

**An Autoethnographic Approach to Exploring My Participation
in the Emerging Culture of Female Entrepreneurship**

By

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Submitted to the Faculty of Extension

University of Alberta

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in Communications and Technology

April 1, 2019

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my husband, who has been supportive of my journey through post-secondary education and has helped to make it possible to balance work, school and family life. To my editor, Sarah Lysakowski, whose guidance and encouragement were ever appreciated. She helped me push through reflection in an authentic way, while encouraging me to tell my story and explore what I've learned in the process. And finally, to my supervisor, Dr. Katy Campbell, who has been so supportive of my desire to explore autoethnography and female entrepreneurship.

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Abstract

Women are choosing to become entrepreneurs and to define their own terms of what a work environment and work schedule look like. The Internet has impacted society on a global scale, which has created new opportunities and challenges that individuals and businesses alike have to navigate. This shift has created innovations and challenges that seemingly impact the status quo in society, creating opportunities to transition careers or open up new career possibilities that may not have existed before.

The aim of this research project is to review the academic literature on female entrepreneurship to explore how women are impacted in their decision to become entrepreneurs. It will examine the potential impact of interpersonal and marketing communications on female entrepreneurs, while providing opportunity to be critical of Canadian culture through participation in that culture as a female entrepreneur. Taking an autoethnographic approach, I will draw on academic findings and personal experiences as a female entrepreneur in Canada. This allows for a unique reflection on the decision-making processes and underlying motivations of a female entrepreneur, while being able to analyze feelings and insights about interactions with others on a similar decision-making path. Further research would involve interviews or focus groups of female entrepreneurs to see how their transition to entrepreneurship compared to this research.

Exploring my Participation in the Emerging Culture of Female Entrepreneurship

Female entrepreneurs in North America are starting businesses more often than they used to (Ascher, 2012). Examining existing research on entrepreneurship in North America could help deepen understanding of this trend. It could also help identify gaps in the research that could help shed light on how and why work culture is changing in North America, and how it will impact society over the long-term. Critically describing the culture and reflecting on my experiences as a female entrepreneur will help better understand this changing culture and the motivations underlying this trend.

Problem and Research Question

How are women impacted by different forms of communication, and do these communications impact their decision to become entrepreneurs?

I want to understand how communication, like social media, has played a role in my decision to become an entrepreneur. I will be able to relate my study of existing academic research to my education on the subject, while being able to reflect on how the content posted by other female entrepreneurs on social media affected my decision making. This visual and written content on social media may have the ability to impact decision making, such as whether to pursue entrepreneurship as a career path. It may also be directly linked to marketing activities that intend to prompt consumer purchase behavior, such as to sell a book or educational resource that helps people start a business.

Literature Review

Search and Selection

To conduct a systematic library search, I limited my search to academic journals and articles published in the last 10-15 years. Using an eligibility matrix, I classified articles based on their dates, research topics, and methodology. Peer-reviewed articles were regarded more highly than non-peer reviewed literature. Search terms were chosen to identify research focusing on female entrepreneurs, or comparisons between male and female entrepreneurs to provide the closest alignment to exploring the research question. In some instances, I needed to broaden my search to find relevant material that would help provide insight into my research questions due to a lack of relevant material about Canadian female entrepreneurs. By classifying the materials in a matrix, I was able to rule out material that was less relevant and find keywords that helped expand the search across a range of databases.

To find the articles in this literature review, I conducted a search of several journal databases to explore my research topic, which included Science Direct, Taylor and Francis, Scopus, EconLit, Academic Search Complete, Sage CKRN, EBSCO, the Directory of Open Access Journals, Social Science Research Network's EPRN and MKT databases, and the Wiley Online Library. As an online resource, Google Scholar was beneficial in pulling full-text journal articles and books that were not readily available through the University of Alberta.

Exploration of the Literature

With the research question posed I could have just focused on studying female entrepreneurship, but it felt prudent to also examine decision making and how communication impacts the decisions we make. As people we are influenced by communication, from

interpersonal relationships to marketing communications, and the impacts of culture and how our roles in society are viewed. This study will focus on exploring communication impacts on decision making alongside factors influencing entrepreneurial decisions. Exploring these topic areas can help shed insight into why women choose to become entrepreneurs, and will help aid my reflection on my own entrepreneurial decisions.

Regarding female entrepreneurship, the academic literature discusses general small business and entrepreneurship, factors impacting female employment and career decisions, and entrepreneurship and education. On decision making, the academic literature discusses purchase behavior, social media communication, influencers and communication online, and how marketing impacts consumers; as women choose to start a business they need resources to aid in that process and find themselves exposed to a range of marketing communication as a result. Outside of academic literature, there are several other helpful resources, such as reports prepared by organizations in conjunction with government, news articles, and books on related topics.

Through the process of reviewing the literature, several categories emerged that are relevant to exploring how female entrepreneur decision making is impacted. These categories include: entrepreneurship trends, entrepreneurship education and career decisions, gender and culture in entrepreneurship, personality and behavior, economic and financial factors, entrepreneurship and the internet, marketing and decision making, and influencers and social media. The following sections will review the relevant literature in each of these categories.

Entrepreneurship Trends

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) compiles a study of entrepreneurship that seeks to provide a national focus on wealth creation and social development in Canada, rather

than the larger focus that GEM's global report on entrepreneurship provides. Both reports are informative and provide an opportunity to compare Canada alongside the United States and other countries around the world. Langford, Josty and Saunders (2016) compiled the most recent Canadian national report, which found that Canadian culture is reasonably favourable for entrepreneurship, that the broader population underestimates the challenges in starting a business, and that entrepreneurship is viewed as a career choice that delivers high social status.

While there is more limited research on Canadian entrepreneurship, the United States of America (U.S.) has a wealth of data collected by government and private enterprises about entrepreneurship that identifies different trends. It is important to note that American and Canadian culture is different, and while the American data is useful in helping to understand female entrepreneurship, this study is not assuming that the American data describes female entrepreneurship in Canada.

Many of the American studies on entrepreneurship are conducted annually or biannually to show indicators of change over time. Fairlie, Reedy, Morelix and Russell (2016) compiled the Kauffman Index by utilizing the Current Population Survey that is conducted monthly by the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the U.S. Census Bureau's Business Dynamics Statistics, that is constructed using administrative payroll tax records from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). This research is undertaken to study entrepreneurs in the United States of America in national, state and metro areas, and provides an understanding of how entrepreneurs are taking advantage of market opportunities, their education, and other relevant factors. Fairlee et al's (2016) research found that in the U.S., women have a greater opportunity share than men and it is more stable over the business cycle, and that for all small businesses

capital is critical to whether the business can launch or achieve long-term growth that can positively impact the economy. These trends are interesting to note, as they may be factors that contribute to a female's decision to pursue entrepreneurship or a market opportunity, such as developing an item for sale.

In compiling the Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs, Foster and Norman (2016) gathered data from sampling approximately 290,000 firms with paid employees over the entire private non-agricultural U.S. economy and found that further study is required to fully understand the importance of alternative employment and personnel practices by firms of all sizes and stages of maturity. The survey was conducted through a partnership of the Census Bureau with the Kauffman Foundation and the Minority Business Development Agency to allow qualified researchers to have access to the data to better understand entrepreneurial trends impacting local to national economies, and the researchers note that further work will need to be done through the survey and by other academic researchers to be able to understand all of the implications for employment and the economy that the survey results uncovered. Work like this provides avenues for understanding complex data that is not readily available outside government organizations, which could have strong implications for the future of employment in the United States, and in other countries around the world as globalization increases.

Gender and Culture in Entrepreneurship

Alongside trends in entrepreneurship researchers often examine the differences between men and women, and between different cultures. George and Zahara's (2002) research on culture and entrepreneurship had definitions that stood out to me in the course of my research; they defined culture as the "...set of values of a nation, a region, or an organization" (p. 5) and

entrepreneurship as the “...act and process by which societies, regions, organizations, or individuals identify and pursue business opportunities to create wealth” (p. 5). Understanding a common definition for both of these concepts is important for exploring how female entrepreneurs are impacted by communication in their decision making. Female entrepreneurs can be influenced by culture on several levels, especially when communication comes into play, as the country where they live or the organizations where they work may have a set of values that impact the decision to become an entrepreneur, or embrace an entrepreneurial mindset within an organization to create wealth for themselves or their employer.

Duffy and Pruchniewska (2017) explored gender to examine entrepreneurship and the relationship it has with social media, finding that “...female entrepreneurs face pressure to leverage social media in culturally prescribed ways for business success, and, consequently, must also mitigate the risks manifest in these gender-coded uses of social media” (p. 855). Duffy et al (2017) also highlight the fact that these women feel they have to be visible online in both the personal and professional context to be able to achieve success, which results in risks such as “...insidious forms of public scrutiny, including hate speech, trolling, and other acts of online misogyny” (p. 855).

Expanding on the research related to gender, researchers also explore decision making related to starting a business, which could help inform why some females choose to become entrepreneurs. DeMartino and Barbato (2013) examined alumni of an MBA program in a top 10 business school in the U.S. through surveys on a range of information related to their career to explore whether there are motivational differences between male and female MBA entrepreneurs. DeMartino et al's (2013) study found that women entrepreneurs have a higher

intensity for family or lifestyle career motivators, and men have a higher intensity for advancement and wealth creation motivators. The researchers also note that these differences become more pronounced when "...the entrepreneurs are married with dependent children" (DeMartino et al, 2013, p. 815).

Business decision making in entrepreneurship also touches on organizational practices in gender related entrepreneurship research. Thébaud (2016) utilized restricted survey data collected by the Harris Poll in 2014 to explore the relationship between inflexible organization practices, family factors and gendered pathways into entrepreneurship, finding that when career sacrifices are made due to a lack of flexibility in organizations women are more likely than men to opt into entrepreneurship as a career choice. Similarly, McKie, Biese and Jyrkinen (2013) conducted 25 interviews and four focus groups with women in senior managerial positions, including six who chose to opt into self-employment, and discovered that the self-employed women had a consistent experience of being able to have greater control over what they worked on, self-determination, autonomy and a better relationship between family and paid work than the women who suffered from a fractured career working in an organization while trying to balance family commitments. This is in line with the research findings of Acker (1990) who found that there is a need to change the attitudes and cultures toward work, life and organizational practices, but to do so would require a redefinition of work and work relations.

These research findings on work culture are a great lead into Adkins' (1999) research exploring the concept of individualization and how it has shaped the traditional economies of work. Her research highlighted how culture and gender play a role in shaping community and the economy. Adkins (1992) discovered that individualization is viewed by some as essentially

“...undoing traditional economic relations and structures, especially those associated with industrial society” (p. 122). The undoing of traditional employment structures was also explored by Beck (1992), whose research showed that workers with a traditional employment contract are being replaced by “do-it-yourself” workers, who differentiate themselves based on the uniqueness of their work (p. 93).

