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# Networks, Aspirations, and Outcomes of Mom Entrepreneurs



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Kylie Goodell King<sup>1</sup>

Champlain College, Center of Innovation & Entrepreneurship, Burlington,  
United States of America

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the networks, aspirations, and outcomes of “mom entrepreneurs”, defined in this study as female entrepreneurs actively caring for children (from birth to age 18). Although men and women found businesses at similar rates, the outcomes of businesses started by men and women tend to be dramatically different. This is influenced by many factors, one of which is the role that many women play in child rearing. This study explores the networks of mom entrepreneurs, how mom entrepreneurs define success for themselves and their businesses, and self-reported ratings of success on these measures. More specifically, this paper evaluates the impact of one identifying as a mom entrepreneur, the relation between the size of one’s network and business characteristics and outcomes, and the impact of a spouse’s employment on women’s motivations and aspirations.*

**KEY WORDS:** *female entrepreneur, mom entrepreneur, parent entrepreneur, gender in entrepreneurship*

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Business & Entrepreneurship and Academic Director, 163 South Willard Street, Burlington, VT 05401, e-mail: kking@champlain.edu, tel. 802-865-5478

## **Introduction**

Female entrepreneurs are nearly as frequent in number as male entrepreneurs (Korsgaard, 2007; Langowitz & Minniti, 2007; Nel et al., 2010); however, the social and financial impact of enterprises founded by female entrepreneurs has not reached the scale of those founded by their male counterparts (Change the Story VT, 2016; Robb & Watson, 2012). research has indicated that this may be due to a number of factors, including but not limited to: size of firms, risk aversion of founders, the industries in which women primarily found businesses, the aspirations that women have for their businesses, and responsibilities for caring for family and managing the household (Clark-Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015; Korsgaard; Robb & Watson). Beyond gender serving as a limiting factor in business growth, marriage and children also have a negative association with the earnings of self-employed women (Marshall & Flaig, 2013).

Although caregiving and household management are considered to be factors behind the reduced impact of female-run businesses, little scholarly attention has been given to the businesses founded or managed by mom entrepreneurs (Clark-Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015). Motherhood, which may be viewed as a “metaphor representing the home and family contexts of female entrepreneurs” (Brush, de Bruin, & Welter, 2009, p. 9), needs to be evaluated in the context of business ownership.

One method that might be highly applicable to the analysis of mom-owned business ventures is social network analysis, or SNA. SNA is growing in popularity in the study of organizations of all sizes (Katz, Lazer, Arrow, & Contractor, 2005). In SNA, individuals are represented as nodes and their relationships to other individuals are represented as ties. A social network is a map of all of the relevant ties between individuals and these ties between individuals are the variables of interest (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

One reason why SNA lends itself so well to the study of entrepreneurial networks is that networks, themselves, are critically important to the success of many new businesses (Uzzi, 1996). What it is it about networks that may encourage entrepreneurial success? Past research has shown that a number of network attributes, including centrality, density, and strength of ties, may influence the success of new ventures.

Social capital is closely tied to many of these network attributes. According to Burt (1997), social capital predicts that individual returns

depend on a person's location in the social structure of a network, market, or hierarchy. Social capital encompasses family members, social networks, connections, and other related resources that may be helpful to an individual and their business (Marshall & Flaig, 2013).

In order to measure the quality and performance of entrepreneurial ventures and support the acceleration of their impact, it is first necessary to identify the patterns or systems that support or hinder the success of new businesses (Fazio et al., 2016). This study explores the relation between the self-reported networks and social capital of mom entrepreneurs, demographic and organizational factors of these women's enterprises (e.g. longevity of business, age of entrepreneur, etc.), and how these women define and evaluate the success of their business.

This paper will first provide an overview of the theory and prior research that motivates the present analysis and then discuss the hypotheses that are tested. Next, the methodological approach is described, including participants and procedures. Following this description, data are described, results are presented, and hypotheses are evaluated. Finally, theoretical and practical implications are discussed and directions for future research are provided.

