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July 2017

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This article was originally published at:

<http://cjc-rcc.ucalgary.ca/cjc/index.php/rcc/article/view/2840>

Citation for this paper:

Hudson Breen, R.E., Tasker, S.L., Hiebert, B. (2017). How Self-Employed Women with Children Manage Multiple Life Roles. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy / Revue canadienne de counseling et de psychothérapie*, 51(3), 187-206. <http://cjc-rcc.ucalgary.ca/cjc/index.php/rcc/article/view/2840>

How Self-Employed Women with Children Manage Multiple Life Roles

Illustration de la façon dont les mères travailleuses autonomes gèrent plusieurs rôles de vie

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ABSTRACT

Although there is a strong body of existing research on women's career-life development and on women's entrepreneurship, there is a lack of understanding of the specific experiences of mother entrepreneurs. This grounded theory study addresses the question of how self-employed women with children manage their multiple life roles. The core category "Keeping Going" illustrates a basic social process that is recursively fuelled and affected by 7 key properties: feeling supported, making choices, adapting creatively, remembering the push, remembering the pull, envisioning the future, and living my values. Implications for further research and counselling practice are discussed.

RÉSUMÉ

Malgré qu'il existe de nombreuses études sur le développement de carrière chez les femmes et sur l'entrepreneuriat au féminin, il subsiste des lacunes dans la compréhension des expériences spécifiques aux mères entrepreneures. Cette étude théorique à base empirique aborde la question de la gestion des multiples rôles de vie chez les mères travailleuses autonomes. La catégorie de base « *Keeping Going* » (poursuivre sans relâche) illustre la démarche sociale fondamentale qui est alimentée et touchée de façon récursive par 7 propriétés clés : se sentir appuyée, faire des choix, s'adapter de manière créative, se rappeler la poussée, se rappeler la traction, imaginer l'avenir et vivre ses valeurs. L'article présente une discussion des implications pour de plus amples recherches et pour la pratique du counseling.

[*EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is based on Rebecca Hudson Breen's dissertation, which won the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association's Award for Outstanding Dissertation in 2015. Congratulations on receiving this prestigious award!*]

Despite a wealth of research about women's career-life development, relatively little research has been done on the career-life development of women entrepreneurs with children. For example, research has looked specifically at the experiences of women who return to paid employment after having children (e.g., Baxter, 2008; Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2004; Halpern, 2005) and of women who leave

paid employment in favour of full-time mothering work (e.g., Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009; Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Stone, 2007). Schultheiss (2009) pointed to the need for research to specifically explore women's work as mothers and mothers' career development. Research also shows a focus on the impact of multiple roles and work-family balance as being particularly relevant issues in women's career-life development (e.g., Betz, 2006; Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008). Further, while a large volume of research continues to be devoted to understanding women's career-life paths, research in the area of women's entrepreneurship tends to exist in areas of business and management. In sum, little is known about career-life development of women who run their own businesses while raising children, or *mother entrepreneurs*.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Given the increasing numbers of mother entrepreneurs and the lack of research in this area, the purpose of this study was to provide insight on the experiences of mother entrepreneurs. The objectives were to understand the career development of mother entrepreneurs and, more specifically, how mother entrepreneurs manage their multiple life roles. Expectations included the possibility that participants identifying as *mompreneurs* (a term often used to refer to mother entrepreneurs) may experience reduced role conflict—that creating a business in line with their role as mother may provide a unique opportunity for negotiating work-life balance as well as employing their experiences as a mother to foster success in business. It was also expected that these women may experience stressors similar to women working in paid employment, such as those around division of labour in the home (Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2004), with additional stressors and benefits unique to the entrepreneurial lifestyle. Given the lack of existing scholarly research focused on Canadian mother entrepreneurs, this research was also intended to provide insight into the unique aspects of the experience of mother entrepreneurship for Canadian women, as well as ideas for further advancing theory and supporting women's entrepreneurship and career development. Attention was also paid to implications for counselling women experiencing career-life conflict, specifically job-family conflict.

In this article, we provide an overview of the empirical research and the overall model developed from the study. Readers are referred to two separate papers (Hudson Breen & Leung, 2017; Hudson Breen, Tasker, & Hiebert, 2017) for a more detailed discussion of the relational impacts of family roles in mother entrepreneurs' career-lives, and a more detailed description of the counselling implications and application of the counselling model described in this article, respectively.

PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN'S CAREER-LIFE DEVELOPMENT

Since the 1960s, when women began to move into the paid work force in greater numbers, the integral role of work in women's lives and women's career-life

development has garnered considerable interest (Betz, 2005). Research and writing on career development for women initially tended to perpetuate the notion of career as comprising work outside of the home and often focused on the barriers women face in career-life development (Betz, 2006; Farmer, 1976, 1985), while also preserving a false dichotomy in locating mothers either at home or at work (Dillaway & Paré, 2008). Research and writing also focused on the negative effect of family life on women's careers and the development of their full potential (Betz, 2006; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987).

