, 2006). Some parent companies title this strategy “posting and planning” while others train their DSOs in prioritization skills such as calendaring, building spreadsheets, taking notes, and organizing orders. One particular company (Mary Kay, Inc.) instills the faith-based values of “God first, family second and career third” into their direct sales business-owners. This was a new theme within this study as no other form of business-ownership addressed concrete principles for balancing work and family relationships. In fact, both BOs and SPs struggled with these concepts and spoke at times about how training or education in these areas would be greatly beneficial to their success as business-owners. These narratives address some of the principles that guide compartmentalization practices encouraged by two different parent organizations, Northwestern Mutual and Mary Kay, Inc.

We call it posting and planning. At the end of the day, you should know where you are for the day. You’re doing two things. One, you know where you’re at, but then you’re closing out that day so that if you had a bad day, you put it in the past and then tomorrow, start fresh. Or if you’ve had a good day, don’t hang on that too long because with the commission based business, you can close a big deal in the beginning of the month and want to take a vacation to Cancun or take your foot off the gas, so that they have the importance of closing the day, every day.

– *Northwestern Mutual insurance agent, addressing how her company teaches her how to prioritize and plan*

That’s one thing that I’ve never really had an issue with because of the philosophies that Mary Kay has. God first, family second and career third. It’s kind of weird, because they actually teach you how to satisfy your balance with your family. That’s never been an issue for me, personally.

– *Mary Kay agent, addressing how her company teaches faith/family/work balance which has led to her rarely having issues with this balancing act*

Summary

For the most part women in this group, the direct sales business-owner group, chose to pursue their own business ventures because of their affinity for the flexibility and freedom associated with this form of business-ownership, identification with the company or founding entrepreneur they sold under and/or their affinity for the product or service they sold. DSOs also provided mixed accounts related to their level of identification with the terms “entrepreneur” and “business-owner.” While a few DSOs viewed themselves as business-owners and entrepreneurs, others viewed themselves as entrepreneurs but not business-owners and vice versa. And still, many DSOs didn’t view themselves as entrepreneurs or business-owners at all, but largely identified with their practice as sales agents.

This particular group struggled with being taken seriously by their peers, loved ones, friends, customers and other types of business-owners. This presented a challenge for DSOs as they grappled with the term “real entrepreneurship.” They spoke at length about being “misunderstood” or feeling like they had to work around “stereotypes” and “misconceptions” related to their roles as DSOs in a multi-level marketing structure. They also spoke about struggling to manage particular relationships as direct sales business-owners. DSOs are very dependent on team members for success, and vice versa, and DSOs typically engage in direct sales because of the added income and flexibility it provides their families with. Thus, a circle of interdependence exists incorporating the DSO, their team structure and their families. In managing the tensions associated with this form of interdependence, women could choose to “turn off” or draw

“soft” boundaries with their recruits, and/or to “compartmentalize” or “segment” time and efforts allocated to these different relationships in scripted ways that are consistent with what is termed segmentation from the social dialectics perspective (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Braithewaite, 2007; Montgomery, 1993). This “segmenting” strategy is reflective of what many multi-level marketing organizations espouse as important principles for managing time effectively and prioritizing faith first, family second and career third.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of how women entrepreneurs discursively constructed their roles as business owners within three types of business-ownership—business owners, sole-proprietors and direct-sales representatives. Through this study, I strove to discover what types of tensions they experienced in the nexus of the various relational networks they engage in their work and how they communicatively manage these tensions as they organize and lead their various enterprises.

In this chapter, I will compare, clarify and extend the central concepts related to entrepreneurship that are the focus of this study: (1) discursive constructions, (2) social dialectics, and (3) tension-management strategies. I begin the discussion by comparing the results for each research question across the different categories of entrepreneurship noting commonalities and contrasts across these three categories. I then continue with a discussion of the connections to previous research and I will conclude by highlighting theoretical connections and future research, pragmatic application of the findings from this study, and limitations.

Entrepreneurship and Different Types of Business Ownership

Table 3 provides a summary of the research questions and themes and secondary themes associated with each research question. A brief description of the themes

associated with the three categories of entrepreneurship and business owners is provided for each research question.

Research Question Case Comparison						
Research Question	Theme	Secondary Theme	SPs	BOs	DSOs	
<i>Discursive Constructions of Entrepreneurship (RQ1)</i>	<i>Motivations</i>	Pushed	✓	✓		
		Choice	✓	✓	✓	
	Descriptions	Forming				✓
		Interacting	✓	✓	✓	
		Maintaining	✓	✓	✓	
		Entrepreneur			✓	
		Business-Owner	✓	✓		
		Practice	✓			✓
	Definitions	Not Taken Seriously	✓	✓	✓	
		Freedom/Flexibility	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Dialectics of Entrepreneurship (RQ2)</i>	Relational Tensions	Production – People		✓		
		Work – Home	✓			
	Work – Home - Team				✓	
	Compartmentalization	✓			✓	
<i>Tension Management (RQ3)</i>	Strategy	Delegation	✓	✓		
		“Managing it all”	✓	✓	✓	
		Combination	✓			

Table 3. Research Question Case Comparison

RQ1: How do women entrepreneurs discursively construct their roles as business owners at various entrepreneurial levels?

Motivations

DSOs overwhelmingly *chose* to engage in direct-sales as a form of business-ownership. DSOs were the only group in this study who did not feel pushed or nudged into business-ownership. Choice as a strong motivator for engaging in direct sales (and

subsequent lack of being “pushed) can be explained in a few ways. First, DSOs did not describe work histories where they experienced differential treatment or discouraging practices. Many of these women maintained corporate positions prior to becoming DSOs, but pursued business-ownership through direct sales as a lifestyle choice. As a lifestyle choice, DSOs considered many factors before committing to a particular parent company including: (1) the likelihood their business would be successful based on the product or services being sold and the values espoused by the parent company, and (2) the flexibility and freedom associated with doing direct sales for a particular parent organization. DSOs chose business-ownership because most of them at one point were seeking a lifestyle that encompassed steady income, professional opportunities, and the freedom and flexibility to juggle this professional opportunity with family obligations. Nearly every DSO interviewed had one or more children and the majority of DSOs had small children still residing at home.

Second, there is a social component to doing direct sales. While some BOs discovered a niche product or service idea through previous occupations, direct sales business-owners sell a product or service invented by parent entrepreneurs. These parent entrepreneurs build multi-level marketing agencies that require DSOs to constantly recruit additional DSOs beneath them in these pyramid structures. These recruits (rather than niche product or service ideas) are discovered via strong networking techniques encouraged by parent organizations. DSOs dedicate a great deal of their work efforts towards hosting parties, dropping off products and marketing materials at local retailers and promoting, marketing and recruiting through social network sites such as Facebook.

It is likely that through these social encounters, many DSOs did not necessarily choose to become direct sales business-owners -- they were *chosen* by another DSO through the recruiting process instilled by multi-level marketing agencies.