## **Theory and Hypothesis Development**

This work relies on a feminist methodology in that it begins with the standpoints and experiences of women and seeks to motivate changes to the support structure for entrepreneurs (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). Building upon prior work that has evaluated the role that gender plays in entrepreneurship (e.g. Fischer, Reuben, & Dyke, 1993; Foss, 2010) and the role of gender in business more broadly (e.g. Radovic, Salamzadeh & Kawamorita, 2016; Radovic, Salamzadeh & Razavi, 2013), this study delves into a subsection of that analysis by focusing specifically on the experiences of women actively involved in parenting children.

### **Network Analysis**

Access to information and an accessible network of peers and advisors is important for entrepreneurs regardless of gender (Nel et al., 2010). Women, in particular, believe their businesses to be part of a networked set of connections or relationships (Bird & Brush, 2002). Based on this network

perception and the role of networks in facilitating business transitions and predicting business outcomes, a number of network attributes are evaluated in this work. These attributes, discussed below, include social capital, centrality, density, and tie strength.

### **Social Capital**

Social capital is a quality created between people (Burt, 1997). In the context of entrepreneurship, social capital encompasses the family members, social networks, and connections that may be helpful to a woman and her business (Marshall & Flaig, 2013). When considering social capital, the opportunities available to an individual depend on the individual's position in a network or hierarchy (Burt, 1997).

Social capital may also be viewed as a function of brokerage opportunities in a network (Burt, 1997). Those who have large number of ties (strong or weak) may be viewed to have greater levels of social capital than those who do not.

### **Centrality**

Centrality is regularly used to describe individuals and networks. There are many forms of centrality including: degree centrality (the total number of direct ties held by an individual), indegree centrality (the number of incoming ties held by an individual), outdegree centrality (the number of outgoing ties indicated by an individual), and betweenness centrality (a measure of how an individual in a network links otherwise unconnected others) (Prell, 2012). Individuals with high centrality are connected to many others in the network.

When these highly connected individuals connect others who would otherwise be unconnected, they are referred to as brokers (Cross, Parise, and Weiss, 2007). Individuals who function as brokers often achieve greater success based on their importance to their networks (Cross et al., 2007).

### **Density**

Network density measures the total present ties in a network relative to the total possible ties. Mathematically, density is the sum of all entries in a dataset of network ties divided by the possible number of entries in that

dataset:  $\Delta = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^g \sum_{j=1}^g x_{ij}}{g(g-1)}$ , where  $i$  is an individual in a network indicating ties to others,  $j$  is an individual in a network receiving ties from others,  $x_{ij}$  represents the presence or absence of a tie from individual  $i$  to individual  $j$ , and  $g$  is the number of individuals in the network of interest (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

Dense networks contain relatively large numbers of ties among their members. Network density can encourage open sharing of information but may also lead to an inefficient use of resources (Lee, Bachrach, & Lewis, 2014).

### **Strong and Weak Ties**

Not all ties in a network are created equal. Some times are much stronger than others, based on the frequency or depth of exchange. The strength of a tie is a linear combination of the amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services which characterize the tie. (Granovetter, 1973) Ties may be strong, weak, or absent. In a network of friendship, for example, a “friend” may be considered to be a strong tie and an “acquaintance” a weak tie.

In addition to the characterization of strong ties as indicative of friendship, the strong ties that are evaluated in this analysis are marked by high levels of trust. Affective trust (mutual interpersonal care or emotional bonds) is important in early entrepreneurial ventures (Smith & Lohrke, 2008). Many entrepreneurs develop ties with close family and friends as they socialize business plans, gaining feedback as well as emotional and financial support. As business plans become better developed, cognitive trust (beliefs about reliability, dependability, and confidence) become more important and ties between other entrepreneurs, funders, or technical experts become more critical (Smith & Lohrke).