Existing research provides evidence of the reality of role conflict and its negative effect on role satisfaction (Cardenas, Major, & Bernas, 2004; McElwain, Korabik, & Rosin, 2005). However, there is also evidence that women exercise personal agency in negotiating multiple life roles so that in fact they do not necessarily experience conflict between paid employment and home/motherhood identities (Bailey, 2000). In addition, while the multiple roles women occupy can be demanding, there is evidence these multiple roles are integral to women's health and well-being (Barnett, 2004; Betz, 2005). Moreover, while career development has traditionally been considered as an individual enterprise, relational perspectives of career development see individuals within various relational systems, such as family of origin or romantic relationships (Farber, 1996; Schultheiss, 2003, 2007). Blustein (2001) stressed the importance of viewing work and relational functioning as integrated aspects of life. Relational perspectives honour the beneficial nature of relatedness and interconnectivity, seeing these as qualities or needs that are central to human functioning and that will enhance growth in other areas of life including career (Blustein, 2001; Flum, 2001; Schultheiss, 2003, 2007).

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005), for example, used the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to describe their relational model of women's career development, suggesting that women in particular appreciate how changes in one part of a person's life create changes within others, and that career patterns are created by "rotating different aspects of their lives to arrange their roles and relationships in new ways" (p. 111).

Women and Entrepreneurship

There is a growing indication women are turning to entrepreneurial ventures to satisfy career aspirations while balancing family and motherhood responsibilities (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). Women entrepreneurs in general report similar motivations to male entrepreneurs in their decision to pursue their own businesses (Belcourt, 1990); however, there are unique factors involved in women's choice of entrepreneurship as a career (Orhan & Scott, 2001). For women choosing entrepreneurship as a career-life path, this option may be an opportunity to define their career-life path in their own terms, combining authenticity, balance, and challenge (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006).

The terms *push* and *pull* are often used when describing factors leading women to consider entrepreneurship (Brush, 1992; Buttner & Moore, 1997; Kirkwood, 2009; Orhan & Scott, 2001; Walker & Webster, 2004). Push factors include external elements, such as perceived lack of opportunity, insufficient in-

come, and difficulty in achieving balance among multiple career-life roles. Pull factors include internal motivators such as desire to be one's own boss, flexibility, and personal achievement. Forging an independent career as an entrepreneur may be a more attractive option for women who seek to balance paid employment and mothering work, especially as women in "fast-track" careers are still paid less and receive promotions less frequently than men in similar positions (Mason & Ekman, 2007).

Although women may turn to entrepreneurship in the quest for work-life balance, some research suggests that despite employing several flexible work practices, this sense of balance is not readily achieved (Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008), and opinions differ on how entrepreneurship can both facilitate and challenge the balancing of multiple roles for women (Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008; Loscocco & Smith-Hunter, 2004; McClelland, Swail, Bell, & Ibbotson, 2005; Winn, 2004). Reminiscent of Mainiero and Sullivan's (2005) kaleidoscope metaphor of career development, choices about the growth and management of a business are also impacted by other life roles and shaped by women's ideas about success (Buttner & Moore, 1997). For example, choosing to keep ventures small and manageable was one strategy identified for maintaining a balance between business and other life roles (e.g., Lee-Gosselin & Grise, 1990; Morris, Miyasaki, Watters, & Coombes, 2006).

Research on the experiences of women entrepreneurs is mostly found in the business and entrepreneurship literatures; many of these studies, however, do not differentiate between women with children or without, despite evidence that the role of family and children is often prominent in the shift to entrepreneurship (e.g., Anthias & Mehta, 2006; Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene, & Hart, 2006; Kirkwood, 2009). Given the growth of women-owned businesses (CIBC, 2004; Royal Bank of Canada, 2013), it is especially important to understand work-life experiences of mother entrepreneurs—women creating and maintaining entrepreneurial ventures while raising a family. While we use the term *mother entrepreneur* in the present article, the term *momprenneur* is often used to refer to mother entrepreneurs. For this reason, a brief accounting of this term is provided next.

Momprenneurs

Within the scholarly and popular literatures, much debate exists around the definition and connotations of this term. For example, Richomme-Huet, Vial, and d'Andria (2013) criticized Korsgaard's (2007) definition of a momprenneur (a female business owner balancing roles of mother and entrepreneur) as too broad, and provided a narrower definition of *mumprenneurship*, with the business opportunity developed being specifically linked to the experience of having children. In contrast, our operational definition of *mother entrepreneur* maintained the centrality of the mothering role, but did not require the business to have a direct link to that role. The lack of clarity about the definition of momprenneur is problematic for other reasons, too. Applying the term momprenneur more

broadly to all self-employed women with children may hide important differences within this group, such as differences in the timing of business start-up and having children, relatedness of the business opportunity development to the experience of having children, and needs in supporting work-family balance. Nevertheless, the existence of the term *momprenneur* is evidence of the growth of this group of entrepreneurs, and it is a term employed by some mother entrepreneurs themselves.