Additionally, several BOs and SPs described choosing to engage in business-ownership because entrepreneurship was modeled to them by certain family members or because they inherited a family business. These types of choices were not described as motivating factors for the DSO. DSOs did not elect to engage in direct sales because they were inspired by the “pioneering spirit” of a great-great grandmother who worked for Mary Kay, Inc.. Similarly, they did not describe inheriting a their direct sales businesses from family members. DSOs did describe being inspired by the values espoused by parent entrepreneurs, however, and by the mentoring and leading efforts of their “higher line” direct sales agents. Direct sales networking structures are very tightknit and resemble in many ways, a family structure where DSOs admire parent entrepreneurs just a children “look up” to their parents. And relationships between recruits and mentors resembled sisterly, or sibling-like relationships at times as DSOs struggled to manage, lead, mentor and “drawing boundaries” for their recruits or “kid sisters.” For the DSO, the role of family influence and workplace structure is constructed differently than for SPs and BOs.

Descriptions

Women’s entrepreneurship is described as relational across all three categories of business ownership. While women attest to devoting efforts towards building and maintaining relationships in different ways according to the type of business-ownership

practice (e.g., DSOs spend more time forming new relationship with recruits and clients than SPs and BOs), all three business ownership categories highlight relationships are a prime focus for the woman entrepreneur. The different patterns of relational work that surfaced from this study may be attributed to the material practices that women entrepreneurs engage in that facilitate a certain work structure.

For instance, many sole-proprietors work from home. This places them in a unique ownership/organizational position. SPs described a work structure where they are solely responsible for meeting the demands of a diverse “cast of characters” while embedded in unstructured workspaces, while simultaneously leveraging personal and family relationships. The structure of this form of work explains why the SP spends a great deal of her time maintaining relationships with a host of different constituents. Business-owners described spending a great deal of their time attending to employee concerns. As business-owners maintain workspace separate from their homes where they employ a workforce of two or more laborers, the structure of business-ownership assumes a different form than the work structure of sole-proprietorship. DSOs, on the other hand, described forming new relationships with clients and recruits and then working to maintain those relationships as their primary efforts in a given workday. Again, the structure of doing direct sales as a form of business-ownership calls for these kinds of relational acts. To generate a certain level of income DSOs have to “directly” sell to repeat and new clients. They also have to build and maintain relationships with recruits who sell beneath them in their given pyramid structures. Given these findings, work structure emerged as a theme that influences the relational acts that participants

engage in throughout “typical” days. This work structure seems to influence the relational form of work participants engage in as well as the relational tensions they experience and strategies implemented to balance these contradictions.

Definitions

Business-owners described themselves as entrepreneurs and business-owners. Sole-proprietors primarily defined themselves by the practice they engaged in, rather than as entrepreneurs, but at times provided self-descriptions of “business-owner” or “small business-owner.” DSOs were not even sure of their role in this project, as they did not see themselves as business-owners or entrepreneurs. These findings are very compelling as I assumed in the early stages of this research that women who owned businesses and engaged in entrepreneurial work would indeed describe themselves as entrepreneurs and business-owners. Roughly 2/3s of the women interviewed for this study, however, hesitated to define or describe themselves using these terms.

Another interesting finding that surfaced from the definitions participants provided addresses the business-owner group. BOs in this study were primarily engrained in “male-dominated” fields such as engineering, construction and architecture. Within this group, 8 out of 10 participants assertively defined themselves as entrepreneurs and/or business-owners. The only two participants who did not describe themselves relying on these terms stated they “worked for a public relations firm” and “a bridal shop.” A connection between self-definitions and gender surfaces when women embedded in more masculine fields describe themselves as “entrepreneurs” and “business-owners” while women who work in “communications” or the wedding/bridal

industry describe themselves as “working for” a business they actually own. Business-owners described themselves as such, because they were embedded in a reality where gender matters (whether they want to admit that or not) and they have to enact entrepreneurship in assertive, masculine ways as a survival tactic. Women embedded in more feminine industries, who work with other women, have to use a different “voice” when communicating their business-ownership status. Perhaps a “self-aggrandizing voice” is a recipe for failure for women business-owners embedded in these feminine industries where humility and demure qualities are the norm. These “voice” implications and self-definitions demonstrate that women enact entrepreneurship based on prescribed expectations tied to their gender, as opposed to their titles as business-owners and entrepreneurs.

Secondly, these findings can be tied to dominant definitions about what constitutes “real” entrepreneurship. The participants who were hesitant to describe or define themselves as business-owners or entrepreneurs offered detailed explanations as to why. Many of them argued they defined entrepreneurs as “visionaries” or “innovators” who created a “grandiose” product or service idea. They used examples such as Steve Jobs, of Apple, Inc., Sara Blakely, of Spanx, Inc. and Mary Kay of Mary Kay, Inc. to illustrate these definitions. These “visionaries,” they argued, are (and were) pioneers who innovated landmark products and sold these products through large corporate conglomerates sustained by countless employees. The work that many participants engaged in (sole-proprietorship, small business-ownership, direct sales) did not align well with these descriptors. Definitions of what constitutes “real”

entrepreneurship surfaced frequently throughout this study and seemed to inform how women describe and enact entrepreneurship and business-ownership. Many participants struggled with “being taken seriously,” perhaps because their line of work is not perceived as “real” based on these definitions and descriptors.

RQ2: What do women entrepreneurs identify as common tensions in the leading and organizing of business enterprises at various entrepreneurial levels?

Relational Tensions

As evident in Table 3, each category of participants described managing different relational tensions. The sole-proprietor described a work – home tension where she felt torn between meeting the demands of her clients while simultaneously fulfilling obligations to her family members and loved ones. The business-owner spoke about “babysitting” and “firefighting” as components of her role as she balanced production concerns with the concerns of her employees. Striking an appropriate balance between “boss” and “best friend” proved to be quite the challenge for the BO who managed an employee base. The direct sales business-owner detailed a complex trialectic where she worked to attend to her individual business concerns, her personal or family concerns and concerns related to her recruits. Although participants described three separate tensions – each of these relational tensions seems directly influenced by the different work structures assumed by the DSO, BO and SP.

Sole-proprietors served as the nexus of their work and home universe and many of them worked in unstructured office environments. While some SPs worked directly from their homes, others leased physical office space separate from their residences.

Whether they worked from home or shuttled back and forth between home and the office, the sole-proprietor described being in constant motion as she attended to the needs of every relationship that sustained her work and home universe, both professional and personal. The business-owner managed an employee base of two or more workers where work was conducted in facilities separate from the business-owner's home. By virtue of this structure and her position as figurehead of her company, the BO struggled to leverage production concerns with people (or employee) concerns. The pyramid structure that DSOs operated within directly influenced the complicated trialectic they grappled with. DSOs also described being in constant motion as they attended to their individual businesses, their family priorities and the needs of their recruits. As DSOs worked from their cars while picking up children from school, event locations, training and development seminars and from home, they balanced this complex trialectical tension while conducting highly fragmented work.