Be it friendship or trust, the stronger the tie between two individuals, the larger the proportion of individuals to whom they are both tied in that network. In many networks, the removal of a weak tie would do more damage to the sharing of information than the removal of a strong tie (Granovetter, 1973). This is because weak ties often serve to connect disparate subgroups. From individual point of view, weak ties are an important resource. From a systems perspective, weak ties play role in encouraging network cohesion (Granovetter, 1973).

## **Women and Entrepreneurship**

There is a lack of quality research related to the role of parenthood in entrepreneurship (Clark-Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015). The work that does focus on mother entrepreneurs often paints a misogynistic portrait of these women as insecure, unambitious, risk-averse, unknowledgeable. For example, prior studies on this topic have stated the value of entrepreneurship to be enabling a woman to rid herself of the guilt that comes from working outside the home (Koorsgaard), allowing women to resolve conflict between earning money and caring for a family (Du Rietz & Henrekson, 2000; Nel et al., 2010), and providing more stimulation than motherhood alone (Nel et al.).

The reasons why women enter into entrepreneurship are likely more nuanced than prior work has illustrated. Furthermore, the goals or outcomes that women hope to achieve through their business ventures and their definitions of success are likely to be related to their motivations.

Much of the prior work on outcomes of entrepreneurship focuses on business growth and profitability. There are, however, many other outcomes that might be important to consider, for both individual entrepreneurs and also for society at large (Nel et al., 2010). By considering financial outcomes alone, we will likely find that male-owned firms outperform those owned by women (Robb & Watson, 2012). An inclusive model of entrepreneurship must include strengths of women and feminine approaches to business and entrepreneurship (Clark-Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015). Furthermore, truly inclusive models must also consider family structure as this has a significant impact on entrepreneurs and their business goals and outcomes (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003).

Beyond the difficulties that arise with integrating female-centric considerations into the outcomes by which business ventures are measured, one must also consider the joint implications of motherhood and entrepreneurship. For example, prior research has found marriage and children to be a profit constraint to self-employed women (Marshall & Flaig, 2013). Others, however, have found motherhood to be an enabling factor in female entrepreneurship, allowing women to leverage their identity to create organizations with products and services as well as structures that are values-driven (Leung, 2011).

## Hypotheses

The general model that is evaluated by this work is summarized below in Figure 1. Essentially, this study seeks to evaluate the relation between a number of demographic variables, social networks, and business outcomes.

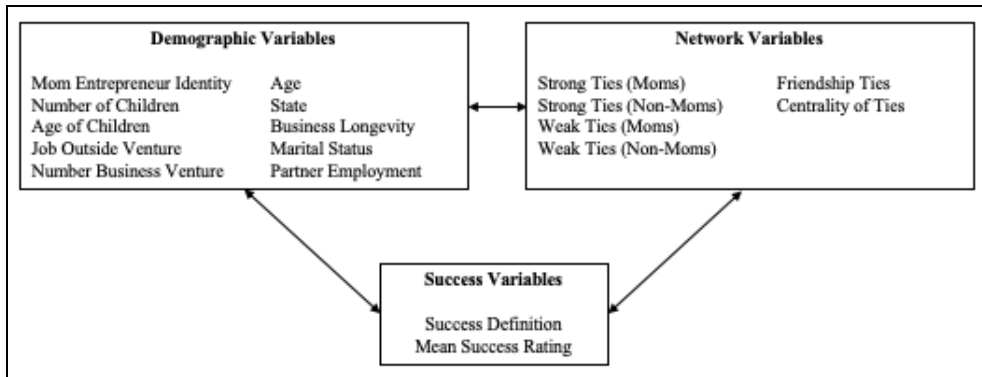


Figure 1: Theoretical model

More specifically, based on a review of prior work surrounding women and entrepreneurship, this study aims to explore the following hypotheses:

- H1: The network size of mom entrepreneurs is positively correlated with self-identifying as a mom entrepreneur.
- H2: Women who self-identify as “mom entrepreneurs” hold different definitions of business success than those who do not.
- H3: Business longevity is related to the composition of ties in mom entrepreneurs’ networks; ventures at earlier stages have a larger proportion of strong ties, mature ventures have a larger proportion of weak ties.
- H4: Women who have a spouse or partner who is also involved in an entrepreneurial venture will hold different definitions of business success than those who do not.
- H5: Women who have a spouse or partner with a full-time job will hold different definitions of business success than those who do not.