Taken together, there remains the need to understand the unique experiences of women who are combining mothering work and entrepreneurship, particularly given the lack of focus on mothering work in women's career development research (Schultheiss, 2009). For this reason, the present study was conducted to look specifically at the experiences of mother entrepreneurs in how they combined multiple life roles, including mothering and entrepreneurship, and their experiences of multiple role balance. Because there are mixed feelings about the term *mom/mumprenneur* among mother entrepreneurs—some embracing it and others objecting to its lack of legitimacy and potentially demeaning tone (e.g., Seth, 2014)—the present study employs the term *mother entrepreneur* except where the term *momprenneur* has been used by participants. The term *mother entrepreneur* perhaps more respectfully and actively highlights the two key roles mother entrepreneurs enact in their career-lives.

METHOD

Grounded theory (GT) was first proposed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 as a method for developing a theory of a basic social process—the way in which individuals resolve a particular social problem, with the theory being “grounded” in data obtained from individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 1). GT, therefore, begins with the study of a basic social problem—the essential issue of concern being studied—in this case, the issue of how mother entrepreneurs manage multiple life roles. GT is a useful method for exploring areas where existing research is sparse (Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008). Further, GT is a method proven useful in earlier entrepreneurship research (Neergaard & Ulhøi, 2007).

Currently, there are several different approaches to GT research (Creswell, 2007; Makela & Turcan, 2007). Strauss and Corbin (1998) took GT research in a direction that Glaser (1992) ultimately did not approve of—a very structured, systematic approach to theory building—resulting in differing approaches within the GT tradition. Glaser (1992) and Charmaz (2006) suggested that the large set of procedures proposed by Strauss and Corbin could distract the researcher from the data, resulting in poor theory building. The current study primarily employs Glaser's (1978) methods of analysis. As a method for constructing a theory grounded in the data, GT offered a way to understand the process at work in how mother entrepreneurs manage multiple life roles. Specific data collection and analysis procedures are described further below.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Using GT as the research method, data analysis begins immediately upon the collection of initial data. Constant comparison coding of data is used in comparing and relating subcategories to categories, comparing categories to new data, describing the properties and dimensions of the categories, and exploring variation in the data with further reconceptualizing of the categories and relationships as required (Glaser, 1978). The results of initial coding and analysis inform further sampling as the emerging theory shapes ongoing data collection, a process referred to as *theoretical sampling*. Theoretical sampling is a recursive and simultaneous process of data collecting, coding, and analyzing to generate theory (Schreiber, 2001).

Initial purposive sampling was used to recruit participants meeting the basic study criteria: women who were self-employed and parenting at least one child under the age of 18; self-identified as mother entrepreneurs (i.e., they saw their roles as both mother and entrepreneur as important); and who had operated their business a minimum of two years, as this age of business indicates a good chance of business success (Leung, Zhang, Wong, & Foo, 2006). Size of business was deemed to be not important for this study, as previous research has found that many woman-owned businesses remain small by choice (e.g., Morris et al., 2006). Likewise, having employees was not required, as Canadian women's businesses are more likely to be sole-proprietor operations (CIBC, 2004). On average, participants had operated their businesses for 5.9 years, with the range being 2–18 years in operation.

Semistructured interviews with all participants were conducted by the first author (RHB). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed as soon as possible after the interview. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, with transcription ranging between 26 and 40 pages of double-spaced text. In all, interview data were obtained from 18 participants. In addition to interview data, participants were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire.

Participants ranged in age from 22 to 50 years of age, with a mean age of 36 years and median age of 34 years. Most participants were married or partnered, with 1 participant identifying as single and 1 as divorced. Participants reported a range of 1 to 5 children, with a mean and median of 2 children. All participants had undergraduate, college, or trade education, with one third reporting post-graduate education. Businesses were primarily service-oriented, including various consulting businesses, event planning, fitness and education classes, counselling services, financial planning, catering services and cooking classes, and family-oriented retail services. Several participants also developed products such as a children's clothing line. Only 2 participants reported additional paid work outside of their business income.

Interview data were coded and analyzed by the first author as quickly as possible after collection so that as categories began to emerge from within the data, she could choose new research cases to compare with those that had already been sampled. Iterative sampling resulted in data sourced through observational notes

made at business sites, and online and archival material such as business advertising and social media postings. Dedoose, a web-based qualitative analysis program, was used to assist in organizing transcripts and in reviewing coded excerpts across interview transcripts and other sources of data. Initial or open coding was used to identify concepts or meaningful segments of data (Glaser, 1978). Data collection and coding continued as gaps in the data became clear, and a constant comparative method was used to establish distinctions between units of data, for example comparing statements or observational incidents within and between participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1999).

Throughout the research process, the first author engaged in memo-writing to make her involvement in the research explicit as well as to identify and examine her own ideas about the analysis (Charmaz, 2006), and the first two authors also engaged in an ongoing peer review process with other GT researchers. Theoretical sampling continued until saturation was achieved—that is, further interviews failed to reveal new or different concepts, categories showed sufficient depth and breadth, and relationships between categories had been clarified (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Further theoretical coding was undertaken to integrate the major or substantive categories into an overall theory. Glaser (1978) stressed that the theory as a whole must have “grab,” fit, relevance, and it must work and be modifiable (p. 4). Member-checking was employed to verify interpretations of data and to assess “grab” for the 18 participants who provided interview data.

