Entrepreneurship in the Fitness and Sport Industry:
How Gender Relations Underpin the Experiences
of Women Consultants

by

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ABSTRACT

In Canada, women entrepreneurs have been starting small businesses at three times the rate of men in recent years (Royal Bank, 1994). Consulting is one type of small business that has become an increasingly popular choice for women who are dissatisfied with traditional work cultures, victims of corporate downsizing, or capitalizing on the shift to a knowledge-based economy (Bridges, 1994; Drucker, 1993). Yet, the literature has been limited to prescriptive accounts of “how to become or succeed as a consultant” (Bellman, 1990; Gray, 1985; Holz, 1985; Kubr, 1986; Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986; Nevis, 1987; Shenson, 1990). This literature and government programs aimed at increasing the rate of small business ownership have focused on the deficits and “barriers” that women must overcome in order to be financially successful.

To counter the gender-blind nature of the entrepreneurship and consulting literature, this study drew upon feminist theory (Aptheker, 1993; Donovan, 1993; Hartmann, 1993; Olesen, 1994; Tuana, 1993), the gender relations in organizations literature (Acker, 1992; Burrell & Hearn, 1990; Lewis & Morgan, 1994; Mills, 1992), and the work, leisure, and family literature (Blumberg, 1991; Carrier, 1995; Hume, 1996; Tom, 1993). The purpose was to examine how gender relations underlie the business experiences of women who are or have been consultants in the fitness and sport industry. The research questions included: 1) How did women get into/out of consulting? 2) What did their work as a consultant in the fitness and sport industry entail? 3) What strategies did these women use to keep their businesses viable? 4) How did consulting fit (or not fit) into their daily lives? 5) How did gender relations contribute to or hinder business development? 6) What were the women’s definitions of entrepreneurship and business success?
Women fitness and sport consultants in the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia served as the study population. Professional organizations and associations, including the British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association, the YWCA, Sport BC, and Promotion Plus were approached to develop a list of women who have or are working as consultants in the field. From this list, women (n=13) were selected using criterion-based sample selection to ensure diversity in terms of marital and family status. Three of the women were no longer working in consulting in the field, an important consideration given the fact that 50% of small businesses fail within the first two years of operation (Foley & Green, 1989). The types of consulting businesses the women operated included personal training, organizational development, alternative health services, and lifestyle transportation management.

A qualitative research methodology was adopted consisting of: interviews, observations, document analysis, and validation focus groups (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain data related to the research questions and to provide the women with the opportunity to raise issues relevant to them. Field notes were used to document observations of the women's work environments and to record the research process. A document analysis of brochures, business cards, and other marketing materials was undertaken to provide further insights into the nature of the women's businesses. Validation focus groups were held after all of the data was analyzed to ensure the themes derived accurately represented the experiences of the women. Themes were analyzed inductively with the aid of the qualitative data analysis package Q.S.R. NUD.IST.
It was clear that gender relations, defined as the interactions among and between women and men that exact dominance and subordination and create alliances and exclusions (Acker, 1992), underpinned a variety of the women’s experiences. Dissatisfaction with the male-oriented organizational logic of traditional employers was cited as a major factor influencing the women’s decision to forge new ways of conducting business. All of the women operated the administrative dimensions of their businesses out of their homes in order to negotiate a better balance with traditional family roles. Therefore, work, family, and time for self were deeply intertwined and could not be viewed as dichotomous entities. A number of struggles were encountered including social isolation, dealing with body image issues, and assessing the value of their services. Many of these struggles could be linked to societal and cultural power imbalances that devalue the work of women and objectify physical appearance (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1991; Laberge & Sankoff, 1988; White, Young, & Gillett, 1995). Rather than focusing on the economic dimensions of their businesses and seeing other consultants as competitors, the women described their activities mainly in terms of developing relationships with others including colleagues, clients, family, friends, mentors, role models, and members of professional organizations. Relationship building was not only important for instrumental and social support reasons, rather it was viewed as a two-way process. The women could validate their self identities and derive satisfaction by giving to others (Young & Richards, 1992). In particular, assisting other women who were interested in becoming either consultants or self-employed provided the women with great satisfaction.
Interestingly, few of the women saw themselves as entrepreneurs or consultants. Entrepreneurship was associated with hiring employees and providing a tangible product. The term “consultant” was avoided because of the stigma associated with being “the new euphemism for the unemployed”. To legitimize their roles within their businesses, they adopted titles such as CEO, principal, or director.

In the small business and consulting literature, success is usually defined and measured in financial terms. While being able to survive financially figured in some of the women’s definitions of success, the notion of “achieving a balance” between work and other aspects of their lives was much more salient. In part, the notion of balance evolved from the fitness and wellness ideology associated with the type of work the women were in. In order to achieve this balance, some of the women resisted pressures to expand their businesses while others looked to role models both within and outside the industry for guidance. Women who left fitness and sport consulting did so primarily because they were unable to achieve their own personal definitions of “balance”.

The major contribution of this study is that it highlights the inadequacy of “gender-neutral” theories of entrepreneurship and identifies some of the dimensions that should be taken into account to better understand how women consultants are transforming the nature of conducting work within the fitness and sport industry.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS vi

LIST OF TABLES viii

LIST OF FIGURES ix

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS x

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION 1
   Purpose 6
   Research Questions 6
   Definition of Terms 7

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW 8
   The Context 8
   Research Used to Inform the Context of the Study 20
   Summary 34

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY 36
   Sample Selection 36
   Research Techniques 37
   Data Analysis Procedures 45
   Standards for Judging the Quality of Conclusions 48
   Reciprocity 50
   Time Line 50
   Ethics 51

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND ANALYSES 52
   Background 52
   Definitions of Entrepreneurship and Consulting 63
   Nature of Consulting in the Fitness and Sport Industry 66
   Strategies for Keeping the Business Viable 78
   Fitting Consulting into Their Daily Life 82
   Definitions of Success 88
   Summary 90
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION  
Who Can Enter? 94
Nature of Consulting in the Fitness and Sport Industry 96
Strategies to Develop Their Businesses 102
Fitting Consulting into Daily Life 105
Definitions of Success 111
Implications for the Small Business Entrepreneurship Literature 112
Recommendations for Future Research 116
Practical Recommendations 118

REFERENCES 120

APPENDICES  
Appendix A: Consent Form 130
Appendix B: Interview Protocol 132
Appendix C: Focus Group Guide 134
Appendix D: Q.S.R. NUD.IST Theme Chart 135
Appendix E: Research Time Line 136
Appendix F: Ethics Approval Form 137
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Background of the Women 54
Table 2: Background of their Businesses 58
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Phases of Consulting 68
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Small business contributes significantly to the Canadian economy and women entrepreneurs are responsible for much of the recent growth in the small business sector. In fact, women have been starting small businesses at three times the rate of men and approximately one third (31.5%) of all businesses in Canada are now owned by women (Royal Bank, 1994; Shaw, 1995).

Consulting is one type of small business experiencing rapid growth as a response to the many societal and organizational changes. Due to an increase in the number of women in the workforce, dissatisfaction with traditional work cultures, corporate downsizing, and the movement to a knowledge based economy, consulting is an expanding form of entrepreneurship, especially for women (Drucker, 1993; Bridges, 1994). According to some researchers, consulting has allowed them to build careers based on their professional knowledge, to bypass glass ceilings that inhibit career advancement, and to have greater flexibility in balancing career and family (Carrier, 1995; Gallos, 1989).

Consultants are being sought in a variety of fields including the fitness and sport industry. In a report by the Royal Bank (1994), concerns about personal health and fitness were identified as one of the four largest trends leading to small business development. Sport and fitness are an integral part of the popular culture in Canadian society (Hall, Slack, Smith, and Whitson, 1991; LeClair, 1992) and consumers are spending increasingly larger amounts of their discretionary income on active lifestyle products and services (Minister’s Task Force Report on Federal Sport Policy, 1992; Sport Ontario, 1992). Sport and fitness businesses are being developed to service
both individual consumers and organizations who either lack the necessary resources and
talent to offer products and services in-house (e.g., corporate health and fitness programs,
personal training) or require outside (managerial) expertise (e.g., management training, programs
evaluations, information technology, market research).

The majority of the literature examining small business entrepreneurship and consulting
in the fitness and sport industry has adopted a positivist stance that has ignored how gender
relations underpin the process (Gray, 1985; Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986; Nevis, 1987; Shenson, 1990).
According to Bull and Willard (1993), the topics that have been addressed include: i) definitions
of entrepreneurship (Collom, 1981; Lavoie, 1988); ii) traits of successful entrepreneurs
(Fagenson, 1993; Royal Bank, 1994); iii) business success strategies (Gray, 1985; Goffee &
Scase, 1985); iv) methods of forming new business ventures (Federal Business Development
Bank, 1989; Royal Bank, 1994); and v) the effects of environmental factors on business
Similarly, the literature directly pertaining to consulting has been limited to prescriptive accounts
of how to become a client, how to develop client relationships, how to deal with resistance, and
how to develop modes of influence (Bellman, 1990; Gray, 1985; Kubr, 1986; Newis, 1987;

Even a study conducted by Belcourt, Burke, and Lee-Gosselin (1991), one of the few to
recognize the influence of gender relations on business development, adopted a positivist stance
with liberal feminist overtones. The authors argued that gender differences in economic success
are due to a "time lag", and that if educational opportunities were provided to improve the skills
of women, they would eventually “catch up” to men (Belcourt et al., 1991). This type of analysis has ignored how issues of power and gender relations underlie the experience of entrepreneurship. As a result, the experiences and the ways in which consultants and women consultants in particular, have been transforming the nature of doing business, developing alternative business relationships and strategies, and developing alternative definitions of success have not been examined. Furthermore, traditional approaches to research have created a dichotomy between work, personal, and family life.