## **Methods**

This study used open-ended interviews to obtain information about the demographics and experiences of mother entrepreneurs. It followed standard guidelines for qualitative research, including using clear, open-ended questions, carefully selecting the question order, maintaining neutrality, quickly transcribing data, comparing findings to other research on the topic, and analyzing negative cases, or cases that were not line with emerging data patterns (Caudle, 2004; Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). Additionally, the validity of the qualitative findings was enhanced by involving participants in the verification of data and keeping explicit records of all aspects of data gathering and analysis (Marshall & Rossman).

The interview protocol also followed recommended guidelines of informing participants of the purpose of the study, explaining that their participation would be voluntary and that results would be confidential (Simone, Campbell & Newhard, 2012).

This study also relied on prior qualitative network studies to inform its method and structure. For example, this work relies almost exclusively on self-reported demographic and network information. Self-reports have been shown to be a valid source of network data (Marsden, 2005).

## **Participants**

Participants for this study were recruited using a snowball technique (Bellotti, 2008). Some were identified through their participation in organizations that support female entrepreneurs, others were colleagues of friends or friends of friends. No one was personally known by the researcher. The criteria for participation were identifying as female and being actively involved in caring for children, biological or otherwise, from birth through age 18.

All in all, 31 women participated in this study. They came from 12 states and two countries. Their median age was 38 years old. The youngest participant was 31 years old, the oldest 60. The mean number of children being cared for by participants of this study was two. The maximum number was five. The mean age of all children being cared for by participants of this study was seven years. Two participants had another job outside of their entrepreneurial venture. 28 participants were married, two were partnered, and one was single. Of those married or partnered participants, four had



spouses or partners involved as business partners and nine spouses or partners who were also entrepreneurs.

The median duration of participant's business ventures was four years, with a mean duration of six years. Of these 31 participants, eight had previously been involved with starting or running a business venture.

## **Procedures**

In-depth interviews were held by phone, videoconference, or in person. A semi-structured interview protocol was followed where participants were allowed to expand on responses to topics as they deemed appropriate. Interviews were recorded using a word processing system as they were carried out. Immediately following interviews, transcripts were sent to participants to ensure that all information collected was accurate.

The interview began with an introduction and overview of the project. Informed consent was gained verbally. Next, demographic information was gathered and women were asked if they held the self-identity of "mom entrepreneur".

Questions were asked to gather information about different types of networks held by participants. According to Krackhardt and Hanson (1993), it is important to evaluate different types of networks, including those built on trust and those that are more transactional. Participants were also asked if they believed themselves to have formed friendships with any other mom entrepreneurs.

Next, participants were provided with possible indicators of success (Buttner & Moore, 1997) and asked how they defined success for themselves and their businesses. Participants were then asked to evaluate their professional and or personal success on those self-determined measures using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all successful) to 5 (extremely successful). Finally, participants were asked if they had any questions or closing thoughts.

Interview duration ranged from approximately 12 minutes to approximately 40 minutes. The median interview time was approximately 18 minutes.

## **Analysis and Results**

A list of all variables is provided below in Table 1. As illustrated in this table, variables were collected to provide demographic information about

participants, information about participants networks (with other mom entrepreneurs and with non-mom entrepreneurs), and information about how participants defined and evaluated their business success.

*Table 1: Variables included in analysis*

<b>Demographic Variables</b>	<b>Network Variables</b>	<b>Success Variables</b>
Mom Entrepreneur Identity	Strong Ties (Moms)	Success Definition
Age	Strong Ties (Non-Moms)	Mean Success Rating
Number of Children	Weak Ties (Moms)	
Age of Children	Weak Ties (Non-Moms)	
State	Centrality of Ties	
Job Outside Venture	Friendships Ties	
Business Longevity		
Number Business Venture		
Marital Status		
Partner Employment		

Nearly three quarters (72%) of the participants in this study identified personally, professionally, or socially as a mom entrepreneur. Some really leaned into this identity, with statements such as “being a mom is part of my personal brand” and “being a mom is in every inch and fiber of my being.”