RQ3: How do women entrepreneurs communicatively manage these tensions?

Tension Management Strategies

Women across all three categories of entrepreneurship managed the relational tensions experienced through their work as business-owners in unique ways. DSOs gravitated towards compartmentalization when attempting to balance the individual business – family – team trialectic. However, SPs and BOs tended to defer to “managing it all” despite the fact that they had full-time and part-time employees (in some cases for the sole-proprietor) to assist them as they balanced work – family and

production – people dialectics. These findings may be attributed to the nature of work that different entrepreneurs engage.

DSOs displayed a tendency to compartmentalize as they balanced a complicated triangular set of tensions. These participants described “tracing boundaries” around the separate spheres of “business,” “family” and “team base” as a strategy for managing the tensions associated with this trialectic. This is especially interesting when considering the type of work DSOs engage in where they market, sell, recruit, place orders, cook dinner for their families, and attend their child’s gymnastics class (to name a few activities) from their homes, cars, remote locations and handheld devices. It appears that the highly “flexible” and fragmented structure of the DSO’s work, requires tight boundaries to manage. In other words, because the DSO can work from anywhere, anytime, she has to create strict boundaries that circle business, team-base and family spheres or these domains will begin to overlap and she will be in constant work mode. Direct sales parent companies are aware of the potential for DSOs to lose control of these three spheres and “burn out.” The direct sales game has a high turnover rate, and to combat this problem many parent organizations conduct training and development seminars where time management and “boundary-drawing” are encouraged practices.

BOs and SPs leaned towards “managing it all” as a strategy. While this strategy makes sense for the SP who works from home (where work and family obligations converge), sole-proprietors with part-time assistance and business-owners with employees also gravitated towards this strategy. Delegation seems to be a more appropriate tension management strategy when part- or full-time assistance is available.

Yet the majority of BOs attempted to juggle production and people concerns simultaneously by exerting extraordinary levels of effort. And even though a few SPs hired part-time workers to conduct “administrative” tasks, these women also attested to delegating *and* attending to “it all” as a combined technique for meeting the needs of a diverse “cast of characters.” “Managing it all” as a go-to strategy for SPs and BOs can be explained in at least two ways: (1) gender influences the need to seek perfection by enacting “superwoman” qualities, and (2) ownership status requires attention to multiple competing tensions.

First, several BOs and SPs described the “urge” to “manage it all” as an inherently “feminine” trait. Women in general, they argued, have a tendency to seek perfection as they balance complicated and competing demands including those that surface from work and home. Business-owners and sole-proprietors described feeling “pressure” to manage perfect businesses, the perfect balance between “friend” and “boss,” and perfect homes. In this capacity women are expected to appear collected, controlled and perfect. Based on these expectations of perfection, BOs and SPs attempt to “do it all” with superhuman strength and composure as they present a perfect balance of “everything” to the world. These expectations are highly gendered as men seek to balance many tensions grounded in work and home obligations, but without the expectation of “perfection” attached to their efforts.

Business-owners and sole-proprietors maintain unique positions of ownership as well. If a problem occurs for the DSO, she has several “higher” and “lower lines” she can defer to for assistance and ultimately her parent company is the final point of

command in the pyramid hierarchy she functions within. In a business or sole-proprietorship, however, the buck stops with the owners and sole-practitioners. This ownership status bleeds into the business-owner and sole-proprietor's personal realm as well, as they are viewed by spouses and family members as having a "flexible" ownership schedule where they can set their own pay scale and working hours. BOs and SPs, then, are in complete charge of their business and personal domains. With or without hired assistance, everyone defers to the business-owner or sole-proprietor when work or family crises emerge. This ownership status directly impacts the "manage it all" strategy that BOs and SPs adopted in this study.

Theoretical Connections and Future Research

The notion of women in the workplace has evolved tremendously over the last century as socially constructed ideas of "women's work" have been shaped and reshaped over the decades. Whereas "women's work" and leadership opportunities were confined to particular domestic and administrative roles in previous generations, women in our current post-modern society are assuming more complicated work and ownership roles that are driven by complex power structures and relationships. Several qualitative themes emerged from this dissertation that connect with and extend our understanding of the connections among gender, women's entrepreneurship, organizational communication, and dialectical theory. The analysis of this dissertation suggests several connections to theory and research in the following areas and suggests room for future research related to: (1) the "Who is an Entrepreneur?" debate, (2) origins of becoming

an entrepreneur, (3) “real” entrepreneurship as relational work, (4) entrepreneurial identity and intersectionality, and (5) social dialectics and entrepreneurship.

The “Who is an Entrepreneur?” Debate

A definitional debate occurred over thirty years ago where small-business scholars attempted to define entrepreneurship. Some scholars sought to answer the question “Who is an entrepreneur” by examining the different traits of entrepreneurs versus small business-owners (Carland, et al., 1984; Carland, et al., 1988, p. 33). Other scholars argued that, ““Who is an entrepreneur?” is the wrong question (Gartner, 1988, p. 11). The latter scholars contend it is the “act” or process of entrepreneurship that is worth examining, rather than the person engaged in the act (Carland, 1988, p. 34; Gartner, 1988). Carland responds to Gartner’s criticism toward the trait approach to examining entrepreneurial qualities by positing that both the entrepreneur and the act of entrepreneurship are “inextricably bound” and that there is room in entrepreneurial scholarship for multiple definitions of the “entrepreneur” and “entrepreneurship.” This dissertation study engages this definitional debate in several ways.

First, this study examines the entrepreneurial processes that women engage. Gartner’s definition of entrepreneurship acknowledges the “game” or process of entrepreneurship, rather than the traits of the player (1988, p. 22). This is an interesting metaphor, as findings from this study demonstrate that the process or the “game” involves different rules for women entrepreneurs. For instance, many women addressed being “pushed” into entrepreneurship and then struggling to finance their respective enterprises. This financial struggle then “pushed” them into partnerships with male

colleagues. These “pushes” demonstrate that women are motivated to play the “game” for reasons that are different than male entrepreneurs (Kirkwood, 2009). The rules and resources available to women entrepreneurs are different as well. Thus, this research follows Gartner’s advice to study entrepreneurship as a process, by exploring the unique experiences, descriptions, pushes and pulls associated with the process of women’s entrepreneurship.

Additionally, this study follows Gartner’s advice to explore entrepreneurship beyond “organization creation” (1988, p. 26). Gartner’s response to Carland’s question of “Who is an entrepreneur?” is helpful as it proposes a useful lens for examining the process of entrepreneurship (Carland, 1984; Gartner, 1988). Findings from this dissertation demonstrate that “organization creation” occurs as a continual process as many women entrepreneurs seek to create new relationships (and maintain and modify existing ones in interesting ways) throughout the enterprising process. Directs sales business-owners, for instance, constantly strive towards forming new relationships with recruits and customers to develop their “lower line” (Sparks & Schenk, 2006). Sole-proprietors are in constant motion as they attend to the new and old relationships that sustain their businesses in unique ways. And business-owners swing back and forth between a production base that it constantly changing with new and modified products and services and an employee-base that can circulate with frequency as new and old workers come and go.