Looking at Morgan and Nelligan’s (2018) description of precarious work in the gig economy, we see the emergence of a culture where “...workers should give up on any expectation of a steady, long-term job, and instead look at working life as a series of gigs” (p. 117). Their research shows how globalization and digitization have an increasing influence over our economies, job stability and the view of how companies expect workers to approach jobs. This aligns with the research conducted by Burtch, Carnaghan and Greenwood (2016) who looked at how “...the introduction of flexible *ad hoc* employment may lead to greater entrepreneurial activity...” due to the ability of the worker to strategically use their time to gain the resources required to start a business (p. 2). They found that “...gig-economy platforms provide workers with an unprecedented degree of flexibility, allowing them to set their own schedules while earning stable pay” and that there may be a sign of individuals using gig-economy platforms to offset underperforming entrepreneurial ventures (Burtch et al, 2016, p. 2). With companies seeking to reduce risk, there is an expectation on the worker “...to be flexible and biddable” rather than having an attitude that views work as a source for long-term stability, which feeds into the gig-economy being a viable source of work for the unemployed and the underemployed seeking to increase their income (Morgan & Nelligan, 2018, p. 117).

This research highlights the impact of gender, culture and the gig economy, which underscores the shift in the way we communicate and form community, networks, ties and bonds with one another socially and productively for work. Over time, it will be interesting to see if work is redefined as organizations and society become more comfortable with working virtually and with changing the norms in work environments, schedules and practices.

Entrepreneurship Education/Experience and Career Decisions

Education and experience may also impact entrepreneurial career decisions, with research showing that further study is required to fully understand this relationship. Oosterbeek, van Praag and Isselstein (2008) used surveys and a validated self-assessment test to study 562 students in four study programs at treatment and control locations to better understand how entrepreneurial education impacts the skills and levels of motivation of individuals opting into self-employment. It was found that there were limitations to studying only one institution and not fully understanding all the reasons why students self-assessed their entrepreneurial skills as being the same or worse than they were when they started the entrepreneurial program. Oosterbeek et al (2008) pose an interesting reflection in their findings that post-education these participants may have a better understanding of what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur, which could have diminished their optimism; this is an area requiring further and broader study to see if entrepreneurs are more likely to increase or decrease in optimism as they learn more about running a business, and if it impacts the decision to exit from this career choice, or see it through.

Using information and insights from academic researchers from a large number of post-secondary institutions around the world, Henry, Cinneide, Johnston and Carter (2006) studied different factors of female entrepreneurship and explored the effects of education,

training and policy on self-employed females in Europe, finding that female entrepreneurship is impacted by education and policy, which has a further impact on decision making and program offerings. This research was peer reviewed by a group of academics for validity, and it may have larger implications for female entrepreneurs in other countries around the globe; further studies on the topic in different countries may find commonalities or differences that vary with culture.

In terms of exploring experience and entrepreneurship, Cumming, Walz and Werth (2016) explored Venture Capital funding and the number of individuals that started and left a business over a specific period of time, and found that venture capital backing only leads to repeat entrepreneurs when the entrepreneur has had prior experience with founding a start-up that provides a substantial financial return to the entrepreneur, or if they are an individual with general management education. They also note that there is room for future academic research that explores the role of the venture capitalist (VC) in creating serial entrepreneurs, as their findings indicated that “...entrepreneurial characteristics, including their prior experience with entrepreneurship and their education, appear to play a stronger role than the experience of VC itself” (Cumming, Walz & Werth, 2016, p. 523).

It is also important to further explore the concept of precarious employment as it relates to career decisions, especially in the gig economy. Wilson and Ebert (2013) define precarious employment as, “employment that is uncertain, unpredictable and risky from the point of view of the worker” (p. 265). They also note that precariousness is in the insecurity of the “...labor contract and labor market conditions” and in the worker’s level of understanding about what precarious employment is (Wilson & Ebert, 2013, p. 266). Through her research, Sidoti (2015) found that “...young people do not necessarily view their work as precarious but as inevitable, at

least in the early stages of a working life (p. 45)”, which could help explain why people in the early stages of their career choose entrepreneurship over other forms of more stable employment. Precarious employment is an interesting concept to explore in relation to female entrepreneurship, because some individuals may not see their employment or economic situation as being precarious and may not recognize the risks involved in choosing entrepreneurship as a career choice. This thought is consistent with what Sidoti (2013) found to be the case through her research on casual employment in Australia, where younger people may experience precarious employment, but not view it that way.

Cranford and Vosko (2006) found that the least precarious form of work is full-time permanent wage work, but that not all jobs in this category are good jobs, and that some occupations are precarious even if they do grant an employee full-time permanent status. In addition, Cranford and Vosko’s (2006) research found that women are “...more concentrated in the most precarious forms of employment than are men” (p. 59). The work environment is increasingly complex, which Cranford, Vosko and Zukewich (2003) examined in their research studying gender and precarious employment in Canada, finding that there has been a disruption of norms in employment post-World War II, leaving a spread of non-standard employment that have qualities of precarious employment. This has interesting implications for factors contributing to women choosing to become entrepreneurs.

Personality and Behavior

Personality factors and behavioral traits play a prominent role in decision making, which make them an important factor when examining entrepreneurship. There is a lot of literature on personality and the choice of profession, and decisions to become an entrepreneur. Fritsch and

Sorgner (2013) examined the choice to become an entrepreneur as a two-stage decision making process, which is impacted by personality, profession and other factors. Fritsch and Sorgner's (2013) research found that some occupations may be more conducive to entrepreneurship than others, and an individual's attitudes, values and needs may be the reason for their career choice and future foray into entrepreneurship. Their exploration of the individual's choice of profession and subsequent influence by others to choose to become self-employed would provide an interesting avenue for continued academic study to close the gaps that this paper identifies.

Hyttinen, Lahtonen and Pajarinen (2012) examined optimism, mindset and attitudes and discovered that individuals may have the right personality or behavioral traits but may not have the right attitude that supports their chance of success. Comparing the entrepreneurial optimism of Finnish and American entrepreneurs provides opportunities to see differences between regions and cultures, while drawing on comparisons to highlight similarities. This is interesting as a factor that could impact an individual's decision to become or stay an entrepreneur, and it may be related to other factors that impact decision making.

Having the right attitude to have a chance of success leads to inquiring about how psychology plays a role in entrepreneurial decisions. Hamilton, Papageorge and Pande (2014) studied how five personality traits impact entrepreneurial decisions and earnings, noting several psychological studies that shed light on the types of people who choose to become entrepreneurs and how successful they might be as entrepreneurs. Their research found "...that the personality traits that make entrepreneurship the lucrative choice are not the personality traits that *ceteris paribus* induce people to become entrepreneurs" and that other constraints, such as lack of credit or financing, are at play, including existing entrepreneurship policies that encourage people with

the wrong personality traits (e.g. low-quality ideas, but a preference for self-employment) to opt into entrepreneurship (p. 28). Entrepreneurial risk tolerance was studied by Hvide and Panos (2013) including the differences between men and women to determine the relationships that exist between starting and growing a firm, finding that performance is correlated to risk attitude, and while risk-tolerant individuals are more likely to start a business, they are also more likely to have poor performance. When personality and behavior is taken into consideration with risk tolerance, it could help inform why entrepreneurial ventures fail.

Economic/Financial Factors

Economic and financial factors are a common area of research and exploration to better understand how entrepreneurs understand the economy, how the economy is supported by entrepreneurs, and what financial factors may hinder decisions at a given point in time. Studying gender and the number of female entrepreneurs in a variety of countries around the world, Ribes-Giner, Moya-Clemente, Cerevello-Royo and Perello-Marin (2017) found that the smaller the gap in participation by men and women in the labor market, the greater the percentage of female entrepreneurs in OECD countries. Meanwhile, in Canada, Dossou-Yovo (2015) explored individuals' growth aspirations in conjunction with their familiarity with available economic development organizations that could help their chances of success to better understand this relationship. Dossou-Yovo (2015) found that there is a relationship between familiarity and the willingness to grow, but economic development organizations need to find better ways to raise awareness of their functions in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. This study is limited to one area, so the implications may not be consistent for other regions. However, it does prompt the need to

study the lack of awareness to see if these organizations are reaching entrepreneurs to make them aware of the support they provide and how it can impact growth and long-term success.

In addition to economic forces, the amount of financial distress the individual experiences can also shape their decision to start a business, which can be viewed as a process of “destructive creation” spawning new ventures from the financial distress of an existing organization (Babina, 2015, p. 4). This is consistent with other researcher’s findings that financial motives lead to precarious employment situations. For instance, Ali (2010) utilized existing studies to identify current entrepreneurs in Australia to interview about their decision to start a business, finding that the primary reasons for starting a business are economic in nature. The study found the two major reasons for going into business are to have financial security and to provide employment.

Financial security is also a consideration in terms of how much wealth an individual has when growing up or when in their career, because this factor also has the ability to impact entrepreneurship. Frid, Wyman and Coffey (2016) conducted a study in the United States exploring this phenomenon in one-year intervals for seven years, finding that low-wealth and middle-class entrepreneurs are just as capable as wealthy entrepreneurs, but they face the hurdle of overcoming liquidity constraints to launch a new business venture and needing to overcome the desire to disengage from the entrepreneurial process as a result of facing financial challenges. The limitations of this study include utilizing data that involves self-reporting, which could provide a bias in identifying self-employed individuals, as they may be more likely to report self-employment after they are earning an income, making their likelihood of being wealthier at

the start of their venture greater than if the data was captured before they earned enough income to warrant reporting a self-employment status.

It is important to note that finances, while a motivating factor, are also contributing to whether or not individuals choose to become entrepreneurs. Block and Landgraf (2013) examined the financial and non-financial motives of entrepreneurs, and the likelihood of developing an intention to pursue entrepreneurship as a full-time venture and discovered that there needs to be an intention to become a full-time entrepreneur that aligns with the financial ability to do so. This is consistent with Hamilton et al's findings on personality and behavior, which reinforces the notion that entrepreneurship is complex, and understanding why people become entrepreneurs may not be as easy as simply meeting a normative set of criteria.

Entrepreneurship and the Internet

In the era of abundant information it is important to examine the role that online channels play in the pathways to entrepreneurship, and throughout the business venture's operations. There have been quite a few studies that explore this relationship to understand how they impact each other. Mack, Marie-Pierre and Redican (2017) conducted a study that utilized two sets of web surveys between December 2012 and May 2014 and conducted 34 interviews with managers of business incubation facilities, entrepreneurs utilizing these facilities, and entrepreneurs not using these facilities located in the Phoenix metropolitan area. Their study found that the majority of the incubation facilities provided internet access in addition to business assistance, that the majority of survey respondents were "...white, highly educated males that are technologically competent and open to adopting new technologies" and that females were less likely to rank themselves as being highly computer competent (Mack et al,

2017, p. 123). Mack et al (2017) noted visibility and information gathering as the main reason for using the Internet in their startup business, with social media being used primarily for marketing activities instead of for market research. It's interesting that there is a difference in self-perception of computer competencies between the genders, and that the Internet is being underutilized by entrepreneurs; further study could help inform why this is occurring.

Campa, Pletnev and Barkhatov, professors with the Chelyabinsk State University in Russia, wrote an essay on how the evolution of the Internet has had an impact on small businesses in Russia, Europe and the United States. Campa et al (2016) examined the evolution of the Internet and the role that this evolution played in the operations of small businesses, discovering that the Internet provides benefits to these businesses, such as providing the ability to communicate with vendors and customers and being able to reach a larger global market. This is consistent with Mack et al's findings and helps reinforce why entrepreneurs are choosing to utilize the Internet for visibility and wealth generation purposes.

Marketing and Decision Making

While economic and technological factors play an important role in shaping entrepreneurship, marketing communications also have the ability to further shape decision making. Understanding the potential impacts of marketing strategies and tactics on the decision making of individuals, especially females, could shed light into how, when and why some women choose to pursue entrepreneurship. Reviewing marketing related topics, such as marketing strategies (including the use of influencers), communication tactics, and social media, will help provide insight into areas that may be related to females making entrepreneurship decisions.