Others actively or inadvertently distanced themselves from this identity. One participant stated “I happen to be a mom and an entrepreneur, but I don’t consider myself to be a ‘momprenuer’ because my work isn’t based around my role as a mom.” Another noted “I don’t identify as ‘mom’ unless I am doing something specifically related to children. I am ‘mom’ at the pediatrician’s office, a kid’s birthday party, and a parent-teacher conference, but I don’t prefix any other identity in that way.”

Another group of participants identified with this descriptor internally, but were resistant to use this as part of their business or social identity. One participant stated “I hide it until I feel safe to say I’m a mom” another “My friends would laugh at that handle because I am actually not a very maternal person by nature!”

Some study participants questioned the value of using the label of mom entrepreneur or mompreneur, stating “It is a really interesting world plugging in to ‘momprenuers’ or ‘women entrepreneurs’ and segmenting yourself off in this way. What are the benefits and pitfalls of seeking these avenues versus a general networking group?”

When considering the networks of these women, I believed that it was important to evaluate networks of mom entrepreneurs as distinct from general support networks due to the unique challenges and opportunities that women with children encounter when starting or running a business.

Some participants strongly believed that the benefits of mom entrepreneur networks were distinct from what might be found in other groups. According to one participant “Every community or network is different. You have to be very mindful of your role in the network. With mompreneurs, people develop trust more quickly and easily if you are transparent and honest.” Another noted “You feel that other mom entrepreneurs are the only people that truly understand you as a mom and a business owner. You get judged sometimes because you work so much and it almost appears as if you’re putting the business first. They provide support during those harder times.” Another commented that “It is so powerful to do business with a network of women who also believe in you.”

Others found greater benefit connecting with other women, regardless of parental status, stating things like “I connect with a lot of women entrepreneurs, parent status doesn’t really come into play.”

These statements stand in contrast with the beliefs of some other participants, who did not believe networks of mom entrepreneurs to be separate from more general business networks. According to one participant, “I don’t need to connect with women, I need to connect with any person who can help. The mom entrepreneur network isn’t a strong driver, even when you helped me examine it.” Another stated, “I was involved with a mom business owner group a few years ago and it was very frustrating. It became clear that this was not a professional group of people, that this was not my group. People talked about their kids all the time, I was there for business.”

Table 2, provided below, summarizes the self-reported networks of the women who participated in my study. As evidenced by the information presented in this table, participants report having fewer numbers of strong ties (characterized by trust and frequent interactions) with mom entrepreneurs than with others (men, non-moms, or non-entrepreneurs). They report generally similar numbers of weak ties with mom entrepreneurs and with others and about the same numbers of strong and weak ties among mom entrepreneurs.

*Table 2: Strong and Weak Network Ties of Mom Entrepreneurs*

	<b>Strong Ties with Mom Entrepreneurs</b>	<b>Strong Ties with Others</b>	<b>Weak Ties with Mom Entrepreneurs</b>	<b>Weak Ties with Others</b>
Mean	3.7	4.9	4.9	4.2
Median	2	4	2	2
Minimum	0	0	0	0
Maximum	12	30	30	25

In terms of network position, in their network of other mom entrepreneurs, participants did not believe those to whom they had strong ties to be connected with one another. The average number of strong ties who are connected with other strong ties is less than one with a median of 0. That is to say, many women may serve as brokers between other mom entrepreneurs, having the ability to connect those who are otherwise unconnected.