Furthermore, this dissertation engages with the “Who is an entrepreneur?” debate by examining different forms of entrepreneurship through sole-proprietorship, business-

ownership (both large and small) and direct sales business-ownership. Future research could examine these processes further (sole-proprietorship, business-ownership and direct sales business-ownership) as well as other discursive constructions, as this dissertation study demonstrates that the process of entrepreneurship is fluid and encompasses unique experiences, tensions and obstacles when enacted in different ways. For instance, there is a new movement towards examining the “mompreneur” (Ekinsmyth, 2013). Additional gender, communication and entrepreneurial research could begin to further enhance the definition of entrepreneurship by examining the unique, situated context of “mompreneurship” (Ekinsmyth, 2013).

Lastly, this study focuses on the process of entrepreneurship and highlights relational work as a feature of the entrepreneurial process for women entrepreneurs. This study suggests that the process of relational work occurs differently for different types of entrepreneurship. This dissertation moves the definitional debate from “entrepreneur vs. small business-owner” or “entrepreneur versus entrepreneurship” to including enactments of sole-proprietorship, business-ownership (both large and small) and direct sales business-ownership. Future research could examine the relational work that entrepreneurs engage in both masculine and feminine communities of business-ownership as current streams of organizational communication scholarship charge modern scholars with looking beyond gendered enactments and examining the structural and contextual features of post-modern work practices (Ashcraft, 2011).

Origins of Becoming an Entrepreneur

This study explored several features of women's entrepreneurship including motivations for engaging in the entrepreneurial process. Participants cited various motivators for entering business-ownership including their family history and socialization. What is particularly interesting about these findings is the fact that SPs and BOs were motivated by a combination of having a family background that included business ownership which led them to choose an entrepreneurial career, as well as being "pushed" out by larger corporate organizations. On the other hand, DSOs were motivated to choose an entrepreneurial career through an affinity to the product, founder of the organization, and the direct sales lifestyle.

These findings extend our understanding of who becomes an entrepreneur (Schoon & Duckworth, 2012) and why (Kirkwood, 2009). There is a growing literature that explores how family socialization influences an "entrepreneurial" mindset in "second generations" (Aviram, 2009; Schoon & Duckworth, 2012). According to Aviram (2009), "Increasing the rate of entrepreneurship is an aspiration of every modern economy" (p. 311). Joining the ranks of "entrepreneurship," however, involves attaining specific qualities such as "a need for achievement," "resilience under stress," "need for independence," and comfort with "risk-taking" (Aviram, 2009, p. 312). These characteristics are primarily gleaned through "socialization that begins in childhood" (Aviram, 2009, p. 313).

Participants (especially business-owners) frequently described being inspired and "molded" by their mothers or grandmothers, while several sole-proprietors were

discouraged from entering into “male dominated” industries by their fathers. Family structures and socialization practices influence aspirations for becoming an entrepreneur and many of these structures and practices encourage (and discourage) certain gendered enactments of entrepreneurship and the ultimate decision of whether or not women should engage in business-ownership. This dissertation suggests a linkage among family structures, socialization practices and likelihood of engaging in entrepreneurship as an avocation.

However, it is important to also note that SPs and BOs were not only pulled to become entrepreneurs by their family history, but were also “pushed” out by their employing organization. DSOs were the only group of entrepreneurs that did not feel that they were “pushed” into their career path. Rather, they expressed that they chose to become a DSO given their affinity for a particular product, company founder and the lifestyle of direct sales. The pattern of findings suggest that the combination of being “pushed” or “pulled” into entrepreneurship varies according to the type of entrepreneurial activity one engages. This suggests that future research on choosing to become an entrepreneur needs to give closer attention to family, vocational, and workplace socialization and how it connects with one’s previous work history.

Another direction for future scholarship concerns the subjects of family communication, gender, and entrepreneurship. Several business-owners discussed creating their own businesses because of familial motivations. These entrepreneurs either inherited a family business or they were encouraged to become entrepreneurs because certain family members modeled a “pioneering” or “enterprising spirit” to them

as children. These concepts of gender, family and socialization need to be further synthesized. For instance, are maternal or paternal figures more influential when it comes to encouraging young women to become entrepreneurs? How do parents and family members communicatively model entrepreneurship to their children? How do children within a family-owned business context learn about work and gender roles? There are several avenues for research in this area.

“Real” Entrepreneurship as Relational Work

There is a great deal of literature that asserts that women entrepreneurs face many obstacles regarding societal expectations of what counts as “real” entrepreneurship (Gill, 2014). In the US specifically, there are several prevailing expectations about the “masculine” qualities entrepreneurs should espouse, such as assertiveness, decisiveness and rationality, while leading and organizing their enterprises which directly inform women as to how they should enact entrepreneurship (Baron et al., 2001; Buttner & Rosen, 1988; Fagenson & Marcus, 1991; Gill, 2014; Gupta & Bhawe, 2007; Orser, et al., 2009; Shinnar, et al., 2012). The results from this dissertation suggest that one reason many women entrepreneurs did not self identify themselves as “real” entrepreneurs may be due to entrepreneurship being equated with more masculine traits and styles of communication.

Some women business-owners described themselves as “entrepreneurs” and “business-owners” and made rational decisions about how to manage production issues, while other business-owners, many of whom did not identify themselves as entrepreneurs, tempered these qualities with “care” and “compassion” for their

employees. However, these compassionate acts of care and concern for “people” demonstrate “real” entrepreneurship just as much as rational decisions about production features. The analysis from the dissertation suggests that we need to expand our definition of “real” entrepreneurship to include a wide range of entrepreneurial activities such as sole-proprietorship, small business-ownership and direct sales business-ownership where women demonstrate care for their recruits, employees and clients. Conversations that foreground “real” entrepreneurship minimize the efforts of individuals who engage in business-ownership processes that do not exhibit “traditional” features such as a grandiose vision, an employee base, and physical office space. These definitions of “real” entrepreneurship have ties to the “real job” and “ideal entrepreneurship” literature where a dominant ideologies about what constitutes “real” or “ideal entrepreneurial” work was examined (Clair, 1996; Gill, 2014; Gill & Larson, 2014). Clair (1996) discovered that when colloquialisms about what constitutes “real” work are used it perpetuates a societal dialogue that places a higher importance on some forms of work, and diminishes any labor that falls outside of “real job” definitions. Similarly, Gill discovered that discursive constructions of “ideal” entrepreneurship are classed and perpetuate dominant discourse about who can become an entrepreneur (e.g., active, educated innovators). Additionally, Gill & Larson found that discursive constructions of “ideal” entrepreneurship are related to place, as entrepreneurs in the technology industry model “ideal” entrepreneurship after innovators such as Steve Jobs of Apple, Inc.