With women choosing to start a business they need to consider lifestyle and resource factors before making a decision. This process exposes them to more types of influence than just that of friends, family and the region they live in, it also brings in the influence of businesses vying for the attention of potential business owners to buy their products or services. Research has shown that decision making is informed by several different factors, including product knowledge, level of concern to find a solution, authenticity, and the online environment. As a result, marketers could deploy strategies targeting word-of-mouth promotion through offline and online interactions to boost sales, which could impact female decision making.

Beatty and Smith (1987) studied the impacts of consumer behavior and communication on various marketing activities by exploring the external search for information of interest to the consumer, finding that interpersonal search (e.g. obtaining information from a friend) is heavily dependent on the individual having little product knowledge, and the more concerned the person is about finding a specific product the more likely they are to conduct an interpersonal search than a retailer or media search. Their research highlighted how differences between consumers and how they search for information can inform how marketers communicate with consumers at various stages of their search for information.

The issue of authenticity in marketing and communication can impact decision making positively or negatively, depending on how the content is constructed and delivered. Cheng serves to raise intelligent questions about the cultural problems of identity, such as authenticity and culture. The weakness in his literature rises from a lack of critical conclusion, and several academics have raised the point that his work is frustrating alongside insightful. Questioning identity and how rhetoric needs to be authentic, Cheng (2004) finds that Western culture and

identity is a remix of family ties that form through a collective self, which results in a continual cultural emphasis on determining identity and showcasing it in communication.

With the thoughts on authentic communication, further research shed light into how communication of all types affects individuals. Grewal, Cline and Davies (2003) investigated the dynamics of word-of-mouth communication and similarity between brands to investigate pioneer advantage in entering markets, and how the consumer decision making process is affected. Credible sources of information are shown to have a greater impact on positive word-of-mouth communication, and researchers discovered that in the case of five products the recall ability of consumers lends positive results to the market follower. This information, while limited to this five-product test, lends itself to further investigation about possible marketing strategies that could help followers to a market succeed.

An individual's decision making is further influenced by the online environment as a whole. Ha (2004) conducted research exploring how the online environment influences trust in brands from the consumer's perspective and found that perceived brand trust is affected by security, privacy, brand name, offline advertising, word-of-mouth communication, website user experience, website message customization, and brand commitment. The exploration of trust is one that has been explored by numerous researchers, but Ha examines it in the online context to help marketers understand how to gain consumers' trust in order to more effectively navigate a noisy market space. Brands that are able to meet the criteria Ha's research outlined may be in a better position to achieve success, which could help entrepreneurs to improve their operations to achieve growth aspirations.

Bringing these researchers' thoughts together, the exploration of the history of the brand and the signal of the branded self as a commodity for sale is highlighted in the era of multimodal communication, which is being explored to exploit consumer behavior and experiences as part of the brand's marketing activities. Women are seeing opportunity in using their daily lives and their ability to influence others, and some are choosing to act on that opportunity to create content that can in turn provide them with a source of income. Their ability to brand themselves and tap into the emotions of others provides them with the ability to leverage an opportunity and transform it into a business, essentially leveraging their ability to market the sale of goods and services to others on behalf of other brands, or their own brand when they create a product or service for purchase by others.

This trend is supported by Hearn's (2008) research into self-branding in the era of mass communication, which is positioned in the context of using the self as a way to lead to transactions and exchanges of value, finding that there is cultural value in the production of affect, desire, attention and image. This finding is aligned with that of Beller (2006) who found that in the new "attention economy" (p. 5) businesses are having to pay for the attention of individuals when they used to get that same attention for free, so it's possible for individuals to maintain themselves as a certain image (i.e. self-branding), portray that online and in person, and be able to find work due to being able to capture others' attention on behalf of a business. In addition, Hochschild's (2012) book on the commercialization of human feeling offers additional insight into both gender, authenticity and how to use feeling for different purposes of communication and business, finding that emotion is related to action and cognition, which can signal when to take action. The right combination of messaging to trigger emotions can trigger

actions, such as recall for word-of-mouth marketing, purchase behavior, or gravitating away from certain things in favor of others. These factors of opportunity and mass marketing are likely contributing to the reasons why women are choosing to become influencers, where they are leveraging their ability to impact emotion and there exists an opportunity to be able to profit from it.

Alongside emotion is the concept of perceived relationships, which shed additional light into influencers and their ability to be effective in marketing strategies. Because influencers are so effective at leveraging the power of emotion and their personal experiences, other people may find themselves feeling as though they have developed a relationship with that influencer as a result. Horton and Wohl (1956) studied the effects of new forms of mass communication on the psyche of individuals and how it impacted intimacy and discovered that prolonged intimacy with a performer through mass media has led to individuals becoming preoccupied with the personal lives of stars/celebrities and other personas. While this research is now quite dated, it offers a view at a trend that has continued into the Internet age as mass communication has changed and grown beyond television and radio to include non-celebrity influencers using social media to display a public persona. Noting the continued trend despite changes in the communication medium can help understand the impact of perceived relationships on the effectiveness of their mass messaging.

Given that influencers are using their own communication abilities to influence the decisions of others, their communication could be seen as being word-of-mouth marketing. Therefore, examining the nuances of word-of-mouth marketing is important to understanding how micro-celebrity or influencer status can be obtained over the Internet, because it is seen to

be the most effective form of advertising, especially in North America. Examining research in this context, and seeing successes in a variety of markets, Mason's (2008) research showcases the growing phenomenon of the effectiveness of word-of-mouth communication as increasing globalization of the world's economies, thanks to the reach of the Internet, finding that while word-of-mouth marketing is effective in advertising, it is more effective in complex and turbulent environments than in simple and stable environments. The weakness in Mason's research is that it is explored from one perspective, the company, rather than from a variety of perspectives, where the motivations for communicating about brand experiences from one consumer to another could be better understood and capitalized on. It also does not explore negative word-of-mouth communication, which requires further study to understand what motivates people to tell others about their bad experiences.

Studying the effects of word-of-mouth marketing on online communities helps to examine how businesses are intentionally influencing consumer-to-consumer communications toward specific purchase decisions. Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, and Wilner (2010) found that communicators have narrative styles that are interpreted as having a persona they use to communicate with their audience (e.g. the persona of the sympathetic, making-ends meet blogger that has the ability to influence the decisions of others). Their findings also note that the degree of success in positive word-of-mouth marketing "...depends on this transformation from persuasion oriented, market-generated, sales objective-oriented 'hype' to relevant, useful, communally desirable social information that builds individual reputations and group relationships" (Kozinets et al, 2010, p. 85). This technique is one that has implications for

understanding how influencers and businesses are able to create communication that can impact decision making in entrepreneurial culture.

Influencers and Social Media

Influencers and celebrities are being used to promote goods and services, and research has shown that this is a favorable advertising strategy for organizations. Agrawal and Kamakura (1995) examined the impacts of celebrity endorsement contracts on the expected profitability of the firm finding that there is a positive impact on future profits by using celebrity endorsements and that despite the negative arguments for using celebrities, marketers and investors view this type of promotion as being favorable when the celebrity is appropriate for the product or service. Till and Busler (1998) explored the relationship between celebrity endorsers and the products they endorse, focusing on the expertise of the endorser as a determinant of positive sentiment toward the brand, finding that it was more compelling if the celebrity endorser had used the product, and could speak from experience. This approach shifts the way marketing and communication campaigns are typically created to highlight a celebrity endorsement of a product or service.

Social media can provide a wealth of insight into the emerging culture of female entrepreneurship as women pursue opportunities in the gig-economy and in the online space in general. Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair and Okumus (2015) sought to fill a gap in existing literature by examining the effects of online social networks on brand awareness, finding that social network profiles are extensions of a brand's website and well-crafted messages and high-quality content provide better outcomes, resulting in two-way communication and opportunities for word-of-mouth marketing activities that can translate into sales and deeper insight into a brand's

audience. Looking at the use of social media metrics, and other online data, Baym (2013) examined the audiences of musicians, explored what the audience is, how it can be defined for different outcomes, and how it can be measured in different media industries, finding that people differ in understanding and making use of the digital data that is available to them. Manikonda, Hu and Kambhampati (2014), highlighted the difference of Instagram from other social media sites, noting that despite the lack of constraints on comment length, users post very short comments and are more likely to share their geo-locations than users of other social media channels. Their conclusions are useful in examining entrepreneurs and brands that have achieved micro-celebrity status.

Examining the correlation between followers and brand attitudes can shed light on how social media marketing activities could be undertaken to have a more positive end result. DeVeirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) conducted two experimental studies on Instagram influencers and how likely they are to have followers and be liked and found that influencers are more likely to be liked if they follow a variety of accounts, because a low number of accounts followed gives consumers a perception of solely aiming at less authentic commercial collaborations. Consumers are mindful of a variety of factors when developing brand attitudes, which is further highlighted by Abidin (2014), who examined how Instagram has become a marketplace that has yet to be fully tapped, by studying how influencers in Singapore are transforming their visual compositions into lucrative self-employment opportunities. Abidin (2014) found that Instagram is about catering to an audience, and what is excluded from Instagram is just as important as what is emphasized on the platform. This means that users who portray a desirable upper-middle-class lifestyle with a congruent personality and beauty attract a

sizable number of followers and advertisers. This finding aligns with the previously mentioned literature on perceived relationships and emotions.

The behavior of influencers underscores the evolution of the way we do business today. Li and Bernoff (2008) explored the shift in the balance of power created by the groundswell in the Internet era from corporation to consumer, finding that the Internet has opened up new opportunities that stand to reshape the way we do business and communicate on any number of topics. Their research has pointed to strategies that help companies work with consumers to tap into the full potential of the Internet to try to strike a balance between the loss of control and the needs of the educated consumer. The thoughts and perspectives they put forward pose challenging questions to brands and organizations seeking to communicate with their audiences to reach their goals, while highlighting the shift in communication where old patterns of communicating may not be as effective as they once were.

Research has shown that audiences prefer customized messaging. Hassan's (2014) study focused on the use of Instagram marketing by five retail companies specifically targeting female consumers to determine if there are differences in the social media strategy used to reach women versus the general population, and found brands deploy different strategies to target women to stimulate a sales or emotional response that stimulate a purchase decision. The limitations of the study mean that the resulting recommendations for a strategic approach may only be applicable to the clothing industry. Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt and Füller's (2013) conducted on the case study of MINI's advertising on Facebook examines the impact of marketing communication on consumers' lives and their communication habits, finding that when consumers become annoyed with advertising by a brand their brand sentiment and communication can turn negative, resulting

in a negative impact on the brand's performance. The limitations of this study include looking only at MINI's fan page on Facebook, rather than a larger subset of consumers who may have been exposed to their marketing activities. The ideas presented by the research findings pose questions for all types of brands and how they approach communication on social media to gain longer term brand loyalty, two-way communication that shapes future offerings and positive sentiment related to brand attitudes.

Kozinets and Cerone (2014) put forward a short reflection on the micro-celebrity status created by social media marketing activities online and examined executives and their personal brands on LinkedIn to find that a limitation exists in social media where there is a finite level of popular attention given by the audience. This is important to note for personal and professional brands, because the level of aspiration, archetypal symbolism and professional voice can come together over a range, changing over time as the brand evolves. This is especially true of early entrepreneurial brands who have risen to a level of success where they have attained their initial goal and can be seen as an aspirational or archetypal symbol by new entrants to the entrepreneurial landscape.