FINDINGS

The core category in GT research often describes the process by which individuals resolve a basic social problem. It became clear from the data that mother entrepreneurs resolved the basic social problem of being a mother entrepreneur (i.e., the problem of how to combine mothering work and work-career aspirations) by actively developing and engaging in a recursive, adaptive process. The lived experience of being a mother entrepreneur represented challenges associated with entrepreneurship (such as the experience of being responsible for many jobs within the role of entrepreneur) as well as those shared by parents who work in paid employment (e.g., challenges with childcare, experiencing role overlap/conflict, and the concept of defining/finding balance).

During the constant comparison process of data coding, it was interesting to realize that our initial research question, which aimed at understanding how self-employed women with children balance their multiple roles, reflected the fact that balance was a sensitizing concept—a starting point or hunch that informs a research problem and initially guides data collection and analyses (Bowen, 2006)—that required challenging through ongoing comparison with the data. In fact, the process to emerge from the data was one of “Keeping Going,” which reflects an indirect achievement of fluctuating balance through ongoing, mutually influencing, managing (including self-managing) actions that enable mother entrepreneurs to meet their multiple life roles. Keeping Going represents the

recursive, here-and-now process of managing multiple roles and values, which supports and facilitates staying the course over the longer term. Figure 1 depicts the model developed from the theory.

Theory: Keeping Going

The process by which mother entrepreneurs get and keep going is first and foremost motivated by values that include integrity and meaning in their work, self-fulfillment, or challenge, and a valuing of the mothering role. In other words, there is a drive to honour their multiple life roles and to achieve a career-life that provides opportunities to live [their] values. For this type of higher-order self-actualizing action to happen, self-employed women with children must remember the push that got them going in the first place, and they must ensure the ongoing satisfaction of their more basic need of feeling supported (e.g., maintaining family income, supportive relationships with partners and others, and having the instrumental supports required to maintain the business). When mother entrepreneurs are feeling supported, they can make reflective choices and adapt creatively in managing their multiple career-life roles; in so doing, they keep going by envisioning the future and remembering the pull to live their values. These components, and the overarching process of keeping going, are described further below along with illustrative quotes.

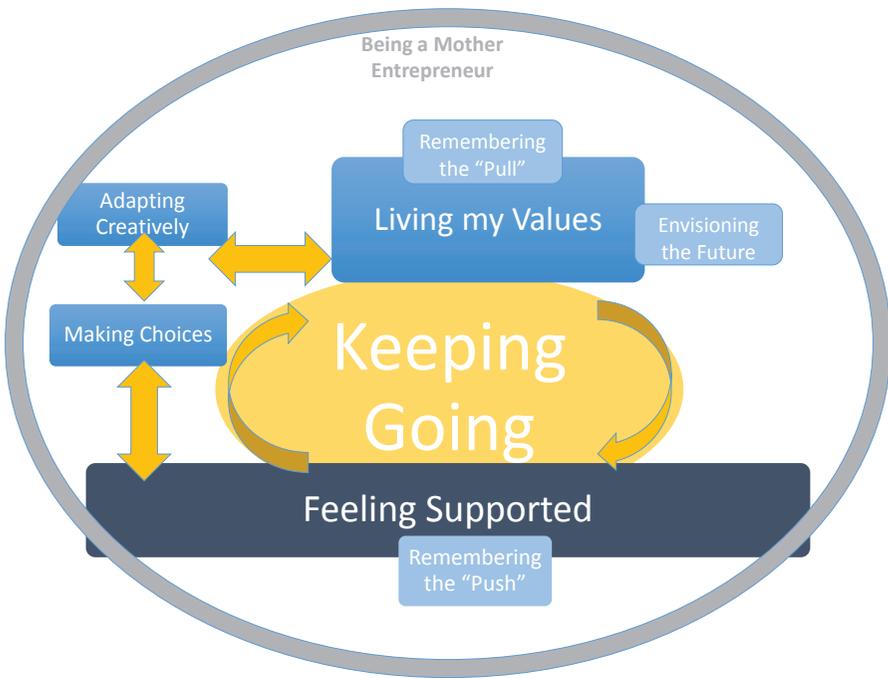


Figure 1. Keeping Going theoretical model.

Remembering the push/remembering the pull. Existing literature uses the terms *push* and *pull* to describe factors in the transition to entrepreneurship (Orhan & Scott, 2001). The concepts of push and pull were strongly present in the stories shared by participants about the motivation to pursue and continue in mother entrepreneurship. Many women talked about the lack of opportunities they experienced in paid employment or a lack of opportunity for rewarding paid employment as factors that “pushed” them to consider and remain in entrepreneurship. Ginger (age 36) described feeling the push to create opportunities for advancement that her employer was not facilitating: “I thought, well I’m going to have to do it myself.” Remembering the push provides additional motivation to keep going, drawing from the context of previous career-life experiences.