Considering ties beyond business relationships, those related to friendship, just over three quarters of all participants (77%) indicated that they had developed friendships with other mom entrepreneurs. When asked to define with they meant by “friendship” in this capacity, some women reported that, as an entrepreneur, they didn’t believe there to be separation among the elements of their lives, that everything, including friendships were integrated. Many spoke about trust, a level of comfort, and someone you could depend on during difficult times. A few participants mentioned friendship as being characterized by deeper levels of connection and similar energy. One defined friendship as “when coffee turns into wine.”

About one third of this study’s participants defined friendship in terms of their children, mentioning such things as “our kids know each other” or “we have an overlap in activities based on our children.” Another third defined friendship as doing things socially outside of a business context.

The most frequent methods of interaction among all network ties were face to face, email, phone, and texting. Social media was also regularly reported as a method of interaction.

## **Evaluation of Hypotheses**

Analysis of information gathered from these qualitative interviews enabled for the evaluation of the five hypotheses presented earlier. All

analysis was conducted using the R platform (R Core Team, 2017). First, the relation between mom entrepreneur network size and mom entrepreneur identity was evaluated by calculating the point biserial correlation between these variables [H1]. Results of this analysis indicate that there is no relation between mom entrepreneur self-identity and network size of strong and weak mom entrepreneur ties ( $r = 0.04$  and  $r = -0.03$ , respectively). That is to say, there is no relationship between calling oneself a “mompreneur” and having a large network of other mom entrepreneurs.

Next, the relation between mom entrepreneur self-identity and holding a definition of success that includes financial viability or profitability was examined by calculating the phi coefficient between these variables [H2]. Results of this analysis indicate that there is no relation between mom entrepreneur self-identity and having a definition of success that includes finances or profitability ( $r = 0.14$ ). This finding might be considered in light of previous work (e.g. Buttner & Moore, 1997; Danes et al., 2007; Du Rietz & Henrekson, 2000) which reported that mother entrepreneurs hold different definitions of business success.

The relation between business longevity and composition of ties was also explored as the Pearson correlation between the number of years of business operation and the proportion of strong ties held by a business owner [H3]. Results show that there is no relation between these two variables ( $r = 0.03$ ). A related inquiry was also made to evaluate the relation between business longevity and number of strong ties. This analysis showed a significant relation between these variables ( $r = 0.46$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ), indicating that business owners with longer running businesses have more strong ties. This should be compared with previous work on the nature of ties in business networks (Smith & Lohrke, 2008).

Next, the relation between a spouse or partner’s involved in an entrepreneurial venture and defining success in terms of profitability or financial viability was explored by calculating the phi coefficient between these variables [H4]. Results of this analysis showed no relation to be present ( $r = -0.22$ ).

Finally, in evaluation of the previously presented hypotheses, the relation between a spouse or partner’s work status (holding a full-time job) and defining success in terms of financial viability or profitability was explored by calculating the phi coefficient between these variables [H5]. Results show no relation between spouse or partner work status and definitions of success ( $r = 0.11$ ).

In addition to evaluating these a priori, data were explored more generally to evaluate the bivariate correlations between all variables in this analysis. Illustrated below in Table 3, several interesting significant relations are present.

One such relation is between participant age and numbers of strong ties. Older mom entrepreneurs have greater numbers of strong ties with other mom entrepreneurs and greater numbers of strong ties, in general. Another interesting relation is that between age of children and ratings of success. Women with older children are more likely to rate themselves as successful, using their self-provided definitions of what business success is. Finally, those who are running their first business have greater numbers of weak ties than experienced mom entrepreneurs (women on their second or greater business venture). These findings will be discussed in greater detail in the discussion section.

*Table 3: Bivariate correlations*

<b>Variable 1</b>	<b>Variable 2</b>	<b>Correlation Coefficient</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Age of Participant	Total Strong Ties	0.47	0.01
Age of Participant	Strong Mom Ties	0.36	0.05
Age of Children	Rating of Success	0.40	0.03
First Business Venture	Weak Ties Other	-0.38	0.04
First Business Venture	Total Weak Ties	-0.49	0.01
First Business Venture	Weak Mom Ties	-0.46	0.01

I also compared the definitions of success held by participants in this study to those identified by Buttner & Moore (1997). As illustrated in Table 4 below, the findings of Buttner & Moore indicate that, in order, the most important measures of success were self-fulfillment, achievement of goals, profits, business growth, balancing family and work, and social contribution. According to the women who participated in this study, the order of importance of these measures was profits, balance, social contribution, business growth and self-fulfillment (tied), and achievement of goals. As illustrated below, these two rank-ordered lists are quite different.