With so many organizations using influencers and social media to influence decisions, it is important to also review how organizations approach social media use. Linke and Zerfass (2013) introduced the concept of social media governance for organizations to establish social media in communication practices before conducting a critical examination of how organizations in Germany were approaching social media communications. The strengths of this article include the provision of an understanding of what social media governance is and comparing it to how actual organizations are approaching social media. A weakness of this study lies in the cultural

difference between German organizations and others around the world, as there could be aspects of undertaking new modes of communication activities that are unique to or not undertaken in German organizations.

Examining the findings of other researchers, Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) found there are a number of articles that focus on the benefits of organizational social media communication, but few touch on the negative side of social media communication in organizations. By examining the difference between the more open, fluid characteristics of social media communication and the typical rigid, hierarchical, controlled communication styles of organizations the article presents techniques that suggest ways that balance could be found to drive a more cohesive relationship between the two very different styles of communication. The weakness of this article lies in the limitations with conducting the same survey in different countries where understanding of social media concepts differs, and the response rates differed between regions as well.

Marwick and Boyd (2011) explored the concept of imagined audiences and how content producers target multiple audiences while maintaining authenticity in brand communications to find that individuals construct different types of communication messages and styles to deal with different audiences. In another study, Marwick and Boyd researched the concept of celebrity as a practice and how that practice can be leveraged on social media, with their study focusing on Twitter. Examining the discourse and effectiveness of the authenticity of the interactions online the research explored the relationship between the celebrity and their audience to learn how it can be used effectively in promotional activities. As a result of this study, Marwick and Boyd (2011) found that the Internet had a huge impact on celebrity culture, creating enormous

opportunities for the entertainment industry, and that the active promotion by celebrities is very similar to the activities undertaken by bloggers, social media gurus, and other micro-celebrities/influencers.

Understanding why some people are more active online could help inform why people communicate online the way they do. For instance, Papacharissi (2002) conducted research on how people present themselves online via their personal home pages, finding that people constructed their web pages to present a performance of their personality to mimic the experience of human interaction that helps people to understand what they should expect from that person. The lacking aspect of this research is that it does not include a correlation between personality characteristics, web design, and author's input into the factors that influence the decision to portray oneself online in a certain way. The interesting aspect of this research is that it studies the trend of self-presentation online as it was becoming a more common activity, and that it considers how user-generated content shaped the audience, rather than considering the audience simply as consumers of the communication media. Also studying the individual's online activity, Okazaki (2009) studied computer versus mobile internet in terms of the level of social influence achieved through the two forms of electronic word-of-mouth communication to find that some individuals are unwilling to participate in electronic word-of-mouth communication to protect their level of information independence, while others are willing to share innovative information, but only if they wanted to be opinion leaders. The study focused on consumers in Japan and highlights theoretical and research implications that could lead to further study on the topic to drive a greater understanding of the impacts of the differences seen in communication from non-mobile to mobile computing technologies.

Research Methods

With a stronger understanding of entrepreneurship and factors affecting decision making, I had a desire to explore ethnography as a research method, so I examined literature to determine the suitability of using this method to study female entrepreneurs. Exploring the idea of studying visual content, it felt prudent to examine literature on data analysis and research methodology. I found that content analysis is used to “...categorize messages in specific contexts” which could be helpful in understanding the research topic and making sense of the data (Merrigan, Huston, & Johnston, 2012, p. 126).

Visual ethnography is one subset of ethnography that could help to derive cultural understanding from the imagery. Sarah Pink (2001) studied how an ethnographic approach can support the production and interpretation of visual images, including how to gain a deeper understanding of how ethnographic research can inform visual artistic practices, finding that images can help understand individuals, relationships, culture, and ethnographic knowledge. This method may help understand the individual posting the content, their relationship with the audience, and the cultural context in which they are motivated to create and post the content online.

Another form of ethnography, autoethnography allows the researcher to participate “...in the social context in which their experience takes place...” and be “...an observer of their own story and its social location” (Muncey, 2010, p. 2). Spry (2001) defines autoethnography as “self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (p. 710). The method has also received some criticism. Muncey (2010) is a mild critic of autoethnography, and describes her hesitancy to consider it a research method, though she does find that there is

legitimacy in using individual experiences as a data source. Hammersley (1991) also notes that “...ethnography offers no immediate solution to the problems that currently face social research” (p. 11), which may be a disadvantage to conducting the research if it is seen as having no immediate value.

In the Internet era, there are so many opportunities to tell the individual’s story, but as we’ve seen in the literature review there is a tendency for individuals to be biased and to project a public persona, thereby editing the story to align with that persona. Berger (2002) claimed that “there is a huge gap between the experience of living a normal life at this moment on the planet and the public narratives being offered to give a sense to that life” (p. 176). I can see how autoethnography could provide an opportunity for the individual to learn from their own experiences and convey those lessons in a way that tells a story and provides an opportunity to educate others. This is supported by the conclusion that, “autoethnographies are characterized by artistically constructed pieces of ‘text’ that evoke the imagination and increase the reader's understanding” (Muncey, 2010, p. 8).

Related to entrepreneurship, Engstrom (2012) found that autoethnography can help to provide a deeper understanding of the political, cultural and artistic dimensions of entrepreneurship. Engstrom (2012) also noted that “...autoethnography is an appropriate methodological approach for the prosaic-oriented ‘life story’ approaches in entrepreneurship studies and education...” (p. 43). Conveying the life story is a peek into the personal life, making it a vulnerable with ethical implications for disclosing too much information about the self, friends, family and acquaintances. Along this vein, Boyle and Perry (2007), argued “that the intensely personal process of identity construction is best documented through an

autoethnographic approach” (p. 188). In addition, Engstrom (2012) also found that that autoethnography can result in a learning exercise for academics and entrepreneurs.

Summary of the Literature

Of the academic articles I reviewed to-date, the most helpful would likely be the ones focused on entrepreneurship, marketing and social media, as it is the focus of my research question. From an initial assessment of the literature, there appear to be gaps in existing research on female entrepreneurship in Canada. I have discovered that there is not a lot of specific research on female entrepreneurship in Canada, but rather general research on entrepreneurship, business in Canada, education in Canada, or research that includes Canadian entrepreneurship alongside people in other countries. It was interesting to see a broad range of research on entrepreneurship in the United States of America, and how studies have used quantitative and qualitative methodologies to paint a picture of who is undertaking entrepreneurship and why. These existing studies could be analyzed to help understand trends in female entrepreneurship in North America.

The existing research on marketing and social media highlights interesting trends that could be examined in individuals becoming influencers and turning their persona into a business. Using social media, and the right mix of marketing and communication to take advantage of existing or emerging opportunities, these individuals could sell products to females to capitalize on the upward trend of female entrepreneurship, which could help boost self-identification as an entrepreneur. What makes an influencer has been defined as someone achieving a celebrity-like status, however influential people online may not have achieved the massive following associated with this status but are just as capable of influencing decisions with content with a

smaller following on social media, according to the marketing literature on what makes word-of-mouth communication effective online and offline.

The cultural implications of identifying as an entrepreneur vary by country, but are associated with high social status in North America, which may also be a contributing factor to the upward trend of female entrepreneurs. Changing employment norms and globalization are also contributing factors affecting career-decisions, and some may choose to enter entrepreneurship to evolve with the changing employment norms out of a feeling of necessity. Overall, the literature poses interesting gaps that lead to a wide variety of areas of additional study to fully understand the complex nature of female entrepreneurship and how decisions are impacted.

Studying content posted by female entrepreneurs on social media as part of the Imperfect Boss movement, by finding images that are posted publicly on Instagram using the hashtags #theimperfectboss and #theimperfectwoman, will help me to determine if and how I was impacted by these communications from individuals identifying as female entrepreneurs; these hashtags were actively being used by the movement, and I was an active participant in that movement at the time this paper was written. The Imperfect Boss movement was started by a female entrepreneur in Canada, as a way to bring more authenticity to social media and to draw attention to shared experiences in the entrepreneurial culture in North America and around the world. For specific times during the year, the movement encouraged female entrepreneurs to highlight imperfections about themselves to showcase the fact that while social media may look perfect, the reality is not always perfect, and that is okay. As a female entrepreneur myself, I want to examine a selection of the content of this movement in the public space and draw a

deeper understanding my personal and cultural experience. Using qualitative research, drawing on autoethnography to explore my own entrepreneurial journey could help extend understanding of the societal phenomenon of the decision to pursue female entrepreneurship. I will purposefully sample content on Instagram to analyze and reflect on how it impacted me.

Methodology

The research method is autoethnography. This method allows the researcher to be immersed in the experience while being able to reflect on that experience, much in the way one would reflect in an autobiography with the underlying tenets of the research practices of ethnography (Muncey, 2010). This helps provide a deeper understanding of a woman's journey into entrepreneurship and the different facets that informed her decision-making processes. Drawing upon personal experiences from the past and reflecting on them allows them to be analyzed in relation to academic literature.

Research Design

For research design, an autoethnographic approach was taken to explore commonalities in experiences of female entrepreneurs to learn more about my participation in the culture of female entrepreneurship. Examining my own experiences and decisions to venture into entrepreneurship and reflecting on what other female entrepreneurs are posting on social media helped shed insight on how female entrepreneurs are influenced by communication in various methods, from person-to-person interactions to social media posts and marketing communications by businesses. This approach was selected to try to understand how female entrepreneurs are affected by external forces and internal forces to highlight the personal element of the experience and how unique the choice is to the individual's personal experience and

motivations. Using the analytical-interpretive approach of autoethnography (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013), themes from reflective journal entries would be drawn upon to be able to explore academic research to address the research question.

Questions Considered During Evaluation

1. Are my experiences as a female entrepreneur consistent with the information available in academic research literature?
2. How much has interpersonal and marketing communication played a role in my decision to become an entrepreneur, and how have those communications impacted the decisions involved with choosing to become an entrepreneur?

Ethics Considerations and Approvals

The autoethnographic research method utilizes the researcher's experiences and interpretation of those experiences. As such, this method does not require ethics approval for the data collected, reviewed and analyzed. The data collected for this research is from the researcher's personal and professional experiences. The reflection undertaken is in journal format and involves the review of social media activities from the researcher's social media accounts or is available entirely in the public space.

Analysis

To conduct this research, I kept a journal of my feelings and experiences over a seven-month period. Many of the reflections were from throughout my life, from childhood to present day, to capture a wholesome picture of my experiences and decisions to become an entrepreneur. Following this reflective process, I analyzed my experiences and decisions against the academic literature on entrepreneurship and marketing and compared the information. I also

compared my experiences against the experiences of others, as posted to public social media channels.

Data Collection

Reviewing personal reflections in journal entries from December 2017 to July 2018 allowed for the exploration of common themes and meanings. The insight gained from analyzing personal experiences included how current decisions to venture into entrepreneurship were informed and influenced by previous experiences happening much earlier in life, and by hearing the stories of others via social media. Attention is paid to how social media played a role in this journey, and how influencers affected the decision-making process.