As Gallos (1989) noted, women’s boundaries between professional work and their personal lives are more permeable than men’s, allowing women to perceive relationships and family as critical to work. Therefore, it was important to consider how the experience of entrepreneurship was intertwined with personal and family life. The importance of including the competing demands of work and family life were also-highlighted in a study of women managers which asked the women to identify important themes facing them (Sheppard, 1992). Other themes identified by these women included: isolation, questions of power and politics, strategies for organizational survival and change, victimization and double standards, perception by others, other women’s experiences and relations with other women, and expectations concerning work, salary, promotion, and career development (Sheppard, 1992). Many of these themes reflect how gender relations influence women’s business experiences.

Another limitation of traditional approaches to research on entrepreneurship is that the experiences of those who have gone out of business have seldom been examined. Approximately fifty percent of small businesses fail within the first two years of business start-up, and under
financing, inadequate research, and unbalanced skill sets are often cited as the most common reasons for business failure (Foley & Green, 1989). Gender relations are seldom acknowledged as a contributing factor even though a survey conducted by Marleau (1995) found that women encountered a higher refusal rate for obtaining business loans and, therefore, had greater difficulties obtaining sufficient capital to fund the start up of their business. As well, women also faced additional “hurdles”, such as discrimination from suppliers, clients, and employees, a devaluing of their work and life experiences, and a shortage of peer support networks (Belcourt et al., 1991). A related issue is that business development is viewed as a process whereby women enter, experience business growth, and eventually leave consulting. It is likely that the process is much more fluid and complex characterized by diverse entry, development, and exit routes (Frisby, 1995).

The examination of gender relations would overcome the gender-neutral stance of existing theories of entrepreneurship. In addition, the liberating and transformative influence of women in sport and fitness consulting may be revealed (e.g., the formation of new alliances and ways of conducting business). Ferree and Martin (1995) showed how an increasing number of feminist organizations have developed alternatives to the structure and processes of traditional organizations. These organizations disrupted the traditional gendered social relations and instead used collaborative techniques that were less hierarchical and were designed to equalize power relations.

In contrast to the approach that dominated the research literature on small business entrepreneurship and consulting in the fitness and sport industry, the feminist literature
recognized the importance of investigating the diverse experiences of women, the issues which were significant to them, and the context that shaped these experiences (Gergen, 1988; Olesen, 1994). The underlying aim of the feminist approach was to overcome the oppression and discrimination experienced by women in all spheres of their lives (Olesen, 1994). As Eichler (1986, p. 68) explained:

many voices share the outlook that it is important to center and make problematic women’s diverse situations and the institutions and frames that influence those situations, and then to refer the examination of that problematic to theoretical, policy, or action frameworks in the interest of realizing social justice for women (cited in Olesen, 1994, p. 158).

A feminist approach was particularly appropriate and useful for this study. By using a feminist framework, a better understanding of the complexities of women’s business experiences was obtained. Yet, just as there is no one universal “woman’s” experience, there is no grand feminist theory. Therefore, a variety of feminist theories were utilized in this study (e.g., liberal, radical, cultural, and socialist) to inform the research questions and the subsequent analysis of the data.

Not surprisingly, given the approach of past studies, the research methods commonly used to examine entrepreneurship have largely consisted of surveys and statistical analyses (Belcourt et al., 1990; Bull & Willard, 1993; Fischer, Reuber, & Dyke, 1993). While these approaches provide some useful information, they do not reveal deeper experiences and patterns of relations. In qualitative research, the researcher:

begins with interesting, curious, or anomalous phenomena, which [she] observes, discovers, or stumbles across. Not unlike the detective work of Sherlock Holmes or the best tradition in investigative reporting,
research seeks to explain, describe, or explore the phenomenon chosen for study (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 21).

This study utilized a specific type of qualitative research, ethnographic techniques, which was concerned with examining the “concepts, beliefs, and principles of action and organization” that could be “attributed successfully to the members of that society” (Goodenough, 1976, cited in Wolcott, 1985). This approach allowed an exploration of the experiences of women consultants to be fully elaborated and also an examination of how gender relations have underpinned their experiences.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to examine how gender relations underlie the business experiences of women who are or have been consultants in the fitness and sport industry.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following are the research questions that guided the initial phases of the study:

1) How did the women get into/out of consulting?
2) What did their work as a consultant in the fitness and sport industry entail?
3) What strategies did they use to keep their businesses viable?
4) How did consulting fit (or not fit) into their daily lives?
5) How did gender relations contribute to or hinder business development?
6) What were the women’s definitions of entrepreneurship and business success?
DEFINITION OF TERMS

Business experiences referred to how women fitness and sport consultants got into/out of business, the activities involved in consulting, how consulting fit into their daily lives, and the strategies involved in keeping their businesses viable.

The term consultant was defined as: “someone who has an expertise in a specific area or areas and offers unbiased opinions and advice for a fee” (Gray, 1985, p.10). The consultant is not an employee of the firm who hires them, but an independent contractor who is usually self-employed (Gray, 1985).

Mills (1992, p. 94) defined gender as:

a set of assumptions about the nature and character of biological differences between males and females, assumptions that are manifest in a number of ideas and practices which have a determinant influence upon identity, social opportunities, and life experiences of human actors. They are assumptions, however, that have tended to be developed and refined in contexts dominated by males, and hence, have been disadvantageous to females.

Gender relations consisted of “the outcome of the interplay between social actors and organizations of which they are a part of and examines the processes which had before been gender-neutral” (Lewis & Morgan, 1994, p. 643). Gender relations also included the “interactions between individuals, men and women, women and women, men and men in multiplicity of forms that exact dominance and subordination and create alliances and exclusions” (Acker, 1992, p. 253).
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

In the first section of this chapter the following areas of the literature on small business entrepreneurship and consulting in the fitness and sport industry are reviewed to provide a context for the study. The second section includes an analysis of research used to inform the study including feminist theory, gender relations in organizations, and the work, leisure, and family literature.

The Context

The Literature on Small Business Entrepreneurship

The small business sector has greatly expanded in Canada in the last few decades. Revenue Canada has classified small businesses as companies with sales of less than $2 million and fewer than fifty employees. Based on this classification, ninety-seven percent of Canadian businesses are categorized as small businesses (Royal Bank, 1994, B.C. Stats., 1990). Furthermore, small businesses contributed thirty-eight percent to Canada’s gross domestic product (GDP) in 1991 (Royal Bank, 1994). Approximately seventy percent of all new jobs created in Canada during the 1980s were derived from the growth of the small business sector (Royal Bank, 1994). Small business is now regarded as the “vital force which drives job creation and economic expansion” in Canada (Royal Bank, 1994, p.1).

Although men outnumber women in small business ownership, women are now starting small businesses three times more often than men and they represent the fastest growing segment of the small business population (Businesswomen’s Advocate, 1991; Royal Bank, 1994). In fact, the number of self-employed women in British Columbia has risen from 323,000 in 1981 to
639,000 in 1994 (Marleau, 1995). However, statistics have shown that despite the increased number of women business owners, the revenue of these businesses has not increased correspondingly in recent decades (Loscocco & Robinson, 1991). As a result, business ownership has not offered women the same levels of economic success as men (Loscocco & Robinson, 1991). In an attempt to explain the differences in economic success of men’s and women’s businesses, researchers have neglected to examine the influence of gender relations.

Young and Richards (1992) suggested that small business entrepreneurship, although often promoted by governments as a viable economic activity, actually marginalizes disadvantaged groups including women and immigrants who do not have access to more stable forms of employment. As a result, it may be possible that the large number of women who are starting small businesses are not actually leveling the playing field, but rather are producing further marginalization (Young & Richards, 1992).

According to Moore, Buttner, and Rosen (1992), women have started their own businesses because of dissatisfaction with the traditional workforce (e.g., inflexible work hours, lower pay, fewer opportunities for advancement, a lack of mentors, and inaccessibility to the “old boys” network). Though many organizations are starting to develop programs to increase the number of women in management and small business, little attention has been given as to how gender relations influence business development.

Bull and Willard (1993) categorized the research that has been done on women entrepreneurs into five areas including: definitions of entrepreneurship, traits of successful entrepreneurs, business success strategies, methods of forming new business ventures, and the
effects of environmental factors on business development. The first category included research on how to develop a classification system to differentiate entrepreneurs from other forms of business ownership (Collom, 1981; Lavoie, 1988). For example, Collom (1981) contended that if companies do not hire employees, they cannot be considered to be entrepreneurial. His classification system overlooked the contribution of sole proprietors, which many of whom are consultants. Another definition by Karloff (1989, p. 50) completely excluded all women as he defined an entrepreneur in the masculine form:

- he prefers to make his own decisions, he appreciates risk taking, he wants to see the results of what he does and expects constructive criticism and praise, he wants to be able to take an active part in business, and is therefore often happiest in small organizations.

A more representative definition of entrepreneurship is the one developed by Lavoie (1988) who has captured the multiple entry paths and responsibilities associated with this form of entrepreneurship. She defined a woman entrepreneur as:

- a woman who has, alone or with one or more partners, started up, bought or inherited a business, is assuming the related financial, administrative, and social risks and responsibilities of the business, and is participating in the firm’s day-to-day management (Lavoie, 1988, p. 4).

The trait approach to research consists of developing “portraits of an entrepreneur” to delineate the psychological characteristics of individuals who choose entrepreneurship as their career. Previous work emphasized how women could fit into the existing male management model (Gherardi, 1994). Other approaches suggested that women should be considered effective leaders because of their “special” traits (i.e., feminine leadership style) (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Carter & Cannon, 1992; Eisler, 1995; Smith & Smits, 1994). Both of these perspectives ignored
how gender relations were responsible for power imbalances which were perpetuated in the workplace. Instead, stereotypes were used to identify what was supposedly "masculine" and what was "feminine" and then these traits were applied universally to men and women leaders. Examples of the traits commonly associated with entrepreneurship included: high energy, optimism, an ability to see a need and act on it, and a desire to achieve a sense of accomplishment (Royal Bank, 1994). Another trait that is commonly associated with women is lower self-confidence (Corbin, Landers, Feltz, & Senior, 1983; Lirgg, 1992; Lirgg & Feltz, 1989). Corbin et al. (1983) and Lirgg and Feltz (1989) state that women have lower self-confidence due to their modesty or honesty. As modesty presumably does not benefit individuals who are trying to sell their products/services or themselves as consultants, this may influence the women's business experiences. The limitations of the trait approach have been well documented as success is attributed to individual characteristics which ignores the important social and contextual factors shaping business development (Fagenson, 1993; Lavoie, 1988).