Dominant descriptions of what constitutes “real” entrepreneurship can help explain why so many women entrepreneurs struggled with “not being taken seriously.” According to Claire (1996), some forms of work are “less valued” than others when they are, “(1) enjoyable, (2) require little trust, (3) temporary or unstable, (4) have low probability of success, (5) require little trust, (6) are not conducted in their natural time (e.g., a soldier in war time versus a soldier in peace time), (7) underutilize the worker in terms of duration and intensity, and (8) are not the primary means of support” (p. 253). Women entrepreneurs exhibit several of these qualities. For instance, direct sales owners are seen as having “unstable” positions that typically do not provide “primary means of support” for women who enact this form of business-ownership. Sole-proprietorship is viewed as “flexible” or perhaps unsteady as their work is conducted in unstructured timeframes that do not adhere to the traditional 8-hour day, 40-hour week temporal structures. Their work could also be described as “not conducted” in a “natural time.” Women business-owners, by virtue of being women, were perceived by their male counterparts as having a “low probability of success.” These theoretical connections shed light on why so many business-owners struggled with gaining respect from personal and professional connections.

This dissertation connects with the conversation regarding “ideal” entrepreneurship initiated by Gill (Gill, 2014; Gill & Larson, 2014). Gill found that entrepreneurs craft specific definitions of “ideal” or “real” entrepreneurship that are tied to class and place (Gill, 2014; Gill & Larson, 2014). Accounts provided throughout this dissertation parallel Gill’s research, as they demonstrate that women entrepreneurs

perpetuate a dominant discourse of “real” entrepreneurship that addresses active innovation, education and gender. Participants in this dissertation disclosed defining features of “real” entrepreneurship that involved innovating a new and unique product or service. They also described “real” entrepreneurship as incorporating the traditional business features of managing an employee base and operating business activities from a physical location (e.g. an office or business campus), rather than a personal residence. These descriptions parallel findings from Gill’s research and reflect a dominant discourse that positions “real” entrepreneurs as innovative, educated and resourceful (Gill, 2014; Gill & Larson, 2014). Furthermore, Gill & Larson discovered that entrepreneurs in the high-tech industry formed perceptions of “ideal” entrepreneurship from technology moguls such as Bill Gates and Steve Jobs. Women entrepreneurs in this dissertation cited these men as examples of “real” entrepreneurship but also spoke extensively about Mary Kay Ash (Mary Kay, Inc.), Jessica Herrin (Stella & Dot, Inc.), and Sara Blakely (Spanx, Inc.). Additional research could explore the connection between “ideal” or “real” entrepreneurship and gender and occupational subcultures. It is interesting that women entrepreneurs provided examples of “ideal” entrepreneurs who are women engrained in the MLM industry (in particular Jessica Herrin and Mary Kay Ash). How does gender, occupational subculture and other topics that intersect with the process of entrepreneurship shape discursive constructions of the “ideal” entrepreneur?

Some literature exists that addresses the occupational subcultures of certain industries. This literature asserts that discursive constructions are a reflection of identity, or how one identifies with their chosen occupation. “Occupational subcultures”

provide spaces for organizational members to construct professional identities and definitions of work where these identities and definitions are shaped by occupational communities and networks (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Kuhn, et al., 2008, p. 164; Lave & Wenger, 1991). For instance, Jorgenson (2002) found that women engineers affirm their credibility as professionals by denouncing minority- and women-based professional organizations. In this example, discursive constructions serve as a powerful reflection of occupational and gender identities (Kuhn, et al., 2008). Tensions related to occupational and gender identities emerge through the discursive constructions women entrepreneurs offer, shaped by occupational communities and mixed messages about “real” and “appropriate” work (Kuhn, et al., 2008, p. 167).

This dissertation contributes to the conversation initiated by Kuhn and colleagues, by examining the discursive constructions women entrepreneurs provided that reflect how different entrepreneurial identities are shaped by occupational communities and traditional gendered discourse. DSOs, for instance, constructed their identities based on their position within their respective MLM organization. Although they are “partners” with parent entrepreneurs, DSOs identified with more collaborative declarations of “ruby-level sales associate” as it demonstrated their cooperative position within their particular network of “higherline” and “lowerline” recruits (Biggart, 1989; Sparks & Schenk, 2006). These descriptions are also reflective of a socialization process that occurs within MLM subcultures where women are expected to cooperate and socialize with each other as they mentor and lead “lowerline” recruits and learn socialization practices from “higherline” recruits (Sparks & Schenk, 2006).

Sole-proprietors demonstrated occupational and gendered identity tensions as they struggled to be taken seriously as practitioners and sole-proprietors because of expectations about “real” and “appropriate” work (Kuhn et al., 2008, p. 167). Business-owners struggled with similar identity tensions as they sought to be taken seriously by male counterparts embedded in their occupational communities of engineering, architecture, consulting, etc. Similar to Jorgenson’s findings, these women also denounced affiliation with minority- and women-based professional organizations as these groups posed a threat to their identities as “qualified” entrepreneurs and business-owners (Jorgenson, 2002; Kuhn, et al., 2008, p. 164). Additional research could examine the gendered discourse of male entrepreneurs who engage in different forms of entrepreneurship and how occupational subcultures shape the identities of men who are direct sales business-owners. Theoretical implications that surface from this dissertation also intersect with topics such as entrepreneurial identity, clichés, religious influences and classed discourse about entrepreneurship (Gill & Larson, 2014).

The Entrepreneurial Identity and Intersectionality

A great deal of research exists that examines entrepreneurial identity (Cohen & Mussen, 2000; Down, 2006; Down & Warren, 2008; Essers & Benschop, 2007; Gill & Ganesh, 2007; Gill & Larson, 2013; Kirkwood, 2009). One body of research examines how clichés inform entrepreneurial identity (Down & Warren, 2008). This research conducted by Down & Warren (2008) points to clichés such as “risk and bravery” (p. 13), “ambition and growth” (p. 14), and “self-sufficiency and autonomy” (p. 16) as discursive constructions that shaped the identities of entrepreneurs in a variety of

organizational contexts. This dissertation contributes to this research as participants in this study relied on particular forms of clichéd talk when describing what they perceived to be central features of enacting entrepreneurship. Freedom and flexibility were two terms used in an almost scripted fashion across the entire sample of interviews. These particular clichés shape the identities of women entrepreneurs who are motivated to become business-owners for a variety of reasons including independence (e.g. freedom) and the flexibility to manage work/home obligations in a flexible manner. These findings also contribute to scholarship demonstrating that women and men are motivated to engage in entrepreneurship for different reasons (Kirkwood, 2009). While men seek job satisfaction through entrepreneurship, women seek opportunities for independence and opportunities to balance work/home obligations more effectively (Kirkwood, 2009). Thus, the clichés of freedom and flexibility shaped the identities of women in this dissertation and contribute to these bodies of research in interesting ways.