Autoethnography of Vanessa Shepherd: The Journey to Entrepreneurship

My journey to entrepreneurship felt different from the way I had heard other people describe their experiences on the road to entrepreneurship. Many felt they had family support to pursue a rare opportunity, or they inherited a role in a family business. Meanwhile, I was chasing an opportunity that erupted thanks to the Internet in a time when social media was still a big question mark to most people, certainly not something one would regard as a solid opportunity for a career, let alone one you could create an entire business around. Deep in the recesses of my mind I had this nagging feeling, like I was missing something along the way, and it took until undertaking this research project to really understand why that feeling was there.

I was raised in a time of belief that children should be silent, and that upbringing has impacted me through to today, where I feel less likely to embrace my impulse to speak and engage and share my opinions than other people. I hold back out of this underlying fear, and while my personal experiences may be different, I've found that there are other women on the

road to entrepreneurship that feel similarly, like they don't have a voice or anyone willing to listen. From my perspective, it is imperative to give women entrepreneurs a voice and an ear to listen when so many women feel they are alone, different, and inferior.

I am living in a time of radical change on so many fronts. Social media has impacted culture, behaviors, attitudes and opportunities. Social media has impacted me. I'm passionate about this communication channel in the same way I'm passionate about helping others and making things. It was this communication channel that helped me find a sense of community alongside other women who wanted to change the way they were living their lives, while feeling they were alone in the things they were experiencing in their journeys. This autoethnography is my written experience about entrepreneurship, and my aim is to help other women understand they are not alone, and that they have a voice they should share with the world.

My venture into entrepreneurship did not happen overnight. I didn't wake up one day and decide it was trendy to work from home and start to do it. Combing through academic literature in the pursuit of a reason why women decide to start a business and reflecting on my own decisions in the process has made me realize that while social media played a large role in my decision to start a business, it wasn't the only factor affecting my decision. There was an array of communications that acted like dominos that came together to form the map to my journey, and one by one I'm turning those dominos over to understand the underlying themes in my journey and what really influenced my entrepreneurship decision.

Career Decisions as a Canadian Woman

The report by Langford, Josty and Saunders (2016) on Canadian culture is really interesting to me, because the findings that entrepreneurship overall is viewed as a solid career

choice delivering high social status feels inconsistent with the reactions of others when I respond to their questions about what I do for work. Aside from financial fears and motivations, the reactions of others have been very impactful on my decision making when it comes to becoming an entrepreneur and advertising what I do. I've struggled with confidence pretty much my entire life, so often I freeze when others shed doubt, or tell me that something can't be done, or that there's no opportunity in it, or that it's not a good career move. Those are pretty large reasons not to become an entrepreneur, and in Canadian society, those are big reasons to stick with what can be considered to be a normative life decision, like getting a job working for someone else, such as in government or the private sector.

Very few people I have encountered in Canada proudly say that being an entrepreneur is a solid career choice. I think some of that has to do with the generations I am surrounded by, because the values feel like they are shifting when it comes to the way we look at employment and other factors of daily life. For instance, the generations younger than me tend to be more open to entrepreneurship or freelance work and the conversations I have had with other women show an alignment with Langford et al's (2016) findings that Canadian culture is reasonably favourable for entrepreneurship. Sidoti (2015) noted that younger people tend to view work as being precarious, which could help to inform why people younger than me view entrepreneurship as a good choice, given that they are more accepting of risk as the normal part of the career journey. Yet, generations my age and older tend to lean toward a more traditional looking career, with a view of someday entering management as an aspirational career path. Bridging the two different values on work and the outlook on what the future could look like, I can definitely see both perspectives. Like many of the people I have talked to over the years, I

believed a career in government was a life-long path and was very surprised to see a quick change toward less permanence, and to lose that career to a corporate restructure. I would not have been one to view a government career as precarious employment before that situation, but now I have been left feeling like it could be heading toward uncertainty for the worker. Both the values in the organization and the city I live in felt a little shaken after that situation, and it has left me with a respect that there should be an openness to an evolution of the way we view work, treat workers and determine how we can have a safe financial future amidst an ever-changing economic environment.

When I was deciding what to do for post-secondary education, entrepreneurship wasn't an option. My first foray into post-secondary education was in 2001, and business was a solid career choice, but there wasn't a consideration or recommendation for becoming an entrepreneur without a business education. Even my second round of post-secondary education in 2004 favoured business studies, and it wasn't until my third round of post-secondary education in 2011 that I encountered an option to study entrepreneurship in any form. Yet, I knew many people who decided to start a business without formal business education, and some seemed to achieve a high social status in the community, while others did not seem to receive the same accolades.

In 2011, I noticed a change in the career options in front of me. Different careers were more openly discussed that might have previously not existed or been grouped together under a larger field of study. For instance, in high school I had the option to study business, which sounded a whole lot like becoming an accountant, a salesman, a lawyer or an insurance broker. Pretty bland options for a creative-minded person like myself. The more creative options were in

the arts, and I could become a teacher with those skills; I ventured into postsecondary on the teacher career path and bailed when the teaching outlook in Alberta changed in 2002. This change in the outlook for a career feels like another disruption in the norms in employment, which as Cranford et al (2003) pointed out in their research has been happening since World War II. When I considered going back for my degree, marketing was an option alongside sales and management. Looking back, had marketing been an option earlier on in life, I might have ventured down that path after the teacher career prospect turned grim, or I may have considered it instead of teaching. I'm not generally one to play the 'what if' game, but my reflections on career options helped me determine that it would have been a likely possibility.

Even today, when I talk to people about doing social media as a job it's becoming a more accepted career. Some people still look at me like I'm nuts, and that job is low paying and only for kids, but I also consider that social media is still growing in Canadian society, and in so many ways it's in its infancy in our culture and economy. Both Campa et al (2016) and Mack et al (2017) found a connection between the Internet and how businesses evolved, and an extension of that evolution is the evolution in career options, lifestyle choices, and opportunities. The Internet has definitely created additional opportunities that never used to exist, especially when it comes to allowing different career options for people who want to start a business or work for others who have started their own business. And for women these opportunities are aligning with the career motivating factors DeMartino et al (2013) noted in their research of a desire to make decisions that positively affect their family or lifestyle.

When people consider the ease of entering into one of these newer career choices, I often wonder if they consider the amount of work involved. In online groups or social media posts I

read about people wondering why it's taking so long to build a business, and they complain about not yet being a success story or an influencer. Langford et al's (2016) findings that the broader population underestimates the challenges in starting a business feels very accurate and consistent with what I've heard others say, and what I've experienced in my own entrepreneurship journey. It's also contrary to the image portrayed by some successful entrepreneurs and influencers, who profit off of their ability to attract attention and commercialize it, the way Beller (2006) and Hochschild (2012) characterize using attention grabbing and messaging to trigger emotional responses that result in purchase decisions, essentially marketing their success stories as a way to trigger others to follow in their footsteps. Starting a business is hard, and it's time consuming and expensive, and very few people can buy their way into success or purchase a product that will catapult their business into profitability. Those things are why I kept a main job working in a more traditional career while starting a business.

Having to juggle my salaried job, post-secondary education, a start-up and family life has had its challenges, and I often underestimated the amount of time or work involved to keep all those things going to be able to grow a business. I often felt that despite how busy I was with work and educational commitments people still expected me to have plenty of time for friends and family, and maintain honours level grades. Meeting those social expectations made me feel like my gender thrust me into a role in society that I may not always want to fill -- what if I didn't want to take care of everyone else? Couldn't I just focus on me for awhile?

I struggled a lot with balancing out the social expectations tied to my gender and my role in my family with the expectation to achieve honours grades in my undergraduate studies and

maintain a management level position in my salaried job without rocking any boats. The pressure resulted in my attention being pulled in many directions, working all the time, and battling periods of burnout. It also left me feeling as though if I was a man, I would have more freedom to do things for myself, and to focus on getting them done so that I could achieve my goals. That struggle has made me angry at times, but more often than not it helps me channel my emotions to push through barriers and break people's preconceived notions of what I was capable of accomplishing. My underestimation of time and effort, and my tendency to take on too many things, has held back my business growth, but I've gained so much more in personal development along the way.

Personality and Personal Development

Hamilton et al (2014) describe the big five personality traits that can be used to understand a correlation between personality and entrepreneurship as, "...agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness and openness to new experiences" (p. 6). While the academic debate about the big five has been ongoing since the introduction of the concept by Goldberg in 1971, I found the traits quite accurate for myself, which helped to shed insight into how my personality may have impacted my decision to become an entrepreneur. Some of these traits were taught to me, like conscientiousness and agreeableness, while others feel more natural and instinctive, like neuroticism, extraversion and openness to new experiences. Despite extraversion and openness to new experiences feeling natural, I have had to relearn these after growing up in a household that disapproved of extraversion and tried to limit a desire to have new experiences.

The personality attributes associated with agreeableness include trust, lack of selfishness, kindness, and affection among other prosocial behaviors (Hamilton et al, 2014). A great example of these prosocial behaviors in action is how I have a tendency to jump in and offer to help others, and to be diplomatic and uphold confidentiality. In my career and personal experiences, I have had many people comment that they love that I am trustworthy, and honest, and act selflessly to contribute to the team or larger community. I definitely feel that these qualities have contributed to helping me be the type of person who is willing to help others to grow their businesses while developing my own, or to go the extra mile on a project without expecting anything additional in return. I see myself as less extraverted than my family sees me but reflecting on my childhood through to the present day has helped me see that I do have a degree of extraversion, which is typically characterized as being talkative, social, excitable, assertive, and emotionally expressive (Hamilton et al, 2014).

The personality trait of neuroticism is one I've battled with throughout my life, but it's also what helps make me unique. For instance, my family recounts stories of my moods being all over the map when I was growing up, often tied to how I was feeling about specific situations; I didn't have much of a poker face, that's for sure! Neuroticism is associated with anxiety, moodiness, irritability, sadness, and emotional instability, which are not things that I feel people want to be proud of; I know I certainly don't typically advertise these traits too broadly about myself (Hamilton et al, 2014).

Finding others on social media who also display levels of neuroticism was a comforting thing for me as I progressed in my entrepreneurial journey. When someone in my social network introduced me to a movement centering around imperfection in female entrepreneurs, I was

intrigued and then completely drawn into the Imperfect Boss community. Up until that point I tended to hide myself online, which created a sense of self that contrasted with my real self to try to avoid any threats to my confidence (Suh, 2012). Appendix A displays an excerpt of the types of posts that have been posted on social media using the hashtags #theimperfectboss and #theimperfectwoman, which had a profound impact on me at various times in my entrepreneurial journey. At times I think there was even a feeling of perceived relationships with people in that community due to the intimacy of sharing our experiences and supporting one another, much in the way Horton et al (1956) described perceived relationships with celebrities and other personas due to the heightened emotional response of the situation. Seeing other people posting about themselves in a real, raw way helped me feel less alone and more confident that my non-traditional career aspirations were a lot more normal than what I had felt they were.

At various times in my entrepreneurial journey I have had the opportunity to avoid or embrace personal disclosure. Over the years, more often than not I have found myself embracing personal disclosure in a way that respects the privacy of others who may have been involved in a situation. Working in government definitely taught me to be confident and diplomatic, which has helped me embrace authenticity in my interactions with others to share my experiences without jeopardizing trust of others along the way. My personality traits have impacted my professional decisions, my personal decisions, and the stories I tell others to help them navigate a difficult situation themselves. An example of this is my level of agreeableness helping me to build trust in an organization that had periods of very low trust among employees. I was able to help others in a selfless way, which built team morale and earned their trust over time. By being myself I was able to offer advice based on my own experiences, which helped them to overcome an issue, like

how to work with a difficult coworker or be mindful of our strengths and weaknesses when reacting to something a coworker says or does. Every time I've shared my experiences to help someone else I have had what I call a lightbulb moment, where I realize something that helps me to further develop as a person.