Remembering the pull to entrepreneurship was equally integral to the process of keeping going in mother entrepreneurship. The leeway for autonomously creating space for their mothering role was the key pull for participants interviewed in the study. Additional pulls for some, but not all, mother entrepreneurs include physically “being there” with their children and personal challenge/reward. Eva (age 50) shared that after 2 years as an at-home mother,

I realized that it was going to be difficult to work for anybody else. Somehow the experience of having run my own life, [...] I’d been really self-employed as a mother and run my own life and made my own schedule and set my own priorities and decided what I would do when and not had to answer to anyone other than me.

Although entrepreneurship presented its own challenges, as Avery (age 34) noted, remembering the pull was valuable:

I have to remember that it was the choice, and I made the choice for a reason because it’s what I wanted and what I value and what I believe, even though it’s not always easy, but I don’t think the alternatives are that easy either.

Living my values. Overwhelmingly, when participants talked about what helped them to keep going, despite the elusive nature of balance between their multiple life roles, they exhibited the sense that they were living in alignment with their values—following a career-life path of their own choosing and in line with their core self and core values. Integrity, living a meaningful life, and making a meaningful contribution were key themes of values participants described. Cheryl (age 36) stated:

I love doing the work, [...] I just wanted to kind of do something that sort of made me feel like I was making a difference, a real difference in people’s lives [...] being able to build something and see it come together and see it be worthwhile.

Meaningful entrepreneurial work complemented values of prioritizing family and mothering work. “Being there” was a value that came across very clearly among participants in this study. As noted earlier, choices women make at one point in

their business development are often linked to the developmental stage of their family. While financial security was important, many participants also noted that they sought other rewards—"as a mompreneur, money never makes up for the other stuff."

Living one's values also included valuing oneself, of valuing self-respect, self-fulfillment and self-care. As Katrina (age 34) stated: "The experience of motherhood, although it was really wacky for two years there, hasn't changed me fundamentally, hasn't put a dent in my ambition. I'm still me." Anna (age 33) also shared about this valuing of herself in the decision to pursue her business venture:

Through the whole process I've been making a lot of choices that come from family, definitely, but are also about me, and it's the first time in a lot of years that I've been making choices about me, and so putting myself back on the priority list has been huge.

Envisioning the future. Many participants shared a desire to be able to look back from the future and recognize that they had designed and managed their multiple life roles in accordance with both their values and hoped-for future. By keeping an eye on their envisioned future, mother entrepreneurs connected their dual present-day motivations to (a) keep doing what they needed to do to actively manage their multiple life roles and (b) live their values in the present. Envisioning the future (re)encouraged mother entrepreneurs to keep going. As Cheryl stated,

I would like to be able to look back and say OK, I did the best that I could with my kids, I tried to make a difference in the parenting community, that affected people positively and their families. To me that is really the main thing.

Feeling supported. The process of keeping going rests on a foundation of feeling supported. Feeling supported is a felt sense facilitated by the external and internal environments' satisfying of basic or necessary support-needs, which are individual, contextual, and open to change. Support came in many forms, but the most common source of support for mother entrepreneurs who were partnered was their spouse/significant other, and included both financial and instrumental support. As Ginger stated, "My husband, 100%, he said whatever you need to do, we'll make it work." Several participants noted that their spouse/significant other's regular income helped to provide security to the family during the transition to entrepreneurship, and was cited as a support by the majority of these participants.

Other sources of support included practical (e.g., childcare or house cleaning services) and instrumental (e.g., business advice or emotional support) support from extended family, an individual relationship or mentor, their own mothers, formal business start-up programs, other mother entrepreneurs, or local women entrepreneur networks. Regarding the support from other mother entrepreneurs specifically, Anna said, "I wouldn't have been able to do this without the community, especially other mothers, that I've built as I've built the business." Many women described a positive surprise in terms of the support network that was

found in local or women-owned businesses (including, but not only, those owned by mother entrepreneurs), such as for Avery:

We've become this network, and certainly by putting on fairs and attending things, I've met an enormous amount of women who are doing the same thing for a lot of the same reasons, so that's been a really neat surprise, and I've met a lot of really great women and talented business people.

Making choices. The main area of choices for mother entrepreneurs in this study was that of decisions around business growth and role overlap. All participants talked about choices they had made around postponing business growth and development as a way of helping to manage their multiple life roles and continuing to live in alignment with their core values. For example, Katrina noted, "For the first couple years of [my son's] life I wanted to keep my business really small, I didn't want to take on too many projects." Participants also shared examples of downsizing and realigning their businesses, diversifying products, and engaging in role reduction and role sharing through the process of hiring staff. Yes, there are conflicts, competing priorities, and challenges in being a mother entrepreneur, but as Nina (age 49) stated, jokingly quoting a *Sex in the City* character, "I choose my choice." In other words, being a mother entrepreneur provides opportunity to make choices about the structure of one's business and time.