*Table 4: Rank-ordered measures of success*

	<b>Buttner &amp; Moore (1997)</b>	<b>Present Study</b>
Profits	3	1
Business Growth	4	4
Self-Fulfillment	1	4
Achievement of Goals	2	6
Social Contribution	6	3
Balancing Family and Work	5	2

Qualitatively, there were several other noteworthy findings regarding how participants defined the success of their businesses. The first is related to the status of profits or financial aspects as the most frequently mentioned measure of success. According to one participant, “Entrepreneurial success is tied with financial success. In my entrepreneurial history, if the business wasn’t providing enough money to make it worth it, I’d be looking for a full-time job. There’s a functional component that can’t be ignored. Sometimes I hate admitting that because it doesn’t sound very ‘follow your passion-esque’.”

Similarly, the relatively greater importance of contributing to social good is also interesting. One participant mentioned the ability to do pro-bono work that is afforded by running her own business, indicating that “there’s no way I’d have been able to do this before becoming a full-time entrepreneur.” Another spoke to founding a charter school, noting “It is 100% volunteer. This informs my entrepreneurial venture and also my whole life! This absolutely wouldn’t have happened had I not had previous experience of starting a venture or the support network that it provided me.”

Participants in this study also defined success using measures beyond those included above in Table 4. One woman spoke to the importance of having options, another to the objective of exercising creativity and encountering new challenges. Multiple participants addressed the importance of meeting a personal calling or finding their true selves and several others mentioned the value of serving as a role model and inspiring or developing others. One participant defined success as failing with enthusiasm, another as having fun.

Interestingly, several women spoke to how their definitions of success have changed over time. For example, one stated that “In the beginning, it was about reaching my goals and being better than the next person. Now

success is based on providing a good quality of life for my family and those who work for me and my community.”

## **Discussion**

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

This work, although exploratory in nature, carries a number of implications for both theory and practice. One important finding is that many women serve as brokers in their networks of mom entrepreneurs, having the ability to connect those who are otherwise unconnected. There were very few instances of women indicating that those to whom they were closely connected were also connected to each other. In the network literature, this would be characterized as having low transitivity and high brokerage (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). This means that the ties between mom entrepreneurs that exist are critical in connecting not only those directly involved, but perhaps serving as future conduits as women connect with friends of friends. It also means that, echoing one participant, “The world of female entrepreneurs needs more options to develop social networks.”

Comparing the results of this work to previous studies of women or moms in entrepreneurship, my findings are aligned with Korsgaard (2007) in that women do not demonstrate a high desire for growth. I did, however, find women to be highly motivated by financial reasons. This could mean that, although women are interested in generating income to achieve a certain level of financial stability or lifestyle, they have less desire to create a high-growth, scalable company.

Related to the findings presented in Table 4, previous work found women's most important entrepreneurial motivations to be a desire for challenge and self-determination (Buttner & Moore, 1997). The findings of this study, however, suggest that generating profits, balancing family and work, and contributing to social good are of greatest importance to mom entrepreneurs. Perhaps these differences are reflective of the nearly two decades that have passed since the original study was conducted, including a more general shift to social awareness and integrating family and work. Again, it is noteworthy that profits, often dismissed as insignificant, were an important measure of success for participants of my study.



This work may also serve to test some of the assumptions that were used in prior studies on women in entrepreneurship. For example, Marshall & Flaig (2013) used having a self-employed spouse as a proxy for social capital. Results of this analysis indicate that there was no relation between having a spouse or partner who was also an entrepreneur and any of the evaluated networks. This means that future work on this topic should consider metrics beyond spousal employment as measures of social capital.