My neuroticism related personality traits have definitely had the most negative career impacts, especially when combined with the other traits that have created moments in my life where things resulted in monumental change. In 2005, an explosion and condo fire resulted in me developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which went undiagnosed until 2008-2009. My tendency to feel anxious, sad and irritable really came out in those years, and I worked myself to death's door because I am so conscientious (i.e. I have good impulse control, goal-directed behaviors, organization and detail oriented-ness, characteristics identified by Hamilton et al, 2014). The same traits that allow me to lean into entrepreneurship allowed me to organize my life in a way where I controlled the things I felt I needed to control to deal with my psychological trauma, which resulted in embracing pre-existing anorexic and other eating disordered behaviors. My openness to new experiences also helped me plan and gain new insight into how to hide my battle from others, while masking unhappiness with a range of interests and jobs to pay the bills and trying to navigate massive debt post-traumatic experience. Interestingly, it was the experience of inpatient and outpatient treatment that sparked me to have a desire to change, and to live my life the way I wanted, even if the journey took time to reach my goals.

Experiences like what I've described have allowed me to be able to relate to other female entrepreneurs navigating a difficult time in their life. Seeing what they post on social media, and being able to respond to it, has allowed me to embrace a community I didn't even know existed.

Being involved in that community is helping me further develop as an individual and a leader and embrace my passions and the skills I have to be able to own them and find ways to use them to help others. I guess on some level you could say that I am using my online persona and offline personality traits to intentionally influence relationships, but in a positive way that isn't filled with the hype that Kozinets et al (2010) described as being used by others online, like influencers, but rather intentional, authentic communication not for the purpose of sales, but for relationship building to feel connected to others the way I was in a traditional office setting.

The Internet Era and Digital Marketing

The shifting balance of power in the Internet era from corporation to consumer, has opened up new opportunities that stand to reshape the way we do business and communicate on any number of topics, entrepreneurship and remote work included (Li and Bernoff, 2008). Where companies may have once marketed to small business owners, they are now considering marketing to entrepreneurs more seriously than they may have in the past. Working in advertising firms has helped me see this shift take place, and being marketed to as an entrepreneur by businesses has also helped me to see the shift from an alternate perspective.

From my career experience, I've been able to see first hand how businesses have been shifting from using celebrities to everyday people with the ability to influence others (i.e. influencers). The better the ability of the influencer to know and sell their product with emotion and communication, the more they are able to achieve sales, which is in line with Till et al's (1998) exploration of this marketing strategy in the context of celebrities being the influencer. When the influencer and the business are able to create a website and social media presence that has high-quality content that creates an emotional connection with the audience they are often

able to increase brand awareness and purchase activities, which is on par with Nusair et al's (2015) study of how social networks can positively influence better outcomes, like sales and a better understanding of the brand's audience. It's easy to see how businesses and entrepreneurs are using these methods to create an opportunity to generate additional income using the connection with their audience.

With other entrepreneurs marketing to entrepreneurs and using language that resonates with that audience, one can see how they are able to achieve micro-celebrity status by leveraging quality content and communication. It's also interesting to see how businesses are building pricing plans that cater to entrepreneurs and it feels as though this mini industry has emerged from within a general premise of start-ups and small business ownership. The newest thing seems to be people who have transitioned from entrepreneur to small business owner or large business owner selling their expertise to other people to help them start a business themselves. It could also be that the more I navigate within the community of entrepreneurs, the more I notice marketing communications tailored toward that audience.

So often on social media I see visual and written content directed toward people like me, and some of it is authentic sounding, but a lot of it is marketing content with the underlying hope that you will work your way through the sales funnel and become a paying customer. As Abidin (2014) pointed out, people can create this content on social media to draw people in and funnel them toward websites to make a purchase. The best marketing efforts I encounter on social media are the personal ones, the content that is created to drive relationship building. I think that's what has made the Imperfect Boss (#theimperfectboss and #theimperfectwoman) movement so appealing in addition to the sharing of real stories and life experiences by female

entrepreneurs (samples of posts using these hashtags are found in Appendix A). With the idea of creating community, the originator of the movement has managed to drive her own business sales and help other female entrepreneurs drive sales for their businesses. It would be nice to see more marketing communications that provide the opportunity for women entrepreneurs to share their voice and recount their experiences. This is something that I want to include in my entrepreneurial efforts as well to help build community and business partnerships.

Overcoming: The Underlying Theme of My Entrepreneurial Journey

It was an Imperfect Boss post on Instagram that sparked an enlightened moment of this notion that it was more than an idea sparked by social media that caused me to make a decision to become an entrepreneur. The post read, “I’ve overcome much pain and obstacles to be here. #theimperfectboss” (Beaudin, 2017). In that instant I had a moment where I thought, “I have too!” and I proceeded to look up the definition of the word overcoming. According to the dictionary, the word overcoming means, “to get the better of: surmount” (Merriam-Webster, 2018). I have definitely gotten the better of my fair share of situations and looking back I’ve come to see that many experiences from childhood until the present day influenced my decision to become an entrepreneur.

My parents always had big dreams and when I was younger they took action to try to fulfill those dreams. There was always talk of some new invention or innovation, a business idea or a way to make some extra cash to pay a bill or two. So, I guess it was only natural that money making ideas would pop up in my own head over time.

When I was a young child, I think about five, I helped with a wedding in my hometown. That's just what you did back then, everyone pitched in and everything got done. It wasn't always

smooth, but it always wound up in a big party afterwards. I wound up wrapping wedding cake (matrimonial cake) into foil doilies with ribbon tied around the outside and a little tag attached. Hundreds of them. I did not like the cake, but I enjoyed helping and doing something that made something.

The weddings and the helping and the making never did stop. Year after year I was asked to help make things for all sorts of people. It was fun, and often I found myself volunteering to help out. That theme has stuck with me my entire life; I've always enjoyed making things and take every opportunity to learn how to make new things.

I was in elementary school when my parents decided to start a food truck business (called a concession back then), and we visited auctions and festivals all around the countryside each spring through fall. When I wasn't in school or visiting family I was usually found selling and serving ice cream, coffee and hot chocolate (I wasn't old enough to help with "real food"). I have always been a tad shy, but I've also loved talking to other people and hearing their stories. A story is how you really get to know people. It's amazing how well you get to know people when you're selling them ice cream or a hot beverage. A lot of people just liked to chat, and back then I was too cute to resist - blonde hair, blue eyes, and a huge smile, I drew in the crowds and kept them entertained. If business was slow my parents allowed me to go out and find the people, and there was usually a few I could convince to come back to buy something from me.

In the winter months, when food truck business was non-existent, my parents sold things at flea markets. They enjoyed flipping items for more money than they paid for them (usually picked up for free from ads in the *Bargain Finder*). My mom also made handicrafts as a hobby, and she sold those too. After sitting at too many tables bored out of my mind I asked if I could do

the same thing - make and sell crafts to earn my own money. With a little help from my mom (hello to the perils of the hot glue gun...) I made things and sold them, often clearing out what I had brought with me. Some weekends were definitely better than others (and my skills weren't top notch either). We did that for years, until the family grew and the returns from the flea markets just weren't there anymore.

Between learning how to make things, helping others, learning the art of the sale and trying my hand at selling my first handmade goods, I ventured into entrepreneurship rather early in life. And I loved it. After that came babysitting, more making things for people, snow shovelling and mowing the lawn. Eventually, I learned how to be a contractor and did all sorts of odd jobs to gain career experience that I could put on my resume. Nowadays, we'd just call that freelancing. Every job and every sale back then came from word of mouth marketing. There was no internet, no fancy ads, and no cell phones. Connecting with people and figuring out what they needed was the way to a sale, and that same critical thing holds through to today. It's no wonder I'm such a strong advocate for word of mouth marketing promotions!

Word of mouth promotion was especially helpful with the help of an influencer. With no Internet an influencer didn't have the help of a social media channel to spread the word - they were people who were happy customers, proud family members, or those who just saw the value in the offering. Those people helped me more than anything, and that fueled me to continue taking on all sorts of projects.

Influential people also helped me choose to lean into certain kinds of projects over others. People who saw my skills improve over time encouraged me to keep crafting, and making things. They were always the most excited to see what I produced, and I did love sharing the

story of how I made whatever it was I had to share. As I ventured more into business consulting, there were people who influenced me to step out of my comfort zone to take on new projects, and others who saw me take that risk and rewarded me with a lead. Those first new contracts were great learning opportunities.

With some contracts I learned what I did not like to do, and with others I learned what I loved most of all. And still others reminded me that no matter what skills you have, you'll always have to do something you don't like. While I'm not proud that I once dropped out of university, and then went back to post-secondary for a certificate in office administration, I do recognize that the journey I took has helped me to change as a person. And every experience along the way has come in handy on the next job or project I've taken on.

There are times when I feel like the more education I have on business the less motivated I am to pursue entrepreneurship, which aligns with the diminishing motivation trend Oosterbeck et al (2008) found in their study, but at other times I become more motivated because I can see the potential outcome of what could happen if I applied that education and experience to tap into an opportunity. The biggest times when I find my motivation dips are when I feel financial pressure, which aligns with the findings of Frid et al (2016), where they note that middle-income individuals are just as capable as high-income individuals, but their lack of income holds them back in the pursuit of an opportunity. The lack of extra cash flow has at times held me back in growing my business, but I remind myself that my hard work will pay off in the long run.

All in all, I'd say my skills as an executive assistant have come in handy more than once on a consulting job, and I understand a much greater picture of how businesses work having had the career I've had compared to what I would understand had I stuck to the first post-secondary

degree program I was once enrolled in. I've come to realize that all those experiences make me a stronger entrepreneur, and I'm forever grateful that I had the opportunities to make mistakes and learn new things with every job, no matter how unglamorous they were.

Life isn't all about the glamour and the job title, no matter what you hear celebrities say on social media. I've had many job titles that were much lesser than the work of the job itself, and those jobs taught me how to take on a project. You see, I treated every job as though I was a consultant, even though I was really a contracted employee with a degree of precariousness in my employment. In my mind, I've always been an innovator, a problem solver, and someone with the skills to address a need for the client that hired me. It took me a long time to recognize that pattern, but when I finally did, it helped convince me that starting my own business was where I was meant to be, and that I had the abilities to bring my big, scary vision to life with time, hard work and patience.

It took the influence of others offline and via social media to help me see the pattern I had embarked on over the years. Talk about an Oprah sized aha moment! Whether we realize it or not, we are impacted by influential people. Stories and actions inspire us, and the interconnectivity of social media has helped to bring us more stories than we would have been exposed to before. As Papacharissi (2002) noted in their research, those online stories aren't always the full picture, but a glimpse by way of an online persona, but I still feel that on some level they have the ability to impact our decisions. At the base of it all, it's usually a combination of social media and interpersonal connections in offline life that help us make decisions, like whether we are capable of starting a business, or embracing our inner entrepreneur at our day jobs, or of having the confidence to try something new.