Choices are informed by values, and in turn the ability to make choices helped to sustain mother entrepreneurs' experience of living their values. For example, Cheryl noted,

I miss some opportunities; you know work-wise out there in the community [...] because I choose to not make work my main focus [...], but right now when they're little [...] I want to be able to be there.

The choice to keep a business small at one point in time was acceptable because it helped mother entrepreneurs to manage their multiple roles, it aligned with their values, and there was a sense that they could make different choices in the future. As Cheryl further expanded: "Maybe in a couple years as my kids get older [...] I might make different choices down the line." Making choices was anchored in feeling supported and also connected to the process of adapting creatively—adapting to the challenges of managing multiple life roles necessitated certain choices, and the choices made led to adapting creatively.

Adapting creatively. The theme of adapting creatively involved concrete structural as well as psychological adaptations to maintain and accommodate the business and the demands of a traditional workweek, while maintaining the flexibility to be present with children during some business hours. Structural adaptations included gaining additional skills, taking on additional roles in their business, and using technology and social media to adapt to role overlap (e.g., many found that social time was found more and more online, in moments here and there, between other tasks and roles). Psychological adaptations centred on modifying expectations and engaging an attitude of agency. Adaptations consistently linked

to self-identified core values and to being intentional in living values presently. For example, some participants initially hoped to combine mothering work with working on their business from home, but found that these expectations had to be adapted as their business grew.

Psychologically adapting to choices around engaging part-time childcare was a theme for several participants. As Cheryl noted, "That was difficult because I thought that I'd never ever need to use child care [...] So that was a challenge for me, the guilt [...] but I don't really feel like that anymore." Others shared Cheryl's sense of adapting their sense of what it meant to "be there" with their children, and giving themselves permission to let go of guilt when they chose to access childcare.

Adapting also means mother entrepreneurs were revising ideas about a typical workweek or adapting to the rhythms of busy and slow times in their business. Isabella (age 30) spoke about the variability of her work as a musician, and how she became adept at saving and planning for leaner times: "In any given month, too, I can have a lot of gigs or I can have no gigs ... it really varies. So, I think I've gotten either quite used to it or OK with it." Adapting also means getting creative with scheduling and using technology. As Kate (age 34) stated, "You get really good at using small chunks of time efficiently." Anna noted that having a home-based business meant adapting to the lack of definition between work and home: "You can't turn the business off," and this in turn fed back into choices she made regarding role overlap between parenting and business work. For Ginger, technology became a tool for adapting her schedule, allowing her to manage her multiple roles within the norms of her industry. "I have an engineering business [...] but as far as my clients are concerned, they don't know when I work." Use of smartphone technology supported her ability to maintain traditional business hours while also being available to walk her daughter to school. Although there was still pressure to devote time or energy to other roles, adapting creatively to changing demands or conditions is another key aspect of the process of keeping going.

Overall, keeping going is about a continual recommitment to being a mother entrepreneur as a way to be true to and live values. Recommitment is reinforced through remembering push and pull factors. Although flexibility serves as a pull to mother entrepreneurship, this may not be the reality for mother entrepreneurs. For example, some mother entrepreneurs challenged the reality of flexibility in practice, noting that sole proprietors may actually experience less flexibility because one is invested in and responsible for the business. What was consistently present in the data was the lived reality of mother entrepreneurs having autonomy to make choices in accordance with their values.

DISCUSSION

While the core upward pulls of living one's values and envisioning the future provide important motivating conditions, neither these nor remembering the push to transition into living/working as a mother entrepreneur are sufficient to enable mother entrepreneurs to keep going. Rather, the three mutually influencing facili-

tating conditions of feeling supported, making choices, and adapting creatively are absolutely necessary. Most particularly, without feeling supported (mainly in terms of financial security or viability), it becomes impossible to continue to make choices and adapt creatively; thus the process of managing multiple roles breaks down and the mother entrepreneur is unable to keep going. When she does feel supported, she is able to access her ability to adapt creatively, making choices informed by the pull to living her values and envisioned future. Managing multiple roles is therefore indirectly and multiply achieved.

Each of the women interviewed noted that courage and openness were necessary requirements for their keeping going. This was accomplished by stretching oneself to develop new skills, staying the course through periods of financial uncertainty, taking the risk to leave additional paid work in order to devote time to the business, making the choice to scale back business growth until a future time, or honouring their valuing of the mothering role in a society that does not fully reciprocate this value.