The third category of research focused on the reasons for business success which is often defined solely in financial terms. Goffee and Scase (1985) went a step further and outlined four types of women entrepreneurs based on their marital status and the profitability of their business. "Conventional" did not report any conflict between their business and personal lives and worked in stable no-growth business situations. "Innovators" were strongly motivated by profit and their business was their primary life interest, with relationships with others being secondary or not figuring into their profile at all. The businesses of those labeled "domestics" were constrained by a strong attachment to a traditional female role. This was because they tended to spend more
time with their families than on their businesses. "Radicals" had businesses which provided services that were geared towards feminist outcomes.

Cromie and Hayes (1988), in an attempt to expand on Goffee and Scase's (1985) typology, acknowledged the presence of children as having an influence on women's businesses. "Dualists" were similar to the conventionalists of Goffee and Scase's (1985) framework. These women had successful careers that strained their role of child-rearing; however, business ownership allowed them to fulfill both domestic and career roles. The "innovators" overlapped with the "innovators" in Goffee and Scase's (1985) classification. They rejected traditional female roles and were highly committed to personal achievement. Finally, the "returners" were similar to Goffee and Scase's "domestics" in that they had interrupted their career to have and raise children, but (unlike the domestics) they later returned to their businesses.

Although typologies such as Goffee and Scase's (1985) and Cromie and Hayes' (1988) have drawn attention to both work and domestic roles, they have limitations. For example, profitability was used as the sole index of business success yet previous studies have shown that women seldom use economic measures as the basis of their definitions of success (Frisby, 1992). As well, these typologies have both treated careers as static entities which ignores the possible movement between the categories.

The formation of new ventures was the fourth research category identified by Bull and Willard (1993). These studies examined the factors involved in setting up new business enterprises and the types of information and/or services required by entrepreneurs during start-up (Federal Business Development Bank, 1989; Royal Bank, 1994). Studies that examined the
barriers preventing or restricting women from starting new businesses also fall into this category and include discrimination, clustering in business sectors with low-financial payoff, a shortage of peer support networks, finite money to find and attend training courses, and limited relevant work experience or management training (Belcourt et al., 1991; Lavoie, 1988; Scott, 1986). One of the limitations of this line of inquiry was that it adopted a “blame the victim” approach whereby individual entrepreneurs are assumed to be solely responsible for business success or failure. This approach ignores the complexities involved in business creation and the social, market, economic, and political forces that influence the viability of business initiatives.

The final category included studies examining how environmental or external factors, such as support networks, political and economic conditions, and market forces, affect business success (Bull & Willard, 1993). Support networks, including mentors, were believed to be especially important for women because they allow them to develop contacts, gain advice and assistance, and possibly even referrals (Entrepreneurship Development Review, 1990; Ragins & Scandura, 1994). Young and Richards (1992) found women describe their roles as entrepreneurs primarily in terms of their connection to others such as family, clients, mentors, friends, and networks (Young & Richards, 1992). These relationships act as a two-way process for the women in which they not only receive support and guidance, but also provide it to others. This allows the women to feel more connected and helps them validate themselves. Role models influenced the women entrepreneur at the business start-up by offering encouragement, enabling them to take risks, be independent, and self-confident (Young & Richards, 1992).

Following their review of the literature, Bull and Willard (1993, p. 184) concluded that:
Despite the number of published papers that might be considered related to the theory of entrepreneurship, no generally accepted theory of entrepreneurship has emerged.

In an effort to overcome this theoretical void, Fischer, Reuber, and Dyke (1993) were among the few to apply feminist theory to the study of entrepreneurship. The authors commented that previous studies "lack [an] integrative framework for understanding the nature and implications of issues related to sex, gender, and entrepreneurship" (Fischer et al., 1993, p. 151). They used a liberal and social feminist theory to "organize and interpret past research and highlight avenues for future research" (Fischer et al., 1993, p. 152). They grouped previous research according to whether it had a liberal or social feminist theory orientation. In general, research adopting a liberal feminist perspective focused on factors limiting advancement opportunities for women including differential experience, small firm size, and low sales volumes (Fischer et al., 1993). Social feminist theory was used to examine how women and men compared on socialized traits and values in terms of gender differences (Fischer et al., 1993). They then tested the utility of these two perspectives by surveying several hundred manufacturing firms, retail firms, and service firms. Fischer et al. (1993) sought to determine if systemic constraints influenced the education and experience of women, if women differed psychologically from men in entrepreneurial motivation, and whether gender differences influenced business performance. Although this study found that there were few differences in the education of male and female entrepreneurs or in their business motivations, differences were found in their business experience. Women tended to have more experience in smaller firms with lower growth in income and less experience in larger firms than men.
Other studies that have examined gender differences between men and women found that women typically have much broader definitions of success which have incorporated the ability to balance work and family (Firestone & Shelton, 1994; Frisby, 1995; Gallos, 1989; Harrington & Dawson, 1995; Rosen & Lovelace, 1994; Sheppard, 1992). In fact, Gallos (1989) found those who did define their success based solely on their business were concerned by what they had sacrificed in order to achieve business success.

**Consulting in the Fitness and Sport Industry**

The sport and fitness industry is one area within the small business sector that is growing rapidly. The Royal Bank (1994) identified the growth of the sport and fitness industry as one of the four largest trends leading small business development. In the Minister’s Task Force Report on Federal Sport Policy (1992), it was reported that approximately $16.2 billion was spent by Canadians on sports and fitness related equipment, memberships, and apparel in 1990. As well, a Statistics Canada survey found that Canadians have increased spending on fitness related goods and services from 1.3% of their disposable incomes in 1969, to 2.1% in 1986, after accounting for the natural increases in income over time (The Conference Board of Canada, 1991).

Furthermore, the sport and fitness industry generated 329,000 jobs for Canadians in 1986 which represented 3% of the working population (Sport Ontario, 1992).

Similar growth in the fitness and sport industry has been reported in other industrialized countries. For example, in 1988 in the United States, it ranked as the twenty-second largest sector surpassing many traditional industries such as automobiles, manufacturing, and petroleum (Comte & Stogel, 1990). In the United Kingdom, the Henley Centre for Forecasting (1992)
reported that sports-related employment was responsible for the creation of 467,000 jobs in Britain in 1990, up from 376,000 jobs in 1985.

Consulting, a form of business being mirrored in business, education, health care, government, military, labour unions, and social services, is responsible for some of the business growth occurring in the sport and fitness industry (Gray, 1985). In North America, consulting has become a multi-billion dollar industry as more companies are searching for cost efficient ways of obtaining specialized expertise (Gray, 1985). Consultants are being hired in the sport and fitness field for their expertise in a number of areas including organizational and program development, marketing and fund raising, event management, equipment and facility design, and personal training.

Declining profit margins and the shift to a knowledge-based economy have been two factors responsible for the increased demand for consultants (Bellman, 1990; Bridges; 1994). The economic downturn has forced many organizations to downsize their staff complement and find alternative ways of getting work done. To maintain work productivity, consultants are being hired to decrease the organization's financial resources invested in the number of full-time employees through salaries and benefits (Bellman, 1990).

In addition, due to the information explosion and rapid societal and organizational changes, individuals and companies are turning to consultants for their up to date specialized knowledge (Bridges, 1994; Drucker, 1993). In fact, some have referred to consultants as "entrepreneurs in the knowledge field" (Gray, 1985, p. 10). Drucker (1993) explained that
society has gone through a variety of transformations and the possession of knowledge has replaced capital, natural resources, and labour as the main economic resource:

knowledge is always embodied in a person; carried by a person; created, augmented, or improved by a person; applied by a person; taught and passed on by a person; used or misused by a person. The shift to the knowledge society therefore puts the person in the center. In so doing it raises new challenges, new issues, new and quite unprecedented questions about the knowledge society’s representative, the educated person (Drucker, 1993, p. 210).

Although consulting has become extremely popular, the research literature has been limited to prescriptive accounts of how to become a consultant, how to develop client relationships, how to deal with resistance, and how to develop modes of influence (Bellman, 1990; Gray, 1985; Holz, 1985; Kubr, 1986; Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986; Nevis, 1987; Shenson, 1990).

Inclusion of the fitness and sport industry

It was important to consider consultants in the fitness and sport industry because the presentation of the body is integral to the field. The body has become increasingly malleable, molded and shaped by social and contextual influences (White, Young, & Gillett, 1995). For women, slimness is the “ideal” body type, while muscularity is associated with masculinity (Cole, 1993; White et al., 1995).

The consultant profits from the investment in their body in the fitness and sport industry because professional success is a function of image or appearance (Laberge & Sankoff, 1988). Laberge and Sankoff (1988) have warned that because of their position in society, middle class women have no choice but to conform to the dominant norms. This may result in a source of tension for the individual as they begin a never successful chain of events that leaves them
underrating themselves (in terms of their own physique) and trying to spend even more time beautifying themselves (Laberge & Sankoff, 1988). As well, this tension may result in the individual turning to extremes (e.g., eating disorders and exercise obsession) in an attempt to attain the "ideal" body (Cole, 1993; Messner & Sabo, 1990).