Future research could extend the body of literature surrounding entrepreneurial identities by addressing characteristics beyond gender that impact one's propensity to engage in entrepreneurship (Gill, 2014). In two identity-based studies conducted that examine entrepreneurial identities, it was discovered that several discourses contribute to a dominant dialogue concerning "real" or "ideal" entrepreneurship including gender, age, religion, race, and class (Gill, 2014; Gill & Larson, 2013). Gill (2014) demonstrates that classed constructions of "real" or "ideal" entrepreneurship occurred as prominent texts and accounts provided by entrepreneurs (both male and female) positioned "real" or "ideal" entrepreneurs as active, innovative and educated (Gill, 2014). Entrepreneurs

interviewed in Gill's study did not describe themselves as entrepreneurs if they did not innovate something new, therefore reproducing something for clients and customers that was not necessarily innovative (Gill, 2014). Discourse from Gill's study positioned DSOs as second-rate business-owners who were protected by the structures provided by MLM organizations (Gill, 2014). Furthermore, participants in Gill's research endeavor drew distinctions between working-class or blue-collar employees and true entrepreneurs (Gill, 2014). As this study was conducted in Utah where business communities (including entrepreneurial communities) are dominated by individual who espouse the beliefs of the LDS religion, many participants attributed their entrepreneurial qualities to their religious heritage.

My dissertation contributes to this research by extending our analysis of a link between entrepreneurial access and religious affiliation, beyond the places of high-tech industries. While Gill found that several participants grounded in high-tech businesses attributed entrepreneurial success to an LDS acculturated upbringing, my dissertation revealed a connection between entrepreneurial access and success and religious values through the direct sales industry. Narratives provided by DSOs interviewed for my dissertation study confirm that entrepreneurship is tied to religious heritage, thus making this opportunity available primarily to those who subscribe in the same protestant values. For instance, Mary Kay reps were drawn to Mary Kay, Inc. because of her mantra – God first, then family, then business. Similarly, ThirtyOne agents openly identified with the scripture Proverbs 31 that describes the virtuous woman. Thus, opportunities to sell these products and assume business-ownership can be linked to religious identification.

Secondly, DSOs discursively constructed classed accounts of themselves within the MLM industry, where some parent organizations were viewed as more reputable than others implying that opportunities to sell for “real” parent organizations are available only for the elite, savvy, educated and perhaps religious DSOs.

As classed and religious accounts surfaced in this dissertation that examined three different communicative processes of women’s entrepreneurship through the accounts of women entrepreneurs grounded in a variety of fields (e.g. communications, retail, consulting, engineering, etc.), future research needs to further examine the class and religion issues addressed by this dissertation and Gill’s study (2014) by analyzing connections between class, religion, access and success in additional places (beyond gendered acts of entrepreneurship and the high-tech industry). Classed constructions surfaced in this dissertation as well as participants described what they believed to be true entrepreneurship. While some participants argued that DSOs exhibit the work of true entrepreneurs, others contended that direct sales owners were couched or protected by their parent organizations and did not assume the same risks, tensions and obstacles that “real” entrepreneurs encounter. Furthermore, sole-proprietors described themselves as practitioners or “reproducers” rather than active entrepreneurs or innovators, demonstrating the dominant discourse surrounding the active, innovative and educated entrepreneur shapes the identities of business-owners who engage in sole-proprietorship (Gill, 2014). Classed discussions about entrepreneurship need to be further synthesized through a wide range of entrepreneurial accounts, not just those provided by white, protestant, educated business-owners.

Social Dialectics and Entrepreneurship

Research has extended social dialectics theory into the organizational realm, as “tensions are a ubiquitous feature of organizing and are not necessarily detrimental; rather they enable diverse, opposing goals to coexist among organizational stakeholders” Erhardt & Gibbs, 2014, p. 162, 2014; Jian, 2007; Putnam, 2003; Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004). For instance, literature that examines the “dialectical nature of impression management knowledge work” found that role-based and media-based tensions shaped the relationships between managers and subordinates grounded in health, insurance and engineering fields (Ekhardt & Gibbs, p. 155, 2014). Additional organizational communication research has explored dialectics in volunteer – manager relationships (McNamee & Peterson, 2014), tensions amongst virtual workers embedded in global software teams (Gibbs, 2009) and the dialectics associated with family farm succession planning (Pitts, et al., 2009). All of these studies demonstrate that the dialectical perspective is a useful framework for understanding the management of multiple organizational systems sustained by intricate and complex workplace relationships. The current dissertation connects and extends the literature on social dialectics in three ways: (1) it shifts the focus from dialectics regarding relationships to networks, (2) it highlights the importance of dialectics emerging from and being connected with work and organizational structure, and (3) it foregrounds the need to manage work/home tensions

First, this dissertation contributes to the intellectual conversation surrounding organizational dialectics as findings demonstrate that women entrepreneurs leverage large, complex networks of relationships as they enact sole-proprietorship, business-

ownership and direct sales business-ownership. Direct sales business-owners, in particular, experienced a triangular set of tensions embedded in the material practices of multi-level marketing as well as the complicated structure of MLM organizations that rely on cooperation, socializing and networking amongst “higherline” and “lowerline” direct sales representatives for sustained growth and profit generation (Biggart, 1989; Sparks & Schenk, 2006). While relational dialectics has tended to give attention to the dialectics within a particular relationship such as interpersonal relationship (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007), moving social dialectics theory to organizational settings and the process of organizing necessitates examining the dialectics associated with managing multiple relationships or networks simultaneously. Future research should explore the kinds and types of dialectics associated with different kinds of networks, and the strategies for managing dialectics within and between multiple networks.

Second, the dissertation highlights the importance of exploring the connections among entrepreneurship, work structure, and organizational structure. A great deal of literature glosses over differences regarding different types of entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurship is often explored via external business and management features such as organizational size and industry in which certain businesses are embedded (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 1994; Brush, 1992; Greene, Hart, Gatewood, Brush, & Carter, 2003). While such features are salient factors to explore while examining women’s entrepreneurship, it is also important to examine how the structure of work as well as the organizational structure they are embedded in influence the experience and communicative practices of entrepreneurs.

The idea that the structure of work and the organizational structure can influence the entrepreneurial experience of women is best demonstrated in the analysis of social dialectics. For SPs, the primary dialectic was work-home. For BOs, the primary dialectic was people-production. For DSOs, the trialectic was among family, the DSO's own business, and team members. The emergence of these social dialectics can be traced to the structure of the work and organizational structure. For SPs, their work was primarily based out of their home and they had only one other person to manage in their practice. It therefore makes sense that the primary social dialectic they struggled with centered on work-home as their family and professional life was co-mingled with each other given their work was operated from their residence. Similarly, DSOs also operated from their homes and experience a similar tension. However, given the organizational structure of direct sales and the way the work is structured, they also had to manage larger teams of sales representatives. Therefore, the dialectic between work-home became more complex as work now included managing one's own business as well as the activities of team members. For business owners, the focus on production-people may have emerged due to the fact that they had a separate storefront and managed multiple people.