That combination of social media and interpersonal connections had an impact on my life and career choices too. Once upon a time my parents had a dream of me being a lawyer, and I could see myself doing that. Standing up for the law and helping people, and bringing about social justice. Then I grew older, and a little wiser to the ways of the world, and I decided that wasn't the right job for me (plus, it was a hell of a lot of work and I wanted to have time to enjoy my life and not work myself to death). My parents were SO disappointed in me when I told them that. Add it to the trail of disappointment I caused them over the years - what, only 95% on that paper?! Not good enough, they'd say! More studying! I loved to learn, but sometimes they took the fun right out of it.

The crushing pattern of this set of expectations that my parents had for me influenced my personality development on many levels. Naturally chatty, I feel as though had I not been expected to be "seen and not heard" (I may have heard that one too many times from my stepfather growing up) I may have grown up to be more extraverted than I am today (fun fact: I typically score evenly in introversion and extraversion, which I believe is tied to the way I was raised as a child). When I let my guard down I'm an open book, eager to help, willing to try all sorts of new ideas, but when I have my guard up I'm more emotional and feel torn between doing what I'm expected to do by society or the culture I'm in and doing what I want to do. Over the years I've found a way to feel a sense of balance between having the guard down and having it up, which has helped me to embrace the path that led me to own the aspects of my personality that make me suited for the culture of entrepreneurship.

I explored many traditional occupational options in my journey to entrepreneurship, asking myself what was I good at? I had a really hard time figuring that out. Looking back I

realize that the way I was raised crushed my confidence, and moving a lot didn't help, and being the ping pong child between two separated parents (they separated when I was three) that went on to have their own families, really gave me a lot of issues with confidence. One household had really strict expectations (i.e. the 95% is not good enough, you should be a lawyer household), and the other had pretty loose expectations (i.e. get good grades, finish school, be polite and you'll be rewarded for it). Going back and forth could be pretty confusing, so it's really no wonder I wound up being a bit neurotic on an emotional roller coaster for so many years. Having time spent in both environments helped me to develop the unique personality I have today, and it also highlights an example of an expectation placed on women for how we should behave, like what Duffy et al (2017) found female entrepreneurs reported about their involvement in the online space.

I struggled to figure out what I loved to do, but a few mentors helped me to slowly figure it out, by pushing me outside of my comfort zone. These people were influential in my high school years. They challenged me to express myself instead of hiding behind facades to make everyone else happy. Sometimes I expressed myself quite well, and I still didn't fit in, but that's also part of life in small town Alberta in the late 1990's. It was a complicated social ecosystem of tight knit students who mostly went to school together for 13 long years, and I happened to move back to town, which dubbed me the outsider. Yay me. Being the outsider, and naturally a person who got along well with adults versus people my own age, I turned to my mentors for community, and help working out the complicated emotions that I felt.

The influence of my mentors diminished the loneliness, depression and low self-confidence I felt in that time of my life. It also provided me with a sense of community, and

they taught me to embrace my creative side instead of be ashamed of it. They also encouraged me to speak up and out and to let my voice be heard, whether it was written or verbal. That definitely caused a lot of tension at home, but it helped me to push past the traditional view of women that I was expected to embody and to embrace a new reality of the confident woman who could do anything she wanted to. Take a trip to Scotland without my family and do all sorts of things I'd never done before - sign me up! Leave home at 17 and go to university to become a teacher - I can do that!

Self-expression was a great resolution for all of the things I felt, and as it turns out I enjoyed it. Looking at the research, it's no wonder why. Wertag and Bratko (2019) found that people with a tendency toward openness as a personality trait tend to have the following characteristics, "...enjoyment of beauty in art and in nature, inquisitiveness about various domains of knowledge, creativity, and a tendency to accept the unusual..." (p. 59), and their study results also suggested that these characteristics are aligned with people who display prosocial behaviors. My learned and natural prosocial behaviors are aligned with other personality traits that include things I love, like the pursuit of lifelong learning, creativity, art and nature.

I always loved to write, create, and use my imagination. Deep down I knew I wanted to make things and teach others, which was usually crushed when I expressed those ideas at the dinner table. You see, there's no money in that, artists starve, and creativity is all part of being an artist. True, but there were jobs that involve creativity that my parents hadn't considered or they didn't want me to consider. Boy were they shocked when I said I was applying to university to become a teacher, studying English and art and design. They were shocked again when I was

accepted and made arrangements to move out of the house at 17. They tried to get me to stay home for a year, and then do online school through a distance university, but I knew I needed out to experience things and grow as a person. I knew and felt that it was the right thing to do. So, I did.

My second year of university there was an announcement in the news that teaching jobs in Alberta were being cut. I did some math and realized that my teaching career options would be limited, and I'd have over \$100,000 in debt by the time I finished my education. I didn't like those odds, and I didn't know what else I'd do if I finished an arts degree, so I dropped out. Working more wouldn't be such a bad thing...except I was a barista at the time and I knew I didn't want to do that forever. The job hunt commenced, and eventually I wound up with a job as a photographer in training. A creative job I loved! I didn't like the limitations that came with the studio's styling, but I loved being behind the camera and learning new things. My photography skills earned me a position as a photographer, and I went on to train others and do all sorts of neat things on the job. Fun times, boring times, tough times, but all the experiences were worth it. I learned a lot about running a business by working for people who started the business and kept building it up year after year. It also helped me to see that if they could do it, I could too.

My stint as a photographer turned back into a part-time thing, then a break from that thing, when I caved to peer pressure and went back to post-secondary for an office administration certificate. In that moment of my life, I caved into the expectation to have a career that was seen as being stable, which was mostly a pressure I faced from my family. Deep down I knew I wanted to have a stable income, and their logic appealed to some rational point in my brain that figured trading one year of school for a steady job would eventually lead me to have

the ability to follow my dreams. Even though I left home at a young age, I hadn't yet learned not to let others influence my decisions so much; I was much more agreeable and felt the need to keep the peace at that age. That would change later on. In the meantime, I had experience, and a previous permanent job offer at the age of 15 with a law firm I was interning at in junior high for a work placement program. The logical move was to go to school for something that paid better. As it turned out I was good at the school side of it, and was bored with some of the programming, and in need of paying my bills. Financial pressure for the win, and a delay in the entrepreneurial dream.

So, feeling financial pressure, I tended to skip classes in favour of more hours working across the street at Tim Horton's. There wasn't an evening shift that went by where I wasn't working on school during my breaks and continuing to do my homework on the bus ride home at midnight. My honors grades stood, and the school was perplexed. The board didn't want to award a valedictorian award to someone who was hardly ever in class near the end of the year, so they compromised and had double valedictorians that year. It's still a funny story to me, even all these years later. Let's just say that the habit of working to pay bills and fitting school in around it is my go-to bad habit. As it turns out, this bad habit is pretty helpful as an entrepreneur in a world in need of people willing to work on contracts or pieces of work. I learned how to better manage my time and that has helped me to be more productive than I might have been had I not had a need to figure out how to work more with less time in my early twenties.

Out of school with a new certificate to my name, I wound up working in government in one position, and then another. It was during one of these contracted positions that I experienced a huge shift in my life. The condo I was renting had an explosion, and I was home at the time. It

was like a scene out of a Hollywood movie, and it was far too surreal in the moment and in the time afterward. It shook me to the core, and I lost everything but the clothes on my back and my car...and it was the dead of winter. That experience changed me in far too many ways, both good and bad.

I already had a lifelong battle with an eating disorder, and this experience didn't help with that. I can say with certainty I didn't behave as I usually did, and a lot of relationships were jeopardized along the way, alongside my health. You see, there wasn't a real sense of non-military or first responder type people getting post-traumatic stress disorder at this time. It wasn't until a few years later where that became a condition that was better understood in the medical community and in other facets of society.

When I finally reached out for help to figure out my physical and mental medical issues the eating disorder and depression were treated first. I couldn't articulate everything I felt and how it impacted me, which I now understand to be part of the condition, but I trusted the health care community to know best. Turns out they were learning right alongside with me and after a few years I felt like a guinea pig, because I didn't fit all the right boxes for any specific diagnoses. I wasn't anorexic enough to be fully anorexic, and I masked my symptoms with a few tricks I'd learned over the years, so that I didn't alarm anyone that there were problems going on underneath the surface. Most people don't have a clue that I ever struggled to overcome mental and physical health issues, and I was happy to keep it that way for a long time.

In a hospitalization in 2008 I wanted to get better, and it was difficult. I had to overcome a lot and the focus was on regaining weight more than dealing with underlying issues. Therapy helped, but I often wonder if things would have been differently if there was a better

understanding of PTSD back then. Either way, the challenges of the experience and the negative impact it had on people close to me was enough to give me the courage to want to change, and the determination to try to change.

It was in those months in the hospital where I could think and dream that I envisioned something greater. I knew I didn't want to live this way forever. In an off chance I was given an opportunity to help someone out who worked at the hospital. I wound up painting a piece of children's furniture for them, and that opened the door to reawakening my entrepreneurial spirit. From there I sold second-hand Lululemon clothing to my fellow patients and earned a little income by getting rid of things I no longer needed. That little spark stayed with me this time, and while I knew it wasn't the right time to reach that dream, I knew it would be there when it was the right time.

After recovery and many years of being an office assistant later, I worked my way up into a management level role and dug myself out of debt. Along the way I realized that I wanted more in my life and the job wasn't as challenging as I needed it to be. I still felt like I was meant for greater things. I held back from going back to school for a few years, and eventually decided with the help of a little Internet research that I needed a degree to change careers.

Confidence shaken, I wasn't sure I could handle working full-time and doing school, so I started off with one course. I was surprised that I could handle it. Slowly I added more courses each term, until I didn't have the patience to finish my degree in way more than four years. I took the plunge and went back to school full-time while working a full-time job. It's a crazy thing to do, and one that had some impacts on my social life and hobbies, but it was well worth the sacrifice.

I earned a diploma, and then a degree, both with honors, and regained my confidence. I took on new opportunities in addition to the work I already had, and freelanced a few contracts, then a few more. Took some internships and started a side-business.

At this point you're probably wondering when I ate and slept. I did both - even slept eight hours a night, except for the odd few nights I had to work late to finish group projects. It's all part of the student experience. And as it turns out, it plays into my personality and the experiences I've had learning how to get more done in less time, which is what helped me to see that this was the way entrepreneurs behaved. Many, many stories I've read on social media had the underline on the hard work and go-go-go personality needed to start a business. How was my story any different, really?

Near the end of my degree, a few influential people sat me down and congratulated me on being a mature student on a mission, who accomplished her goal to earn a degree with honors while working full time. What made these people influential was their ability to connect with me emotionally and they provided, "...relevant, useful, communally desirable social information..." that appealed to my need for achievement in the pursuit of a long-term dream (Kozinets et al, 2010, p. 85). These people told me they knew I would get a great job and make something of myself. What I did not know was that once I was away from their positive attitudes, I would lose the confidence I had gained, and would keep working in a career until things changed around me.

All those influential people had it right on some level. They encouraged me to apply to a master's program while I was still finishing up my undergraduate degree. I didn't believe I would get in, and what was the harm of applying, anyway? I knew I could do it if I did get in, but it would involve a few more years of hard work and sacrifice.

As it turns out, I got in and was shocked to bits. Well, now it didn't make sense to change jobs when I needed to focus on school, did it? So, I kept working in my same administrative position until my second year of the program. Then I accepted a promotion into a higher management level administrative position, which was seen as a great segway by many people in the corporation to be a stepping stone into the type of role I wanted to work in.