As of yet, very little research has addressed the issues of consultants in the fitness and sport industry. In a search of a fitness/sport data base and a commerce/business administration data base, no attention was devoted to the experiences of the business owners and there were only two references related to the fitness and sport industry. Berrett, Burton, and Slack (1993) was one of the fitness and sport references and examined multiple case studies to determine the characteristics of sport and leisure businesses and their owners, as well as internal and external factors affecting success. Three types of entrepreneurs were identified based on the route individuals had taken to enter the business. These included those who had set up a business directly relating to a hobby, those who had previous experience in other businesses before switching to the fitness and sport industry, and those who had other reasons for starting their business (e.g., disenchantment with an existing job, growth from a cottage industry, or the continuation of a family oriented operation) (Berrett et al., 1993). The internal factors found to influence business success were: a commitment by the owner to providing quality products or services, an emphasis on positive employee relations, and valuing intrinsic rewards over capital returns (Berrett et al., 1993). The external factors identified by the owners as adversely affecting success were: financial problems due to rapid business growth, fluctuating sales volume due to the seasonality of the industry, and the need to adhere to government regulations.
A limitation of Berrett et al.'s. (1993) study was that only “successful” male entrepreneurs were examined (i.e., those who were still in business two years after the start-up). As approximately 50% of small businesses fail within the first 2 years of business, the experiences of entrepreneurs, including women, who have gone out of business are largely unknown (Foley & Green, 1989).

Gender relations and consulting

As the operation of a consulting business depends heavily on developing relationships with corporate clients, creditors, suppliers, customers, and employees, the influence of gender relations on entrepreneurial experiences was important to consider. For many women entrepreneurs, entering into this form of business also means adjusting their relationships with friends, family, and childcare providers.

There was a growing body of literature which has attempted to elucidate why women are increasingly attracted to consulting as a form of small business (Bellman, 1990; Gray, 1985; Lavoie, 1988; Vipperman, 1990). One major factor, according to Lavoie (1988), was that home-based consulting makes it more possible to combine motherhood and business. Gurstein (1995), in a report for the Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation, supported this finding. She labeled self-employed consultants who utilized their home as their office but visited with clients outside of their office as “teleworkers”. Gurstein (1995) cited several reasons driving the trend to telework and home-based employment including the rise of information-based and service related businesses, the increased use of contract work and part-time employees, and the effects of corporate restructuring. Improvements in computer technology and telecommunications were
other factors aiding the movement towards telework and home-based businesses as they gave individuals the ability to communicate with other colleagues and clients directly from their homes (Gurstein, 1995).

Individuals who choose to telework or operate home-based businesses, however, give up a variety of features associated with more traditional forms of employment including job security, pensions, and employee benefits. Frisby (1995) suggested that some women may be willing to give up these benefits to achieve a better balance in their lives. Further research was needed in this area to determine: whether women consultants are transforming the nature of doing business by developing more egalitarian partnerships, alternative interpretations of success, new patterns of family interaction, and other support networks?

Research Used to Inform the Context of the Study

This next section examines the research used to inform the context of this study. It includes an overview of feminist theory, the gender relations in organizations literature, and the work, leisure, and family literature.

Using Feminist Theory to Inform Research on Entrepreneurship

There were a variety of feminist theories which have been developed to overcome the void created by traditional social and organizational theories as well as research methodologies (Aptheker, 1993; Bunch, 1993; Donovan, 1993; Farrell, 1992; Hartmann, 1993; Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1993; Jonasdottir, 1994; Tuana, 1993). As Farrell (1992, p. 59) noted, this has been an important development because:

women’s every day lives, especially as constituted in the past, have been experienced differently from men’s and therefore may produce different
knowledge and social understandings.

Some feminist researchers (Donovan, 1993; Hartmann, 1993; Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1993) have searched for one theory to explain the diverse experiences of women, but "since lived experiences are multidimensional...it is time to recognize that no one theory, no one method is sufficient to adequately represent the fullness of gender" (Tuana, 1993, p. 281). By embracing theoretical diversity, the plurality of women's experiences can truly be recognized (Jonasdottir, 1994).

Feminist theory helped to shape the research questions in this study and was drawn upon, where applicable, to inform the interpretation of results.

Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal feminism states that "women are disadvantaged relative to men due to overt discrimination and/or systemic factors that deprive them of vital resources" (Fischer et al., 1993, p. 151). Using feminist theory helped to recognize a variety of issues related to women and their business experiences. This approach contended that if women are given equal opportunities they will be able to "catch-up" to the accomplishments of men (Belcourt et al., 1991).

Liberal feminist theory was limited in the types of contributions it could provide because it primarily concentrates on removing inequalities or barriers so that women can "fit" into existing systems (Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1993). This theory may, however, provide insight about the entry and/or exit factors that influenced the career choices of women consultants. For example, a study entitled "Double Standard" reported that women were refused business loans 20 percent more often than men (Marleau, 1995).

Radical Feminist Theory
A radical feminist approach contends that women can only be truly free of male oppression if they refute it and adopt a significantly different approach which involves rejecting all that is "male-serving" (Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1993). Women adopting a radical stance view:

their own personal 'subjective' issues as important and legitimate...and that male supremacy and subjugation of women was indeed the root and model oppression in society and that feminism had to be the basis for any truly revolutionary change (Donovan, 1993, p. 142).

This approach encouraged a radical re-thinking of traditional social structures and recognized that "men and women are fundamentally different [and] have different styles and cultures" (Donovan, 1993, p. 142).

However, radical feminism does not fully address issues of race or class. This may have been because most of the feminists adopting this viewpoint were white, middle-class women (Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1993). In this study, it may be possible to locate women who ascribe to this approach and have developed alternative ways of running and organizing their businesses, and/or dealing with clients or competitors.

"Women of Colour" or Cultural Feminism

Women of colour or cultural feminism highlights how women create a "separate cultural group with its own values and practices" (Donovan, 1993, p. 187). hooks (1984, p. x) elaborated on the lack of attention to race very effectively when she wrote that:

much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the center, whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live in the margin. As a consequence, feminist theory lacks wholeness, lacks the broad analysis that could encompass a variety of human experiences (cited in Birrell, 1990, p. 188).
In this study, it must be acknowledged that women consultants will likely represent privilege in terms of race and class as well-educated white women dominate white collar occupations. For example, Hisrich and Brush (1988) found that women business owners in the U.S. are from a homogeneous demographic group. They were on average, white, 35-45 year old first born children from middle to upper class families. The women entrepreneurs were also well-educated and had financially successful, well educated, and supportive partners. Examining privileged women provides only a starting point for understanding the experiences of women entrepreneurs.

Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminists are concerned with examining how “differences in the early and ongoing socialization of women and men differ” (Fischer et al., 1993, p. 154). This approach involves utilizing the “concept of the sex/gender system to examine all other social institutions for the roles they play in defining and reinforcing gender hierarchies” (Hartmann, 1993, p. 195). Many contemporary socialist feminists (Aptheker, 1993; Hartsock, 1983; Donovan, 1993), recognizing that the current theories are inadequate, are searching for new forms of socialist feminism. These approaches are aimed at recognizing the diversity which exists in women’s issues (Donovan, 1993).

One of these new forms which has only been developed in the last few decades is the feminist standpoint theory. Hartsock (1983), one of the leading proponents of this approach, stated that a feminist standpoint theory enables feminists to “better understand both why patriarchal institutions and ideologies take such perverse and deadly forms and how both theory
and practice can be redirected in more liberatory directions" (cited in Donovan, 1993, p. 89).

Feminist standpoint involves an examination of:

the patterns women create and the meanings women invent each day and over time as a result of their labours and in the context of their subordinated status to men. The search for dailiness is a method of work that allows us to take the patterns women create and the meanings women invent and learn from them. If we map what we learn, connecting one meaning or invention to another, we begin to lay out a different way of seeing reality. This way of seeing is what I refer to as women's standpoint. And this standpoint pivots, of course, depending upon the class, cultural, or racial locations of its subjects, and upon their age, sexual preference, physical abilities, the nature of their work and personal relationships. What is proposed is a mapping of that which has been traditionally erased or hidden. (Aptheker, 1993, p. 86).

The feminist standpoint theory addresses the importance of understanding the meanings and experiences of women from their perspective; however, it only uses feminism to selectively read and describe women's lives (Jonasdottir, 1994). In order to adopt a determined "standpoint", a particular perspective must be selected as dominant while all others are placed as subordinate to it.

Whenever we declare a priori what women’s experiences are and then go on to describe the experiences that are or should be associated with feminist women, we run the risk of a woman refuting us simply by saying, ‘I don’t experience things that way.’ This is all the more damaging if the woman claims to be a feminist (Jonasdottir, 1994, p. 156).

Therefore, in this study it was important not to adopt any particular woman’s experience as more significant than any other. Instead, it was necessary to recognize the diversity of experiences which exist among women.
Gender Relations in Organizations

Gender and gender relations are invisible in much of the research literature on organizational theory, entrepreneurship, and the fitness and sport industry (Rothschild & Davies, 1994; Sheppard, 1992; Staudt, 1993). According to Burrell and Hearn (1990), definitional problems have arisen because insufficient attention has been given as to how power and history shape gender relations. As a starting point, Mills (1992) has defined gender as:

a set of assumptions about the nature and character of biological differences between males and females, assumptions that are manifest in a number of ideas and practices which have a determinant influence upon identity, social opportunities, and life experiences of human actors. They are assumptions; however, that have tended to be developed and refined in contexts dominated by males, and hence, have been disadvantageous to females (p. 94).

In another definition, Acker (1992, p:250) described how gender is socially constructed:

Gender is patterned, socially produced distinctions between male and female, feminine and masculine. Gender is not something that people are, in some inherent sense, although we may consciously think of ourselves in this way. Rather, for the individual and the collective it is a daily accomplishment that occurs in the course of participation in work organizations as well as in many other locations and relations.

There has recently been a movement away from studying gender as an attribute to studying gender relations as a social construct. For example, Lewis and Morgan (1994) contended that a focus on gender relations entails recognizing processes and perspectives which had before been considered "gender-neutral" and therefore have not been closely analyzed.