What this analysis suggests is that the emergence of social dialectics is tied to material practices including the place where the work is conducted and the way the work is organized. Future research should explore how issues of place, work structure, and the embeddedness of work in larger organizations, influence the experience of entrepreneurship. This connects with a larger conversation regarding the connection

between material and communicative practices. Such investigation follows Ashcraft, Kuhn and Cooren's (2009) call for research efforts that "examine communication" as a "central organizing process that manages the intersection of symbolic and material worlds" (p. 2).

Third, this dissertation highlights the need to examine the ways female entrepreneurs manage work/home tensions. Findings from this dissertation demonstrate that women entrepreneurs juggle work and home obligations in interesting ways. These findings support literature examining "hard choices" women make about career priorities and personal obligations (Gerson, 1986). The body of research surrounding work/home choices has grown tremendously over the years and frequently addresses a "second shift" or a "time bind" that women experience as they attempt to manage work and family obligations as organizational members (Hochschild, 2001; Hochschild & Machung, 2003). More recent scholarship argues that as the family form shifts, so do the unique strategies family members employ as they attempt to balance work and family responsibilities within unique family structures (Gerson, 2004). The concepts of family and work/home arrangements need to be explored through the unique processes employed by dual-income families, single-parent and single-income families, blended families, and families with differently-abled children. Findings from this study demonstrate that women balance work/home obligations in different ways, depending on the type of entrepreneurship they engage in and the resources available to them. Several participants were single parents and the primary earners for their household and two participants described raising children with different abilities, while attempting to

balance work and personal obligations. Additional research should further synthesize these family forms and the strategies employed while managing work and home responsibilities while enacting fragmented and complex work practices.

Additionally, work/home research needs to be extended into the realm of entrepreneurship. Many women in this study described the flexibility and freedom to balance their work/family obligations as primary motivations for engaging in entrepreneurship. Ekinsynth (2013) uncovered similar accounts but argues that carving an entrepreneurial career around family can position a mother's business as "not serious" (p. 13). Women entrepreneurs in this dissertation invoked creative strategies for working around family obligations but did not assess the effects of strategies such as "managing it all." Recent literature examining the work/life balance of women entrepreneurs in South India linked managing multiple roles with role overload and health implications (Mathew & Panchanatham, 2011). Mathew and Panchanatham's study highlights the struggle women entrepreneurs experience as they attempt to balance work and home, when work frequently interferes with life and life often interferes with work. Women attested to working long hours in an effort manage multiple roles such as caregiver, spouse entrepreneur, marketer, etc. (Mathew & Panchanatham, 2011). Women entrepreneurs from South India also attested that because of cultural gender roles they received little support from social networks such as spouses, employees, and society. This lack of support coupled with long working hours led to what women described as role overload and eventual health implications (Mathew & Panchanatham, 2011). Accounts provided in this dissertation contribute to this literature, as women

described feeling “burnt out” and overloaded from juggling multiple roles, accommodating a diverse “cast of characters,” and “managing it all.” Additional research needs to be conducted that examines specific strategies for work/home balance as exhibited by women engaged in nontraditional forms of work such as entrepreneurship and mompreneurship throughout a variety of regions and contexts (Ekinsymth, 2013).

Pragmatic Applications

Several pragmatic applications stem from this study. First, this study suggests that entrepreneurs may need to develop communication skills aimed at managing networks and establishing their legitimacy. This study provides insight into how women business-owners define themselves as entrepreneurs including motivations, descriptions, and defining characteristics. By being aware of these features of entrepreneurship, women can better prepare themselves for the challenges associated with the enterprising process. For example, as participants described the communicative practices they engage in during a “typical day,” they shared stories about the relational work they exhibit as business-owners with a wide variety of personal and professional networks. These narratives provide insight into the communicative tools necessary to manage the emotional “ups and downs” of engaging in business-ownership. Women also described “not being taken seriously” by a wide variety of constituents including personal and professional connections. These accounts intimate for women entrepreneurs to start “being taken seriously,” may begin with assertive self-descriptions that denote a certain tone of “seriousness.” In other words, if women entrepreneurs and business-owners

want to “be taken seriously,” they should take themselves seriously by describing their work in a more affirming fashion. It may be necessary to develop training material for women entrepreneurs, that goes beyond time management and marketing strategies, to focus on communication-related topics such as the relational and network management issues associated with entrepreneurship as well as strategies for managing legitimacy with different groups.

Second, this research project provides a useful roadmap for women entrepreneurs that will enable them to better understand and manage the tensions and struggles they face as business-owners. Entrepreneurship is a tension-filled activity, but the kinds of tensions that entrepreneurs experience may be unique to their role as sole-proprietors, business-owners, or direct sales business-owners. Women need to gain a greater understanding of the struggles and tensions that are unique to their particular work and develop strategies for managing them. This suggests that women entrepreneur need to develop the ability to articulate the kinds of tensions they face and how they might manage them. It may be particularly important for them to develop a broader range of management strategies than working themselves constantly by “managing it all.”

Third, women need to form information and research networks where they can assist one another as they refine their business efforts. Many of the SPs and BOs were hesitant to participant in male-dominated business groups such as the Chamber of Commerce. Without these pertinent connections, women entrepreneurs will continue to lead, manage and organize in silos grounded in linear assumptions regarding gender roles and entrepreneurship (Cron, Bruton & Slocum, 2006). As evident in this

dissertation research, women entrepreneurs are highly adept at managing intricate webs of professional and personal networks and are fully capable of expanding these networks to include women entrepreneurs with varying characteristics.

Many of the women expressed an interest in knowing about what I found from this research, suggesting that they are interested in developing their ability to become better business women. Several participants in this study requested that I follow-up with them regarding my findings. They were especially intrigued to find out what other women entrepreneurs were doing to deal with the many tensions that sustain the enactment of women's business-ownership. Some of these participants also expressed a desire for a formal networking hub that allowed them to share resources with each other without disclosing the "secret sauce." For instance, there is much to be gained from sharing information related to accounting practices, tax information, leadership practices, management strategies and techniques for improved time management and work/family balance without disclosing any specific formulas for success. Women often commented that men appear to be more adept at this sort of information-sharing and networking through several references to "a good old boys network." Further research could be conducted to analyze the networking practices of certain business-owners in different gendered contexts. For instance, DSOs found great success in the networking processes they exhibited, as the multi-level marketing industry requires networking and recruiting for financial success. Therefore, one practical implication of this research is women entrepreneurs should form collaborative on-line and face-to-face informational networks where they can share relevant knowledge and resources.