This research has highlighted the importance of understanding mother entrepreneurs within the contexts and components of her life experiences, values, roles, needs, and relationships. The pull to entrepreneurship included a strong desire to live their core values—to both honour the mothering role and maintain an income-generating career. The core category, Keeping Going, represents the basic social process of how self-employed mothers manage their multiple life roles. This model is also congruent with constructivist and relational models of career development, which highlight the interconnectivity of multiple roles and how changes in one area of a relational system impact other areas (e.g., Blustein, 2001; Flum, 2001; Richardson, 2012; Schultheiss, 2003, 2007).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite achieving data saturation, it could be argued that a specific limitation of this study is that few single parents are represented in the interview sample. However, the need to theoretically sample for further single parents did not arise during the constant comparison process of data analysis. The mother entrepreneurs from whom interview data were collected are generally similar to previous research that has found that the “average” woman entrepreneur is middle class, has postsecondary education, and is married with children and a supportive spouse with a well-paying occupation (Belcourt, 1990; Greene, Hart, Gatewood, Brush, & Carter, 2003). The importance of support in some form was common to all participants, whether this came from a spouse or coparent, or other sources.

Because fathers continue to take a more active role in parenting, future research could also explore (a) the effect of this on being a mother entrepreneur and (b) the possible emergence of a new generation of father entrepreneurs, particularly in Canada where federal parental benefits may be accessed by either parent. While Richomme-Huet et al. (2013) suggested key differences may exist between Canadian and French mother entrepreneurs, findings of the present study support some of the conclusions of previous research with regards to the similarity of

motivating values of Chinese-Canadian and Chinese-Australian women (Low & Chiang, 2010) and Japanese mother entrepreneurs (Leung, 2011).

Future research aimed at understanding the unique needs of sole parents, further examination of gender differences among parent entrepreneurs, and specific examination of cultural differences in mother entrepreneurs is warranted. Specifically examining the role of business financing and access to affordable childcare in (single) mother entrepreneurs' ability to manage multiple life roles and achieve sustainability in business also warrant further investigation.

A category that emerged but was not fully saturated in the current research as a function of time constraints was the idea of modelling for one's children, perhaps even including children in the business. Specifically, the idea of wanting to model for their children was beginning to converge on desires to model (a) that women can succeed in business, (b) values of independence and perseverance, and (c) that it is possible to combine both mothering and additional career roles.

While participants interviewed for the study had the perception that their being in business was positive for their children, several participants did mention that it would be interesting to speak directly with their children about this. Only one previous study (Schindehutte, Morris, & Brennan, 2003) specifically examined the impact of mothers' entrepreneurship on children, employing interviews of mother entrepreneurs and their teenaged children, or follow-up surveys of adult children. Future research could perhaps explore the attitudes and experiences of younger children who are being raised by mother entrepreneurs. Further, while Kirkwood and Tootell (2008), for example, suggest increased experiences of role overlap/conflict for women entrepreneurs with children, future research might uncover the role of the age of children on mother entrepreneurs' experiences of managing multiple roles.

As we did, future studies also need to carefully define the terms *momprenneur* or mother entrepreneur and delineate between the two so that findings are interpretable. The most recent definition and empirical evidence of *mumprenneurship* (Richomme-Huet et al., 2013) places importance on the link between the business opportunity and the mothering role (for example, those interviewed for this study who had developed ventures such as retail stores catering to family and baby needs), yet it may be more accurate and helpful to preserve a definition of a distinct subgroup of entrepreneurs whose businesses are not obviously linked to the experience of having children. While our operational definition of mother entrepreneur for the present study points to the centrality of the mothering role in being a mother entrepreneur, this did not require the business to have a direct link to the mothering role; some mother entrepreneurs' businesses were focused in less traditional lines of mother entrepreneur industries (e.g., engineering or business).

Implications for Counselling Practice

Our findings offer insights for counsellors and career development practitioners working with mother entrepreneurs specifically, and mothers with other work roles more generally. Based on the challenges and successes experienced by the mother

entrepreneurs interviewed for this study, a broader discussion of implications and advocacy for mother entrepreneurs, as well as considerations of how women more broadly might be effectively supported to create holistic career-life thriving, is explored in a follow-up paper (Hudson Breen et al., 2017). Further examination of the needs of women, such as affordable childcare and business financing in order to promote greater opportunities for women’s entrepreneurship, is included in this additional paper. For the purposes of the present article, we provide only a brief introduction to the application of the general career counselling model developed from this research.

A general career counselling model for assessing the process of keeping going for individuals enacting multiple roles in a diverse range of career-life paths has been derived from the theory of keeping going. This model, based on the model of an engine, is illustrated in Figure 2.

The counselling model involves exploring past, present, and future perspectives in that it indicates the influences of past experiences (in this case, remembering push factors); the importance of understanding the roles of a client’s current context and desire to live according to self-identified core values (and remembering and holding onto these as pull factors); and the importance of eliciting and envisioning a clear sense of future goals (and remembering these as pull factors). As illustrated in Figure 1, the keeping going theory provides deeper understanding