Acker (1992) outlined how gender relations operates in the workplace through the following forces: 1) the production of gender divisions (e.g., gender patterning of jobs, wages,
hierarchy, power, subordination); 2) the creation of symbols, images, and forms of consciousness that implicate, justify, and oppose gender divisions; 3) the interactions between individuals, men and women, women and women, men and men in multiplicity of forms that exact dominance and subordination and create alliances and exclusions; 4) the internal mental work of individuals as they consciously construct understandings of organizations gendered structures of work and opportunity and demands for gender appropriate behaviours and attitudes. Acker (1995, p. 139) suggested that these four forces result in a gendered logic of organizations which is “anchored in and helps to reproduce the fundamental structuring of industrial societies”. The problem with this logic is that it assumes that work has the primary role on the worker which places many people (and especially women) at a disadvantage as their daily lives may not fit with these structures (Acker, 1992). Although Acker discussed gender relations in terms of traditional work organizations, it is likely that similar elements will be found in more non-traditional forms of business, such as consulting. For example, interactions that evolve among employees, partners, clients, lending institutions, professional organizations, friends and family will be present in consulting businesses. Gender relations, therefore, shape how individuals, groups, and institutions respond to women consultants and in turn, how the women interpret their experiences.

Gender relations influence career choices and advancement opportunities (Frisby, 1992). For example, many modern day organizations are characterized by cultural values associated with rationality, bureaucracy, and the suppression of personal emotions (Martin, 1990). As these characteristics are commonly associated with patriarchy, most women are placed at a
disadvantage in organizations. If managers assume that women are less competent and committed than men because they do not have these attributes, they may be considered less often for a variety of organizational rewards, such as promotion (Collinson, Knight & Collinson, 1990; Gherardi, 1994).

Ferree and Martin (1995) and Martin (1990) have conducted research on alternative organizational structures developed by feminists to resist the patterns of gendered relations that shape traditional organizations. However, despite the large increase in the number of feminist organizations over the last few decades (Ferree & Martin, 1995), there has been no consensus on the essential qualities of these organizations. Martin (1990) suggested there are five main characteristics that define feminist organizations: 1) a feminist ideology (i.e., generalized beliefs that make sense of, and direct attention to, particular aspects of social reality and the world “as it should be”), 2) feminist values (e.g., normative preferences that guide goal formation, action, planning, policy making), 3) feminist goals (i.e., actions agendas that the organization claims it wishes to achieve and actually pursues), 4) feminist outcomes (i.e., consequences for members, all women, and for local and national societies of feminist organizational activities), and 5) founding circumstances (i.e., relationship of the organizations founding date to the women’s movement). Ferree and Martin (1995) found that although many feminist organizations maintain their original ideals over time, they do tend to become bureaucratized, institutionalized, and develop relations with male-dominated businesses to achieve their goals.

Whether a business organization chooses an alternative route or not, it is important to place gender in an explanatory framework dealing with entrepreneurship. This is important
because traditional approaches to organizational theory have been "gender blind" and therefore have limited utility in contributing towards the understanding of women's business experiences.

One study of women managers which gave recognition to the importance of studying gender relations specifically asked women subjects if they believed that gender was an issue for them in their business experiences (Burrell & Hearn, 1990). Although many of the women initially stated that gender was not an issue for them, they then went on to describe the strategies they use to manage their gender (e.g., dress, relationships with peers, and ways to build networks without "ruffling feathers") (Burrell & Hearn, 1990). Many of these women felt they needed to handle their gender in certain ways or they would not be taken seriously.

In another study, Sheppard (1992) asked women managers to suggest themes which were significant in order to better understand their experiences. The following themes arose: 1) isolation (e.g., a need to know about the experiences of other women in their situation); 2) questions of power and organizational politics (e.g., a desire to know who their strongest allies were); 3) strategies for organizational survival and change, (e.g., forming networks of positive relationships); 4) victimization and double standards (e.g., fears of exploitation); 5) perceptions by others (e.g., how individuals were seen by peers, superiors, family, and friends); 6) other women's experiences and relations with other women; 7) self-perceptions, (e.g., feelings of success and inadequacy); 8) expectations concerning work, salary, promotion, and career development; and 9) competing demands of work and family (Sheppard, 1992).

The importance of relationship building highlighted by Sheppard (1992) has also been documented in other studies (Lirgg, 1992; Wentling, 1995). The development of mentors, role
models, networks, and/or friendships, to obtain guidance, support, nurturing, and feedback have been extensively documented in the literature (Lirgg, 1992; Wentling, 1995; Zuckerman, 1990). The development of these relationships is especially important for consultants as their business revolves around whether they are able to develop effective relationships with clients. King (1993) and Zuckerman (1990) stated that work friendships are even more important because they found that women, due to time pressures, have difficulty forming relationships outside of work. However, Zuckerman (1990) has suggested individuals may have difficulties forming working friendships as they rise higher up the organizational ladder. She believed this is because feelings of jealousy and envy by others may limit relationship building.

**Work, Leisure, and Family**

Another area which helped to inform the context of this study was the literature on work, leisure, and family. Much of the literature on small business and organizational theory has created a false dichotomy between work and family (Baber & Allen, 1992; Gallos, 1989). As Gallos (1989) noted, women’s boundaries between professional work and the rest of their lives are more permeable than men’s, allowing women to perceive relationships and family as critical to work. Therefore, when examining women’s business experiences, it was important to consider the diverse family styles and significant relationships which they may be a part of (e.g., being single, living with a partner, being married, being married with children, or being a single parent with children) (Baber & Allen, 1992). This literature was useful because it utilized feminist approaches to challenge the existing paradigms and assumptions about women’s lives, their work, and their families (Baber & Allen, 1992; Baker, 1990). Harrington and Dawson (1995)
contended that more researchers are recognizing the importance of including the balance of work and family on women's daily life, but attention also needs to be given as to how leisure fits in this framework.

The amount of time people are spending at their jobs has risen steadily in the last few decades (Schor, 1991, p. 1). People now have, on average, only about 16 1/2 hours per week of leisure outside obligations of job and household (Schor, 1991). As Firestone and Shelton (1994) found, women who work and have families, for the most part, are also responsible for household labour and often encounter difficulties scheduling leisure time for themselves. Schor (1991) found that women are spending the same amount of time on household labour as 20 years ago; however, many are also now conducting additional work outside of the home. As a result, the literature has outlined that “women are coping with living a life of perpetual motion” (Schor, 1991, p. 20). Women have been hit by a “speed up” in work and family life with no more time in the day but twice as much to get done (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, p. 8).

Working women face a variety of challenges with each family choice, issues which often affect their work decisions but are overlooked in the small business literature (Tom, 1993). For example, if a woman remains single, King (1993) contended that she may have to deal with loneliness as well as all of the household responsibilities. However, if she lives with a partner, she has to deal with increased tension around determining how to split the housework. Furthermore, if she is living with a partner of the same gender, she may have to deal with the labels society places on her (King, 1993). Yet, it is becoming increasingly acceptable to cohabitate without marriage for both heterosexual and homosexual couples. In fact, in the U.S.,
from 1980 to 1990, the number of cohabiters increased by 80% to 2.9 million (Saluter, 1991 cited in Baber & Allen, 1992). As well, it has been found that unmarried couples, especially homosexual partners, tend to have a more egalitarian sharing of household responsibilities (Baber & Allen, 1992).

If an employed woman is married, she has to face similar tensions over the distribution of household responsibilities. According to Coolidge & D’Angelo (1994), both spouses were working in 57.9% of all married couples with children under age 18 in 1993, compared to only 36.2% less than 20 years ago.

Although some middle-class couples are starting to take on more egalitarian roles within the household, women continue to be primarily responsible for caring for children and arranging for a substitute when they are at work (Baber & Allen, 1992; Lee, Duxbury & Higgins, 1994; Firestone & Shelton, 1994; Gurstein, 1995; May & Mählmeister, 1994; Sheppard, 1992). The result is a “double day” for women or even a “triple” day if they are also responsible for caring for aging or unhealthy parents (Gee, & McDaniel, 1993). Depending on the demands of the woman’s business and her family motivation, she may require full-time or part-time child care. If so, she faces a decision about what type of child care (e.g., day care, family member, private nanny) to use which will be affected by her ability to pay for it. As well, women who choose to operate home-based businesses encounter additional difficulties scheduling child care. As a result, they may need additional child care alternatives or the assistance of a partner to take care of children when they are working at home.
In addition to these pressures in the household, the working woman who chooses to marry and raise children may receive extra criticism from her colleagues (Tom, 1993). Many people feel that women with partners and/or children will give a greater primacy to the role of parent rather than that of worker (Carrier, 1995). Family ties are seen to be detrimental to the career attainment and advancement of women, but for men they are perceived as beneficial due to the "bread winner" role men assumed following the industrial revolution (Carrier, 1995; Hume, 1996). It is believed that when a woman has a family, she will place a priority on the family which will detract from her job. In contrast, when a man has a family, it is believed that he has the support system needed to commit to the job (Carrier, 1995). Due to these work and family pressures, many couples are putting off having children (Blumberg, 1991). These couples are instead placing their education and careers first.

In a study comparing four groups of professional women based on family status (e.g., single childless, single with children, partnered childless, and partnered with children), Carrier (1995) found that the presence of children had a significant influence on the number of hours worked and perceptions of job involvement. Childless women felt more involved in their work and worked more hours per week than the other groups, while partnered women with children worked the fewest hours. However, Carrier (1995) concluded that although family situation caused women to negotiate the number of hours they worked, it did not influence their commitment to their careers.

The work and family literature also illustrated that it is impossible to utilize traditional models of career development that assume "a successful career is a series of stable uninterrupted
steps which result in steady progress up the organizational hierarchy” (Schein, 1978 cited in Frisby, 1992: 157). Instead, Frisby (1992, p. 160) suggested it is necessary to develop a “woman centered model of career development” based upon women’s diverse and unique experiences. This model needs to be “flexible and encompass movement between a wide range of paid and non-paid career alternatives”, recognize that organizations are “gendered entities”, and utilize alternative definitions of career success. Frisby (1992) stated that it may be too early to develop a comprehensive “woman centered model” as women’s roles are constantly changing, but she outlined eight elements which need to be considered. These included: socio-economic factors, legislative influences (e.g., employment equity, human rights legislation, pay equity), organizational factors (e.g., formal or planned practices, informal relationships), professional organizations (e.g., training and upgrading, mentoring), background factors (e.g., education, previous paid and non-paid work), individual factors (e.g., choices about work and family, definitions of career success), the nature of the current positions, and family factors.