Limitations

Limitations to this study include sampling limitations as well as data collection limitations. Sampling in this study occurred primarily in one particular region – an urban area located in the southwest region of the United States. Regional influences could have been a factor in the information obtained from women engaging in entrepreneurship in a limited regional sphere. Additionally, although attempts to obtain a diverse sample were made, there appears to be more industrial representation from masculine industries (e.g., construction, engineering, architecture, etc.) than more feminine industries (e.g., design, creative services and retail). This could also be attributed to regional and industrial demographics and the purposive theoretical sampling implemented in this study where engineers referred other engineers and additional business-owners in similar disciplines to this study. Finally, although attempts were made to obtain a diverse sample regarding race and ethnicity, it proved to be very difficult to recruit minority *and* women-owned business representatives. Future research needs to be conducted teasing out race and culture as well as gendered influences in the enactment of business-ownership or entrepreneurship.

In regards to data collection, this study relies on the accounts and narratives provided by thirty women entrepreneurs through semi-structured qualitative interviews. Although these women did provide vivid accounts of what “being” and “doing” entrepreneurship entailed, additional insight could have been obtained through ethnographic shadowing (Gill, 2011). This study offers a somewhat limited view through qualitative interviews where the definitions, tensions and communicative

intricacies experienced and enacted by women entrepreneurs relied on self-report data. A richer depiction of women's entrepreneurship and business-ownership could be obtained through future research endeavors where ethnographic shadowing of direct sales owners, business-owners and sole-proprietors can capture the experienced and lived realities of women entrepreneurs. Using ethnographic shadowing might also reveal tensions and issues that women may not be aware of and able to articulate.

Summary

Interesting findings surfaced from this study that can be extended in several different directions. Connections tying family, socialization, dialectics and work structure research with the concepts of gender, business-ownership and entrepreneurship surfaced within this study. Furthermore, several pragmatic implications emerged as findings demonstrated areas of professional improvement for the woman entrepreneur. Although some sampling and data collection limitations exist, this dissertation contributes to several important philosophical, theoretical and topical conversations (Barge, 2009).

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APPENDIX A

Topics	INTERVIEW GUIDE Questions
<i>Demographics</i>	1. What is your age, level of education, marital/family status (number of children if appropriate), race/ethnicity? How much ownership do you assume in your business (if appropriate)? How many workers do you employ (if appropriate)?
<i>Discursive Constructions</i>	2. Tell me about your business. 3. What is the story behind your business? <i>a. How did it all begin?</i> <i>b. Why did you choose to start your own business?</i> 4. When people ask you what you do for a living, what do you say? <i>a. Who do you tell that story to?</i> <i>b. Do you tell different stories to different people?</i> <i>i. Client, friends, colleagues</i> <i>c. What are some of those different stories?</i> 5. How do you describe your work to others? 6. What is a typical day like for you? 7. As a business-owner, what are the different kinds of conversations you have to have with different people? <i>a. Are there different relationships you manage in your work?</i> 8. What does being an entrepreneur mean to you? Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?
	9. Are there any particular struggles that you think women entrepreneurs face? <i>a. Can you give me an example of your greatest struggle as an entrepreneur?</i>

<p><i>Discursive Contradictions</i></p>	<p>10. Do you ever struggle with having different conversations with different people? <i>a. Tell me about a time you successfully juggled different conversations with different people.</i></p> <p>11. Do you ever feel pulled in multiple directions? <i>a. Walk me through an example of that.</i></p> <p>12. How do you work through these situations?</p> <p>13. How do you think other women entrepreneurs work through these situations?</p> <p>14. What do you think business-ownership means for other women entrepreneurs?</p>
<p><i>Closing</i></p>	<p>15. What do you like the most about your job?</p> <p>16. Final question, what do you think you've gained from today's conversation?</p>

APPENDIX B

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: The Dialectics of Women-Owned Businesses

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Cara W. Jacocks, a researcher from Texas A&M University. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the tensions women business-owners struggle with on a day-to-day basis and to gain stronger knowledge of what it's like to be a woman business-owner in modern society.

Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a female business owner who either owns her own business with at least 2 employees, owns a sole-proprietorship with no employees or who maintains ownership of a direct sales franchise with no employees.

How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?

20 - 30 people (participants) will be invited to participate in this study locally. Overall, a total of 6 – 10 business-owners, 6 – 10 sole proprietors and 6 – 10 direct sales franchise owners from multiple business enterprises will be invited to participate in this study.

What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?

Your participation is voluntary, thus your only alternative is to choose to not participate. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University or the researcher being affected.

What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an information-gathering interview where the researcher will ask you questions about communication within your work environment and this interview should last approximately one (1) hour. Additionally, with your permission the researcher may be observing everyday communication within your work environment on established dates/times. These observations will take approximately 1-2 working days where the researcher will observe you through shadowing you on an average workday. If

additional interviews and/or observations are required, the investigator/researcher will notify you promptly and arrange an appropriate time/place for these additional interviews/observations to take place.

Your participation in the information-gathering interviews will be audio recorded.

Will Photos, Video or Audio Recordings Be Made Of Me during the Study?

Required recordings:

The researchers will make an audio recording during the study so that the information you provide can be easily transcribed and used for reporting purposes in the final product that stems from this study. It should be noted, that findings obtained from these recordings and used in the final research report will not include any specific personal identifiers (i.e. your name, the name of your business or the region this study is taking place). All information will be recorded in aggregate and pseudonyms will be used when appropriate to protect your individual identity. Again, the purpose of audio recording the interview session is to gain an accurate account of the dialogue that stems from our conversation that will ultimately inform the data analysis portion of this study. If you do not give permission for the audio recording to be obtained, you cannot participate in this study.

Are There Any Risks To Me?

The things that you will be doing have no more risk than you would come across in everyday life. Although the researchers have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions that are asked of you might be stressful or difficult. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to. Your participation is entirely voluntary, should you choose to not answer certain questions or not participate you can do so with no consequences.

Are There Any Benefits To Me?

There may be no direct benefit to you by being in this study. Findings from this study may help other women business owners learn to deal with entrepreneurship, leadership and communicative tensions more effectively. This in turn will hopefully foster the women-owned business sector at large, and perhaps your own business through an increased understanding of these tensions and strategies for coping with said contradictions.

Will There Be Any Costs To Me?

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?

You will not be paid for being in this study. Should you elect to conduct the one-on-one interview at a local coffee shop or restaurant the researcher will reimburse you for your food and/or beverage expenses.

Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only the Protocol Director (Cara Jacocks) will have access to the records.

Information about you will be stored in locked file cabinet and/or computer files protected with a password. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area.

People who have access to your information include the Protocol Director and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) or (*if FDA regulated*) the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

Information about you and related to this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law.

Who may I Contact for More Information?

You may contact the Protocol Director, Cara Jacocks, ABD, to tell her about a concern or complaint about this research at 817-797-6142 or cjacocks@neo.tamu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

What if I Change My Mind About Participating?

This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on your student status, medical care, employment, evaluation, relationship with Texas A&M University, etc.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. I can ask more questions if I want. A copy of this entire consent form will be given to me.

Participant's Signature

Date

Printed Name

Date

INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

Signature of Presenter

Date

Printed Name

Date

APPENDIX C

HIERARCHICAL CODING SCHEME