Changing jobs, doing a master's degree, and getting married all at the same time made life challenging. But I did overcome those challenges, leaned into the encouraging words from the female entrepreneur community on social media, especially those who were part of the Imperfect Boss, and embraced the community of other people who understood that these challenges were leading me to something greater. The great part about being connected to a community of people similar to me was that I was surrounded by people who understood and could relate to what I was going through, which helped me to feel like I shouldn't give up on my entrepreneurial dream and to keep push through all the challenges to make it happen. I didn't know my challenges would snowball. Or that the snowball would become the best thing to happen to me to kick me into changing careers fully, and diving into growing my fledgling business.

As I pushed through all the challenges of juggling education, married life and working life I started to pay closer attention to what the community of female entrepreneurs was saying. I was searching for tips on how to get new leads, generate income, and just make everything work out. You see, there were a few key influential female entrepreneurs online that I was paying attention to. These women grew their businesses to hit six-figures and they made it look easy and oh so appealing. Looking back, I recognize that it looked easy, because that is the online persona

they chose to present to the world to be able to construct marketing communications that would build positive communications that would sell their products to people just like me (Kozinets et al, 2010; Papacharissi, 2002; Marwick et al, 2011). And it worked! The marketing communications these female entrepreneurs created wound up targeting women like me who wanted to start or grow a business online, and what made it work was the fact that they presented their persona in a way that was relevant, useful, and appealed to emotions well enough that people in their audience, like me, perceived an authentic relationship (Kozinets et al, 2010; Horton et al, 1956). As their businesses grew these influential female entrepreneurs became micro-celebrities, which allowed them to partner with other bigger businesses to earn income as a social media influencer (Kozinets et al, 2010; Agrawal et al, 1995; Till et al, 1998). In turn, female entrepreneurs wanted to learn how to replicate their success, which as I reflect on what I saw on social media and in my inbox, exposed me to more marketing communication selling me products and services that could help me grow my business.

This culture of female entrepreneurship online is an interesting one, because we are expected as women to be transparent and authentic to be able to be successful (Duffy et al, 2017). Yet, in looking back at the female entrepreneurs I've learned from and looked up to (e.g. these micro-celebrities or social media influencers), I can see how marketing strategies have been at play to mask the downsides of entrepreneurship, while persuading me to make a purchase or behave in a similar fashion to be able to be successful.

Reflecting on my own behavior while participating in this culture, I recognize that my entire life has not been put on display, but that I'm not hiding how I have gotten to where I am today either; the online persona I create doesn't mimic interactions or build perceived

relationships, like those studied by Marwick et al (2011) and Papacharissi (2002), it builds authentic relationships. I feel that the personality trait of agreeableness, in being able to build trust with others, works to my advantage here, because I am approaching navigating the culture with expectations in mind while balancing out what feels right to me to build relationships with the people I want to work with. And on some level I know I'm heading in the right direction in balancing out what I feel is right for me as a female entrepreneur with what is expected of me, because other businesses have approached me to work with them to use my influence, emotional connection and trust with my audience and community on social media to help promote their businesses. Had I not studied social media influencers and marketing communications so intently to reflect on my journey I may not have recognized these patterns.

It's crazy to think about how everything in my life has come together to get me to where I am today. I've had to overcome emotional turmoil, confidence rebuilding, job hunting and contract hunting, and navigate a sea of confusing communications to make series of decisions that led me to participate in the emerging culture of female entrepreneurs. Today I'm much more confident in my abilities, and my dream, and the vision I have for being an entrepreneur and the good I can do with it. Without the influence of other female entrepreneurs on social media, and of people in "real life", I don't know that I would have the vision I do today, or the confidence to pursue it. I'm thankful for where the journey has taken me, and how my decisions have progressed over the years. And I'm thankful for finding the community of female entrepreneurs who helped keep me inspired to keep overcoming obstacles to reach my goals.

In Conclusion

The journey to entrepreneurship has been full of ups, downs and sideways moves. I've found myself holding back, not certain of how to proceed forward, cautious of whether I can fulfill the goals and vision I have set out for myself. On some level I know that I can, and I will, but the uncertainty from other people in my life makes me hesitate at times. Fulfilling my degree will most certainly help naysayers, and business leads, because that much time spent studying subjects that I am passionate about gives me that much more experience than I had before. Who can possibly argue with that?

The struggle with confidence in my entrepreneurship journey will likely always be something to overcome, and my deeper understanding of how personality and life experiences have shaped my decisions helps me to understand what is happening in the moment when I hesitate. Somehow that makes it easier to keep moving forward, despite the uncertainty surrounding building a business and bearing the risks that are involved in that decision.

Reflecting on my experiences and how social media and other influential individuals have impacted me helps me feel less alone in my journey, even if all those people aren't right by my side as I move forward. It's comforting to know that there are other women who are willing to share their experiences, and who are having similar thoughts and struggles. Having that online community to turn to is helpful on so many levels. This notion of creating community and shared values seems especially important as the world around us continues to change and evolve, creating turbulence alongside opportunity.

Barton (2016) highlighted the transformation of the traditional employment path in a succinct sentence, "gone are the days of 'getting a job' and welcomes is the age of 'making a

life” (p. 10). The economic downturn in 2008 resulted in the rise of a more risk averse culture, which has had a profound effect on the approach to finding and securing work, and the path taken from high school to education to a job that could sustain whatever lifestyle you envisioned for yourself.

I have literally stood on the employment transformation bridge that was being built as I walked across it. When I graduated high school in 2001 the attitude and culture still stood firm in the path to my adult life: graduate, get a degree, develop a resume, go on interviews and get a job. Partway through my 20-year-old life that path started to change and has snowballed ever since. This new attitude of making a life that you want to live has taken the contract work of the gig economy and turned it into a wave of entrepreneurial ventures full of men and women who are securing piecemeal employment to pay the bills and shape their personal vision of adult life.

Women can work from home while raising a family, men can stay at home and work while raising their children as long as there is a source of income, and people can travel the world while working as long as they can access wifi. The concept of what a normal life looks like is changing, and people’s attitudes are changing to accept this new reality. Who knows where the gig economy, social media and this evolution of our culture will take us in the next ten to twenty years!

My goal for writing this paper was to understand how different forms of communication have impacted my decision to enter into the pursuit of entrepreneurship, so that I could give a voice to and reflect on my own journey while understanding what the research says about people like me. Reflecting on how seeing those initial Imperfect Boss posts on social media helped me to see that it was more than one form of communication (i.e. social media, marketing,

interpersonal relationships) that shaped my decision to venture into entrepreneurship, and to make decisions that would help me to reach my goal. I hope that by sharing my own experiences other women on the entrepreneurial journey would feel less alone in their unique situations and feel comfortable owning what they are passionate about and confident enough to push forward to reach their goals.

The key findings from this experience are:

1. I have had experiences that are consistent with the information available in academic literature, as well as experiences that are a little different. Being part of a generation that has bridged change in culture, gender roles, technology and working conditions/roles it is interesting to see how my unique experiences relate to those studied by other academics. Given that some of the research studied was based in another country, rather than just in Canada, it was expected to find some differences due to differences in culture and economic factors. While those differences existed, it was interesting to see some commonalities shared despite the cultural and economic differences.
2. While I have found commonalities with other women on their own entrepreneurial journey, the influence to make that decision came from multiple sources, both online and offline. The decisions I have made while participating in the emerging culture of female entrepreneurship have been impacted by interpersonal communication and business-oriented marketing communication. With the growth in influencer marketing on social media, it was insightful to see how marketing strategies impact communication, which in turn impacts decision making on a personal and business

- level. Identifying some of the strategies used to capitalize on effective interpersonal communication, I could reflect on the interactions I had to then identify whether the relationships were real or perceived; whether they were intended to cultivate community or generate a sale. I was surprised to learn how much I have been impacted through interpersonal and marketing communications throughout my life to get to the point I am at in my journey today. Both types of communication have had a significant impact on my decision to become an entrepreneur.
3. My motivations to become an entrepreneur align with my personality, but also with academic research touching on financial and career motivations that contribute to the decision to venture into entrepreneurship. My personality has been developed naturally and through the impacts of others communicating with me, and it has been very insightful to see how my natural personality traits come out and work in conjunction with traits developed over time after years of being influenced by other people, such as my parents.
 4. Entrepreneurship is often ventured into with a sense of oversight on the amount of work and effort required to start and grow a business, and without considering the implications of how our culture views and values entrepreneurs.

Taking into consideration the academic debate about autoethnography, there is the consideration of the proximity of the researcher to the experiences and the way the findings are recorded to share the experience in a creative way with the help of a reflective process.

Had I not undertaken autoethnography as a research method, I do not believe that I would have chosen to take as broad an approach to understanding entrepreneurship, decision making,

marketing and how those concepts have shaped my entrepreneurial journey. With another research method I would have been more likely to explore the concepts at a distance, which would have led to much less personal transformation in the process of undertaking this academic research. Being able to compare my personal experiences with the experiences of others through research and the course of daily life has provided me with a realization about why some of my experiences have been harder than others, given that my generation was brought up in a time of such drastic changes to daily life, from the way we approach work to how we share information.

Additional research could be done to explore how social media joins forces with other influential forms of communication to impact women in their decision-making processes while they consider entrepreneurship as a career and life decision. There has been a great deal of research done on social media, on decision-making and psychology, but few have brought multiple factors together to explore how they culminate in this complicated decision to embark on an entrepreneurial journey. Fewer researchers have explored these concepts within Canada, which opens up the opportunity to further explore how women in Canada are choosing to become entrepreneurs, and why they make that choice, and what or who has influenced them along the way. It's a fascinating area to explore further, and one that society should consider exploring further as economic forces change, and as culture changes to be more open to different sources of employment and types of work arrangements.

Communities need to continue to have open conversations about the experiences of female entrepreneurs. As those conversations take place, we can gain additional insight into why female entrepreneurs are choosing this path over other career paths, and we may learn more about the psychological side of the journey in addition to the economic aspect. It would also help

female entrepreneurs to feel confident that they are making the right decision, and that there are others who can help support them through shared experiences, encouragement and the support of the larger community.

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Appendix

Appendix A

The communications posted by women identifying as female entrepreneurs provide an example of the challenges women face as they participate in the emerging culture of female entrepreneurship. The expectation to be transparent and authentic, as found by Duffy et al (2017), has led to a gender expectation for women pursuing entrepreneurship as a career-decision. The women posting on Instagram about their real lives (e.g. emotions, fears, imperfections) strive to be authentic while exposing the expectation to be perfect as something female entrepreneurs should not strive toward.

A selection of a few of #theimperfectboss social media posts on Instagram:



Image 1: Beaudin, A. (2017, September 15). [Instagram post].



Image 2: Beaudin, A. (2017, September 14). [Instagram post].



Image 3: Ashley Beaudin. (2017, May 3). [Instagram post].



Image 4: Ashley Beaudin. (2017, February 21). [Instagram post].

A snapshot of a few of the #theimperfectwoman social media posts on Instagram:



Image 5: Charmaboutyou. (2018, June 26). [Instagram post].



Image 6: Olive4Design. (2018, June 26). [Instagram post].



Image 7: Alliepal. (2018, June 26). [Instagram post].



Image 8: TheHippeEmpire. (2018, June 28). [Instagram post].



Image 9: Strong.and.Smart. (2017, May 3). #repost from @danielle.zeigler [Instagram post].



Image 10 : Cupcakestocurves. (2018, June 29). #repost from Ashley Beaudin [Instagram post].