Due to the tensions women face in negotiating work and family, Rosen and Lovelace (1994) found many of them are trying to escape and/or avoid jobs that are not “family friendly”. As a result, organizations that offer flexible work schedules, temporary part-time arrangements, or at home-work arrangements produced less stress for employees and greater organizational commitment (Rosen & Lovelace, 1994). This need for flexibility in work environments (for both men and women) has been noted in other studies as well (Coolidge & D’Angelo, 1994; Rose, 1996). Rose (1996) found a flexible work environment was listed as the number one change that would help employees better manage their work and personal lives.
Summary

Despite the expansion of women-owned businesses over the past few decades, the literature examining the experiences of these individuals has not kept pace with their accomplishments. Although consulting in the fitness and sport industry is growing, the literature is limited to prescriptive accounts of how to become a consultant, how to develop client relationships, how to deal with resistance, and how to develop modes of influence (Bellman, 1990; Gray, 1985; Holz, 1985; Kubr, 1986; Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986; Nevis, 1987; Shenson, 1990). This literature has not directly addressed consulting within the fitness and sport industry, nor has it examined how gender relations have influenced the individuals experiences.

While entrepreneurship is being championed by government, Young and Richards (1992) warn that entrepreneurship may actually be a form of marginality that distances women from more stable forms of employment. According to Bull and Willard (1993), the literature on small business entrepreneurship focuses on five main areas: definitions of entrepreneurship, traits of successful entrepreneurs, strategies for business success, methods of forming new business ventures, and the effects of environmental factors on business development. These studies provide some important information but ignore the dynamics of the process.

Due to the weaknesses in the current literature available on small business entrepreneurship and consulting in the fitness and sport industry, research in other areas was also utilized to inform this study (e.g., feminist theory, gender relations in organizations literature, and work, leisure, and family literature). A variety of feminist theories were utilized to better recognize the diversity of experiences that exist for women consultants, the notion of privilege...
associated with being a consultant, and the alternative methods and strategies the women have adopted to operate their businesses.

The literature pertaining to gender relations in organizations highlighted the importance of examining the influence gender relations have on people's business experiences. Acker (1992) provided a framework to understand how gender relations are instituted in the work place and how they are maintained through a gendered organizational logic. This logic is perpetuated by society and is difficult to escape. Some individuals who have escaped this logic have developed alternative organizational structures (Martin, 1990).

Another body of literature utilized to inform this study was the research pertaining to work, leisure, and family. This area of research helped to recognize that much of the traditional literature has created a false dichotomy between professional work and the rest of their lives (Gallos, 1989). Therefore, it was important to include the women's family styles and significant relationships when examining their business experiences. As well, Harrington and Dawson (1995) suggested that more attention also needs to be given as to how leisure fits in to daily life.

By including these additional areas when examining the bodies of literature pertaining to small business entrepreneurship and consulting in the fitness and sport industry, a better understanding of the entrepreneurial experiences of women consultants was obtained.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research methodology to “discover important questions, processes and relationships” underlying the experiences of women fitness and sport consultants, “not to test them” (Marshall and Rossman 1989, p. 43). The methodology for this study was based on a qualitative research design framework developed by Marshall and Rossman (1989). Their framework considers the following dimensions: sample selection, data collection techniques, data analysis procedures, reciprocity, time line, and ethics.

Sample Selection

Definition of the Population

Women consultants in the fitness and sport industry in the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia served as the study population. As there are no formal professional association specifically for fitness and sport consultants, other organizations such as the British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association, Promotion Plus, the Young Women’s Christian Association, and Sport BC were approached for names of women fitness and sport consultants in the Greater Vancouver area. A list of 38 names was subsequently produced but it was not possible to determine what the total population of fitness and sport consultants was.

Criterion-based Sample Selection

Criterion-based sample selection was utilized to ensure that a diverse group of women consultants were selected from the list (Goetze & LeCompte, 1984). The sample selection criteria for this study included:
1. women who currently had a consulting business in the fitness and sport industry, or who had previously been in the industry,

2. women of different marital status and family situation,

3. where possible, women who operated their consulting business as their primary means of economic livelihood.

The first criteria was chosen to examine how gender relations influence the experiences of women who have gone out of business. The second criteria was designed to ensure diversity in terms of marital and family situation. Finally, to fully understand the nature of consulting, a decision was made to focus on full-time consultants.

The women from the original list were then contacted to determine if they matched these criteria. Thirteen women were subsequently selected, nine of whom were currently consultants, four of whom had left fitness and sport consulting.

Research Techniques

Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis were the research techniques used to gather the data (Adler & Adler, 1994; Anderson & Jack, 1991; Bernard, 1994b; Reinharz, 1992; Wilson, 1977; Wolcott, 1985).

Making Contact

Each of the thirteen women were sent an introductory letter about the study including a consent form (see Appendix A). The women were then contacted by phone to ascertain their willingness to be involved and to arrange an appropriate time and place for an interview. All of the women were extremely enthusiastic about the study and all agreed to participate.
Interviews

One on one interviews were conducted to obtain information directly from the women about their experiences as consultants, using their own words and descriptions. Initial interviews were held at the women’s convenience to answer the questions listed in Appendix B. These interviews ranged in length from one hour to one and a half hours depending on the amount of detail provided by the women.

There are several types of interviewing techniques which range from casual conversations to more formal structured ones (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). In this study, semi-structured interviewing was utilized because the researcher was interested in answering certain questions but also wanted to pursue interesting topics that arose. Therefore, the interview questions were asked in an open-ended way to allow the women time to think, reflect, and respond in the way they wished to. As well, other questions were raised by the women and were added to the interview protocol. Following the interviews, the tape recordings were transcribed into the computer.

Reflections on the Interview Process

I found that having previously conducted interviews and observations with two women in similar areas of work for another course project allowed me to become familiar with some of the discourse used by consultants in the fitness and sport field.

Much of the initial anxiety caused by entrance into a “new” research site was reduced by the women’s overwhelming enthusiasm for the study. They talked about the need to find out
about each other’s experiences, the need to meet other women in fitness and sport consulting, and their concerns about the lack of information currently available to them. As the process unfolded, it became easier to follow different leads touched on by the women. I was able to prompt them with questions, such as, “In what way?” or “What do you mean by that?”.

In the transcriptions from my early interviews, my questions tended to be derived directly from the interview questions listed in Appendix B. However, subsequent interviews contained probes about additional areas of information which I felt would further enhance my understanding of the women’s experiences. I was thereby able to attain much “richer” data from the interviews.

The women in this study seemed to be comfortable with me as a researcher because I obtained a large amount of very detailed information from them including a variety of interesting and sometimes personal stories. Their comfort with my role as a researcher was also evident as none of them chose to turn off the tape recorder during the interviews, although they were given the opportunity to do so. In fact, they seemed to be very enthusiastic and willing to pass on information about their businesses and their experiences. As well, they all seemed to enjoy being interviewed as it provided them the chance to share some of their business experiences with others. They also felt that this type of research was needed as they had very little information to draw upon. In terms of the research design, most of the women enjoyed participating in the one on one interviews first because it allowed them to talk about their situations in depth. The validation focus groups were viewed as an opportunity to share experiences with others in similar situations.
Validation Focus Groups

Focus groups provide a valuable opportunity for research participants to communicate with each other as well as the researcher (Bernard, 1994b). In this study, the focus groups were a valuable validation tool that ensured the themes derived from the interviews accurately represented the experiences of the women fitness and sport consultants. After the initial interviews, two focus group sessions were held to ensure small group discussions and validate the themes that had emerged.

The focus groups were originally set up with five women attending per session. Three women were unable to attend either session due to previous work commitments. However, for the first session one woman had to cancel due to illness, and in the second session one woman canceled because she had recently given birth. As well, on the morning of the second session, two other women phoned and canceled because they had just received last minute consulting contracts. In the end, 4 women attended the first session and 2 attended the second. All of the women (n=7) who did not attend either focus group were interviewed a second time by telephone to ensure that the themes derived from the initial interviews accurately represented their business experiences. The follow-up telephone interviews ranged in length from half an hour to one hour.

The focus group sessions started out with a continental breakfast and time for socializing. Then, the researcher provided a general overview of the subjects’ backgrounds followed by the focus group questions listed in Appendix C. The questions were designed to determine if the themes that arose during the research process were indeed relevant to the women, to obtain a better understanding of each theme, and to determine if other significant themes had been
overlooked. As well, a framework that emerged from the data analysis process to capture the nature of consulting was presented so that feedback could be obtained.

The focus groups were tape recorded, following consent from the women, and were later transcribed with field notes and head notes into the computer.

Reflections on Validation Focus Groups

When some of the women canceled their attendance at the focus group sessions, I became concerned and doubted whether I would be able to successfully carry out this phase of the study. These women had been very enthusiastic about having the chance to meet other women consultants and expressed their disappointment at their inability to attend. In fact, they were all quick to reschedule individual meetings with me so I could still obtain their input. I realized that the scheduling difficulty in having these women all attend one of the two focus group sessions provided a glimpse of the busy lives they led as consultants.

The focus group sessions proved to be very useful and provided a unique opportunity for the researcher to validate and confirm the themes that emerged and allowed for a greater understanding of the meaning of each theme. All of the women agreed with the themes as presented and provided insights into an additional theme about social isolation that had not specifically emerged during the interviews.

Having the opportunity to discuss the framework with the women allowed the researcher to ensure it accurately reflected the nature of consulting. The women refined the framework by moving some of the themes around to better illustrate the complex and cyclical nature of the process.
I was particularly interested to note the dynamics of the group sessions. Business people are depicted in the literature as being competitors, yet the data revealed that these women were very interested in working with and supporting one another. Throughout the sessions, the women who had been in business for a longer period of time were constantly providing helpful “hints” and suggestions to the less experienced consultants. After the sessions, the women exchanged business cards with the promise to keep in touch. Some of them even exchanged business opportunities, offering to contract out services to one another.