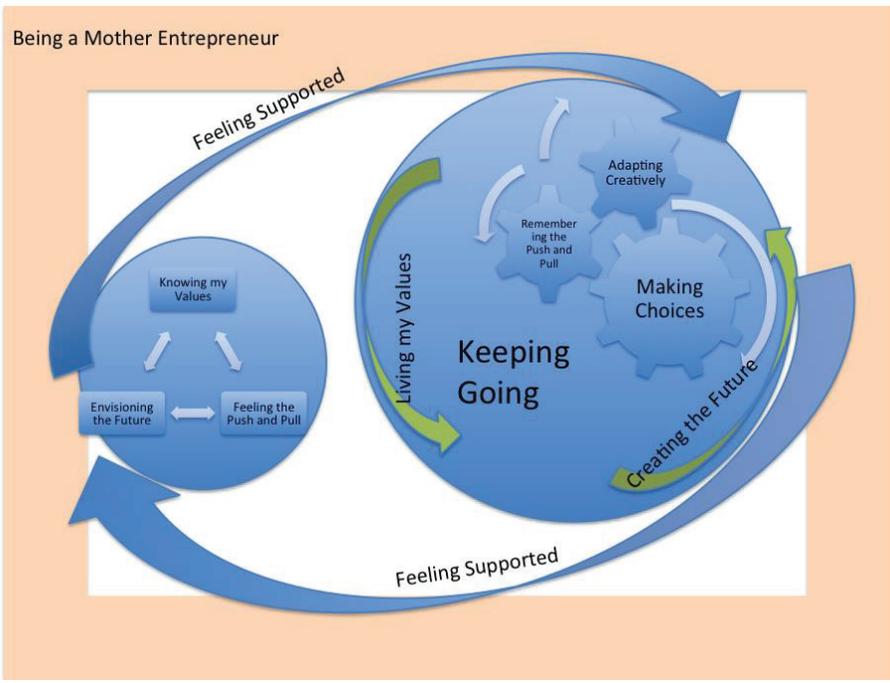


Figure 2. Keeping Going counselling model.

of the intersections between multiple life roles, particularly of mothering work and entrepreneurship work. Because of the level of abstraction achieved through GT analysis, the keeping going counselling model—the process described and illustrated in Figure 2—can be applied in work with entrepreneurs in general, as a way of assessing the strengths and challenges that are being experienced. The particular exists in the properties of the individual categories.

Further, the theoretical (Figure 1) and counselling (Figure 2) models specifically illustrate and accommodate how changes in one area of a relational system impact other areas in the process of keeping going, as well as highlighting the centrality of the relational systems of mothering in shaping the career-life development of self-employed women with children. This highlights the importance for counsellors in understanding the meanings, needs, values, the role of choice, the influence the mothering role holds for individual clients, and the support structure available to them. Figure 2 provides a tool for assessing present state (values, goals for the future, push and pull factors, existence of supports) and envisioning the future in the service of creating movement in the present to drive the process of keeping going.

Also central to this is the role of choice. While existing literature on entrepreneurship tends to focus on constraints (Leung, 2011), findings from the present study highlight the importance of choice as valued by mother entrepreneurs. Indeed, the allure of being able to “choose my choice” was one of the initial pulls they remembered that helped them to keep going as a mother entrepreneur. In this way, the proposed therapeutic model offers connections with solution-focused and reality therapy models of counselling (Corey, 2009).

Sensitivity to the connotations of the term *momprenneur* is also essential for counsellors and career development practitioners. As stated earlier, new definitions of the term have been suggested over the past several years (e.g., Duberly & Carrigan, 2013; Ekinsmythe, as cited in Richomme-Huet et al., 2013). Throughout the course of the research, in engaging with the literature and in speaking with mother entrepreneurs, the first author encountered the tension around the term *momprenneur* (Korsgaard, 2007; Lewis, 2010).

Some mother entrepreneurs commented that the catchy term could be a way of raising awareness and drawing attention to the synergistic nature of the two roles, while others flatly rejected the label of *momprenneur* as trivializing their work and not fully capturing the complexity of their career-life experiences. O'Reilly (2011) has noted that motherhood is the unfinished business of feminism, and this tension was clear in the stories shared by participants. If, as the title of hooks's (2000) work says, *Feminism Is for Everybody*, and it is intended to equally support and value the choices of all people, the enduring fact that mothering work and women's unpaid work in general is still not highly valued in our society remains a challenge for women who hope to combine the equally challenging careers of motherhood and entrepreneurship. In moving forward, it will be important for career development scholars, practitioners, and counsellors to be aware of the varying definitions of *momprenneurship* and the different connotations individuals

may hold about the term *momprenneur*, as well as to consider the role of mothering in a woman's self-concept and career-life development.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This article presents the results of a GT study examining how mother entrepreneurs manage multiple life roles. Keeping Going illustrates a basic social process through which mother entrepreneurs resolved the basic social problem of being a mother entrepreneur (i.e., the problem of how to combine mothering work and work-career aspirations). The process of keeping going is an adaptive and recursive process of making choices and adapting creatively, which is supported and sustained through feeling supported and having a sense of living one's values. The necessary condition of feeling supported is enhanced and informed by an overarching goal or pull to living one's values, and key to this is remembering the push and pull factors that drew one to choosing entrepreneurship in the first place, and by envisioning the future.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the reviewers for their careful and thoughtful comments on earlier versions of this article.

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