Expanding on the results of the hypothesis testing that was previous described, I reject the hypotheses that owners of longer-running businesses have greater proportions of strong ties. I did find, however, that this group had greater numbers of strong ties. It is interesting to consider this finding in conjunction with that of Smith and Lohrke (2008), who noted that cognitive trust (characterized here as weak ties) rather than affective trust (characterized here as strong ties), is more important over time. Although this finding was not confirmed, it is noteworthy that ties seem to be maintained by women over time, resulting in owners of longer-running businesses having greater numbers of ties in general. Perhaps rather than abandoning those strong ties characterized by affective trust for weaker ties related to cognitive trust, women instead maintain their strong ties and add to them.

Another finding of this work that warrants further exploration is the relation between participant age and strong ties. Older women indicated greater numbers of strong ties with other mom entrepreneurs and greater numbers of strong ties in general. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, with age, comes the tendency to rely more heavily on close relationships than more the more transactional business relationships that are frequently found among younger mom entrepreneurs. This is speculative and needs to be further evaluated.

Similarly, the finding that women running their first business had greater numbers of weak ties than experienced mom entrepreneurs warrants additional consideration. This might be due to a strategy of developing large numbers of ties and before deciding which to cultivate when a woman is embarking on her first entrepreneurial venture. Women who have already started a business may already have a network of ties and do not need to “test the waters” with large numbers of transactional relationships.

Also worthy of further consideration is the relation between age of children and ratings of success. Women with older children are more likely to rate themselves as successful, using their self-provided definitions of

what business success is. Perhaps this is due to the fact that women with younger children feel more pressure to contribute at home, therefore believing themselves to be less effective with their businesses. For example, one participant noted “The daycare situation is a nightmare. We haven’t found care in two years.” It may be that women who are compelled to care for children young in addition to running businesses do not believe themselves to be as successful in their work.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

It should be noted that a qualitative study like this does not allow for generalizable findings. As participants came from only two Western countries and were generally of middle- or upper-middle class, results should be considered in that context. Future research might explore similar questions in other contextual settings.

Furthermore, the results presented here might serve as suggestions for possible fields of exploration moving forward. One example of an area that might be explored in the future is that of father entrepreneurs. This study provides a detailed portrait of the state of entrepreneurship among women actively caring for children. It neglects, however, information about how men manage the dual roles of parent and business owner. After all, men entrepreneurs are equally likely to be parents as women entrepreneurs (Clark-Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015). Future work should expand the present analysis to evaluate the networks and definitions of success of father entrepreneurs.

Based on the experiences of some of the participants of this work, other areas for further exploration can be identified. The isolating nature of entrepreneurship was one theme that was mentioned on multiple occasions. According to one participant, “There’s something there that could be captured, highlighted, or reflected on. That’s something to think about.” Indeed, future research should explore networks among mom entrepreneurs with a focus on different types of networks and how positions in those networks might contribute to feelings of isolation.

### **Conclusions**

The importance of work is perhaps best captured by feedback from interview participants. Many women indicated that thinking about their

networks motivated them to do more work in developing new or furthering existing relationships. According to one participant, “When you started asking questions about mom entrepreneur connections I was like ‘I want to have that.’” Another stated “I love questions and these have made me think about who is supporting me and what my business looks like in a different way than I’d thought about before.” Others spoke of needing to make time, or more time, to simply reach out to other women. Nearly all participants stated that this work was important and that they were eager to review the findings.

Networks, ties in and of themselves and the information that is transferred through these ties, are very important to mom entrepreneurs. According to one participant, “Being a mom is hard because you always feel like you’re not doing enough but know you can’t do any more than you’re doing. It is a constant balancing act. When something falls off the map; your marriage, your friendships, it adds a little bit of pressure, but overall I wouldn’t have it any other way.” Having a network of women who understand these challenges and are able to provide support can certainly make this balancing act more manageable, and perhaps, more enjoyable.

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