**Participant Observation**

Participant observation is defined by Bernard (1994a) as getting close to people and making them feel comfortable so that observations and a record can be made of their lives. Observations were recorded during the initial interviews, most of which were held at the women’s work setting (n=9). All of the women (n=13) in this study operated their businesses out of their homes. Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview all of the women at their place of business for a number of reasons. Two of the women had their home-based businesses located outside of the Vancouver area and two other women were constantly traveling and wanted to be interviewed at a more convenient central location. As a result, two of the interviews were conducted over the phone and two were held at restaurants along the most frequently traveled routes of the consultants.

There are several types of observational roles which can be used, ranging from complete observer to complete participant (Atkinson & Hammersley 1994; Fine, 1994; Reinharz, 1992). The complete observer role involves no direct contact between the researcher and the subjects.
The researcher observes what is going on from a distant position. The complete participant, on the other hand, involves interaction between the researcher and the subjects and therefore allows the researcher to share some of the experiences of the subject. As the observations were conducted either during the interviews or immediately after (while being given a “tour” of the office space), the researcher adopted a semi-complete participant role. A more complete participant role could have been adopted if the time frame for the study was expanded and it had been possible to observe the women actually engaged in fitness and sport consulting. It was felt that the latter would be too invasive and that it was possible to address the research questions through the other research techniques without interfering in their work.

The semi-complete participant role allowed for interaction between the researcher and the subject and, therefore, enabled the subject to share some additional discussions with the researcher. This role also fits with the feminist goal of researchers “integrating themselves into their work and eliminating the distinctions between the subject and the object” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 69).

Participant observation as defined by Marshall and Rossman (1989) involves, “the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study” (p. 79). In this study, observations were used to document information about the office setting, objects included within the office, and how the office fit with the house space. As well, field notes were used to document non-verbal behaviours, interactions between the subject and researcher during the interview process, and reflections about the research process.
Scratch notes, field notes, head notes, and journal writing were kept to document observations (Sanjek, 1990). Scratch notes (e.g., key words, phrases, feelings) were jotted into a notebook while on a “tour” of the office space, as well as during or immediately after the interview. Next, the scratch notes were transformed into more detailed field notes within a 24 hour period and entered into a computer. These field notes only reflected what the researcher had seen or heard during the process. An attempt was made to separate the researcher’s “feelings” from the process by allowing these to come out in head notes which were entered into a journal and subsequently transcribed into a computer file. Due to the large amount of information generated by the field and head notes, separate directories were kept for observations, interviews, documents, and general notes. This made it easier to keep this information separate when transferring it to Q.S.R. NUD.IST for data analysis.

**Reflections on Participant Observation**

Over the course of the research process I found that my field notes became more detailed as I became less nervous about entering the various research sites. As a result, my observations from interviews conducted later in the research process tended to have more information about the women and their businesses. As I was not able to conduct observations of four of the women’s businesses, I had less information about these women’s business environments. The information I was able to obtain from the other women allowed me to paint a better picture of their business setting for myself. As well, I found that I wanted to know more information about these women, such as how they presented themselves and delivered their services. Although the
women described in detail the nature of what their work entailed, I found myself wanting to see it personally.

**Document Analysis**

Another data collection technique used in this study was the analysis of documents relevant to the women's business. During the interviews, the women were asked for any written information they had related to their businesses. These documents included: brochures, pamphlets, and business cards. Field notes were written about what the contents of these documents included and why some of the women did not have any.

**Reflections on Document Analysis**

These documents provided insight into how the women promoted their businesses. However, only five of the women had these documents and the rest of them had not yet developed this marketing material. As will be discussed in the results section, the women relied more on networking to promote their businesses.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis began during the data collection process to allow the researcher to "check" or "test" emerging themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). These themes were, at first, broad and through the continued data analysis process became tighter and more concise (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The following steps, as outlined by Marshall and Rossman (1989), were utilized in this study: i) the data was organized; ii) categories, themes, and patterns were generated; and iii) emergent explanations for the data were sought.
Organization of the Data

This step involved reviewing the data on an ongoing basis to ensure the researcher was familiar with it and to help refresh her memory of what occurred at the beginning of the data collection process (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). The data was inputted into the computer in a raw form and analyzed to develop profiles of the women, and to draw out general broad themes that represented their experiences. Emerging themes and subthemes were noted in the margins of the printed data and became more succinct as the process continued. As well, timed writings were used to allow the researcher to draw out further patterns and themes which seemed to be arising. The timed writings involved writing continuously for a period of approximately ten minutes on the major themes that were arising to allow the researchers thoughts and feelings to come forward. As well, this strategy enabled the researcher to start drawing out similarities and differences among these themes. The data was then converted and transported into a qualitative data analysis software package entitled Q.S.R. NUD.IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing). This program was used to manage the data, search for patterns, and organize the data under emerging subthemes.

Generation of Categories, Themes, and Patterns

Once the general themes and subthemes were developed, they were continuously refined through the use of Q.S.R. NUD.IST to allow the researcher to search for patterns, similarities, and differences across cases. Marshall and Rossman (1989) consider this the most rewarding phases of the data analysis process and the researcher found this to be true also because:

Identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and setting together is the most intellectually
The qualitative researcher was not searching for “exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories”, but rather for categories which best described the subjects of her study (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 116).

Q.S.R. NUD.IST, a qualitative computer software package, enabled the researcher to segment and index the data (line by line) into the emerging themes or, as the program refers to them, nodes. These nodes were displayed by the computer in the form of a tree that looked very similar to an organizational chart (see Appendix D). This program also allowed the researcher to transfer nodes around and link them with other nodes so that they were in a more meaningful position. This strategy enabled quick and easy access to the data that had been indexed beneath each node.

The data was examined both in terms of the uniqueness of each consultant (or what is termed within-case displays), and also for the similarities and differences among all of the women (or cross-case displays). One of the benefits of doing cross-case analysis is that it improves transferability by allowing the researcher to examine whether or not the women shared similar experiences.

Searching for Emergent Explanations

The next phase of analysis involved searching for emergent explanations and testing them against any “negative instances of the patterns” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 118). This was done to ensure that the diverse nature of the women’s experiences was portrayed. The researcher
had to be open and flexible to alternative explanations that emerged. This process was aided by the use of the validation focus groups. By taking the emerging themes and presenting them back to the women for feedback, it was possible to test directly whether they represented the women's reality or whether they were merely interpretations by the researcher.

Standards for Judging the Quality of Conclusions

The traditional criteria of generalizability, reliability, validity, and objectivity for judging the quality of quantitative research are not relevant for qualitative inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have identified parallel criteria for qualitative research including: transferability, dependability, credibility, and confirmability.

Transferability

The degree of transferability depends upon the degree to which two different contexts are congruent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The more congruent the two situations, the more applicable some of the original context may be. Congruence is not established by the researcher, but by the reader. Therefore, it was important for the researcher to carefully outline all of the characteristics of the context under examination (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The context of this study consisted of women fitness and sport consultants in the Greater Vancouver area who fulfilled the three criteria outlined earlier (i.e., women both in and out of the industry, women of different marital status and family situation, and (where possible) women who operated businesses on a full time basis).

Dependability

Dependability is concerned with whether or not similar findings are found across different types of data. The dependability of the results can be assessed through the use of triangulation.
Triangulating “supports a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, do not contradict it” (Miles & Huberman, 1989, p. 266). The types of triangulation utilized in this study included the data sources (e.g., persons, times, and places) and the methods (e.g., observations, interviews, document analysis, and focus groups) (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Credibility**

Credibility “lies at the core of evaluating ethnography” (Sanjek, 1990, p. 395) and addresses, “does it say what I claim it does” (Agar, 1980 cited in Sanjek, 1990, p. 395). Sanjek (1990) contends that whenever a decision or choice is made during the research process, the researcher must be careful to state what decisions she makes. As a result, the researcher was careful to document any significant judgments made during the research process through the use of field notes, head notes, and journal entries to ensure that the ethnographer did not filter out important information (Sanjek, 1990). For example, the researcher decided to focus more on the themes relevant to women consultants in order to better understand the nature of consulting, rather than to focus on the individuals’ stories. However, some filtering had to occur over the course of the study to reduce the data set to a manageable size. As well, the validation focus groups helped to improve credibility by providing additional data collection opportunity over an extended period of time to allow for the process of filtering to occur.

**Confirmability**

The validation focus groups were also used to confirm the data by allowing informants to provide feedback on the general themes and typology that emerged as the data analysis process evolved (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This method provided the subjects with the opportunity to
elaborate upon or clarify the researcher’s initial interpretation of the findings. Validation interviews also fit with the feminist approach adopted in this study. They were aimed at minimizing the divisions between the researcher and subject and ensuring the voices of the women were heard (Olesen, 1994).

Reciprocity

Women gave their time to be interviewed to improve the researcher’s understanding of their experiences. As Marshall and Rossman (1989) note, it is only fair that the researcher gave them something back or reciprocated with some appropriate gesture. A copy of the research results will be given to those women who would like them so they can compare their experiences with those of other women consultants. However, confidentiality will be ensured as pseudonyms will be used to represent the women. This seems to be especially significant to these women as both the literature review and this study show that these women often feel isolated and are interested in obtaining more information about the issues which are relevant to them. As well, a catered breakfast was provided during the focus group sessions to thank the women for their involvement in the study. These sessions also provided them with an unexpected networking opportunity.

Time Line

The time frame of this study was a span of eight months (see Appendix E). The observations and interviews were conducted over a three month period on different days of the week. This ensured that a more accurate representation of the women’s experiences was obtained by allowing some time between interviews. The initial phases of data analysis were commenced
while the interviews were still occurring. Although, data analysis was expected to continue only for another two months following data collection, an additional month was utilized to allow the researcher to further reflect upon the developing themes.

Another unexpected “delay” occurred in the research process during May and June when the themes were being validated. As several of the women were unable to attend the two focus group sessions, additional time was required for follow-up interviews. The data analysis and interviews ended when data obtained became redundant and the themes being derived seemed to accurately represent the experiences of the women (Patton, 1990).

Ethics

Ethical considerations were maintained by ensuring that the appropriate guidelines set out by the UBC Behavioural Sciences Committee for Research and Other Studies Involving Human Subjects were closely followed (see Appendix F).
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS AND ANALYSES

The results are presented in the following sections: the background of the women and their businesses, the nature of consulting, strategies used to keep their businesses viable, fitting consulting into their daily lives, and meanings of success. The way in which gender relations underpinned each of these areas is also discussed.

Background

The Women

The background of the women involved in this study in terms of their age, race or ethnicity, education, family situation, and reasons for getting into or out of consulting in the fitness and sport industry are presented in Table 1. The women ranged in age from their late twenties to early fifties with the majority being in their 30's. They were all Caucasians and had pursued some post-secondary education either in physical education or business administration. As these women were able to afford a higher education, it could be assumed they were all from the middle to upper class backgrounds. As well, all of the women were physically fit and engaged in regular physical activity, either through their profession or in addition to it. The women consultants in this study belonged to a privileged group of individuals in terms of age, race, class, education, and physical fitness.

The aspect which differentiated the women in this study was their marital status and family situation. One of the women was single, two were living with a partner, six were married with no children, and four were married and had children. Another way in which the women differed was their reasons for entering or exiting the consulting industry. The women cited a
combination of reasons why they started their consulting businesses which included: the loss of a
full time job (n=2), pursuing an interest in fitness (n=5), being offered the opportunity by clients
(n=2), having specialized expertise to offer (n=5), and/or the opportunity to obtain a higher
income than would otherwise be possible in the fitness and sport industry (n=6).

For those women who had exited fitness and sport consulting, the economic instability
associated with operating as an independent and the stress caused by competition in the industry
were cited as the main factors causing them to seek employment elsewhere.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Type of Business</th>
<th>Stage of Growth</th>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Clients</th>
<th>Nature of Contracts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>Personal training, home-based, FT</td>
<td>Entering 4th year</td>
<td>*trains and evaluates instructors, evaluates fitness purchases, develops and presents conferences *conducts lectures, classes, and personal training</td>
<td>*3 major contracts with health and fitness organizations, some individual clients (2 of these are with female client-based orgs.)</td>
<td>*three ongoing and a few short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Fitness and gender consulting, home-based, FT</td>
<td>1 year and a few months</td>
<td>*physically training women to achieve goals (e.g., police exam, fitness inst.), gender equity and valuing diversity in sexual orientation workshops,</td>
<td>*one main contract with a fitness organization that downsized, some individual contracts (works mostly with women)</td>
<td>*one ongoing and other short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Exercise therapy and personal training, home-based, FT</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>*works with rehabilitation team to develop programs for clients, some personal training, instructor workshops</td>
<td>*one main contract with rehab facility, other contracts with individual organizations.</td>
<td>*one ongoing and other short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Personal training, home-based, FT</td>
<td>2 1/2 years</td>
<td>*provides a variety of personal training services, but gravitates towards more lifestyle consulting</td>
<td>*variety of clients: including those with injuries, those of all ages, and men and women</td>
<td>*variety of contracts depending on what the clients want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Yoga instructor/alternative health, home-based, FT</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>*yoga instruction, individual body work and unofficial massage, currently developing aromatherapy spritzers to market and individual aromatherapy courses</td>
<td>*variety of clients (ages 20-60) interested in reducing stress or seeking alternative health</td>
<td>*has ongoing contracts with recreation centres for yoga classes, and other contracts with individual clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>Personal training (Size plus and deconditioned adults), home-based, FT</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>*developed and distributed an exercise video, instructs fitness classes, personal trains, lectures on small business, and the importance of fitness for women reentering the work force</td>
<td>*size plus and deconditioned adults</td>
<td>*has contracts with broad range (7 weeks to 3 years), also some short-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>Women and coaching, home-based, FT</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>*offers advice from main contract to other orgs., assists sports orgs. in developing plans to promote women in coaching</td>
<td>*sport organizations who are looking to improve chances for women in coaching</td>
<td>*one main contract, other contracts with individual sport organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: FT=Full time  
PT=Part time
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Type of Business</th>
<th>Stage of Growth</th>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Clients</th>
<th>Nature of Consulting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Transportation demand and employee</td>
<td>*full time for 5 months</td>
<td>*develops bike plans and facilities, also interested in convincing</td>
<td>*works with engineering firms for municipalities and regional</td>
<td>*aligned herself with several engineering firms to ensure obtains contract, contracts have a specific beg. and end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>management, home-based, FT</td>
<td>*first consulting job was 11 years ago</td>
<td>corporations about addressing employees transporation needs</td>
<td>districts, also interested in working on own or with a group to address corporations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Personal training (prefers outdoor</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>*started training aquafit instructors, moved to conducting workshops and finally evolved into personal training, now has variety of workshops (e.g., posture, personal growth, aqua fit)</td>
<td>*variety of clients but predominantly women ages 35-60</td>
<td>*contracts with clients tend to be ongoing (usually starts with 12 sessions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>training with “street” equipment),</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>home-based, FT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia.</td>
<td>Organizational development (effectiveness), home-based, FT</td>
<td>*4 years</td>
<td>*training for boards of directors, conflict resolution, and identification of issues, now also is working in policy model of governance (clarifying boards and staff roles and responsibilities)</td>
<td>*almost entirely in the non-profit sector because that is where her expertise lies</td>
<td>*contracts are specific and have a beginning and an end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Corporate fitness consulting, home-based, FT</td>
<td>*full time for 7 years</td>
<td>*while consulting she did instruction, personal training and administration, the administration has carried over to present</td>
<td>*before contracted out to a corporation and worked with a variety of clients, currently operates a medical practice with her partner</td>
<td>*previously had one main contract with a fitness org.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*first consulting job was 16 years ago</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shandia</td>
<td>Organizational development, home-based, FT</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>*presents workshops and seminars on leadership, time management, and long/short term planning, developed policy and procedures manuals, also has small business with partner (e.g., bed &amp; breakfast registry and sport related travel)</td>
<td>*currently works with non-profit fitness orgs. but is considering moving away from this area</td>
<td>*her contracts have had a specific beginning and an end to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Organizational development and training, home-based, FT</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>*used to develop communication skills for fitness instructors and businesses (also some body sculpting), now concentrates on businesses (designs, develops, and</td>
<td>*previously conducted contracts with fitness industry now mostly outside the industry (e.g., profit, public, and government)</td>
<td>*variety of contracts depending on clients, some ongoing, some short-term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Their Businesses

Background on the women’s businesses in terms of the types of consulting, stage of business growth, services offered, clients serviced, and the types of contracts are presented in Table 2.

Types of Consulting

The types of consulting that the women were engaged in the fitness and sport industry included: personal training, women in coaching, organizational development, transportation demand management, and alternative health. An interesting point highlighted by the women during the first focus group session was that they were careful not to label their businesses as “consulting”. The reason for this was explained by Barbara who noted:

_Recently when I was in Ottawa and someone asked me what I do and when I said, “I’m a consultant,” she said, “Oh, the new euphemism for the unemployed”._

As a result, the women explained they referred to themselves as: ”_the President and CEO of my company that I started”, “I’m the director of my company”, “I’m the Principal of my company_” or they simply referred to their company by name.

All of the women’s businesses were operated primarily out of the home, although the actual consulting involved travel to numerous sites. This created some advantages and disadvantages in terms of career choice for the women. The main benefits of home-based employment or teleworking cited were: low start up costs, income tax advantages, and flexible work schedules. Barbara highlighted the importance of low start up costs when she commented that:
Home-based means that you don’t have to have a lot of money to start-up, you can usually start with a back bedroom, your own phone and fax line, and your own computer and its only yours. So, I mean, you’re justified right?

The disadvantages of home-based consulting included never getting a break from home or office work, having to schedule family around work, financial instability, and not having any pension plan or employee benefits. Shelly highlighted the drawbacks during her interview when she said:

Working at home is a bit of a drawback, and you have to weigh the benefits of doing that. The drawbacks would be, you come home you need to do laundry, and in your office the fax is going, and where do you start. So, you are continually bombarded and you don’t sort of really get a break to go home and relax from work because the work is always there and chugging along.

One solution which the women felt enabled them to better disconnect work and home was building boundaries in their home environment (e.g., bookcases, walls).

Stage of Business Growth

The stage of growth of the women’s businesses ranged from five months to ten years with the majority being around 3 or 4 years old: Stage of business growth influenced both the strategies the women used and the challenges they faced as will be noted in the section on the nature of consulting.

Services Offered

The women in this study offered a wide range of services which differed for the most part based on the type of business they operated. For example, most of the women in organizational
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Entry Factors</th>
<th>Exit Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.A. (business admin. and industrial relations), getting into a course on how to be self-employed</td>
<td>Married, no children</td>
<td>*left an executive director position with a non-profit sport org. to work on own, had been conducting some consulting while at previous job</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.P.E., BCRFA Level III trainer, personal trainer, STFA, CPR, NLS &amp; other swim instruction cert.</td>
<td>Married, pregnant with first child</td>
<td>*tried two partnerships (e.g., leased a hotel fitness facility, tried training fitness instructors), but found she wanted to work on her own</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>40's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.A. (minor in Human Resource Management)</td>
<td>Married, 2 children (ages 19 and 20)</td>
<td>*employed full time in a senior management position in a non-profit fitness org., found expertise was sought by others</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.Sc. (kinesiology), fitness instructor certification</td>
<td>Married, no children</td>
<td>*previously job was in marketing but could not afford fitness membership so became certified and started teaching</td>
<td>*had the opportunity to leave stress and competition of industry to start a medical practice with her partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shandia</td>
<td>50's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.P.E., M.Ed., M.B.A., 4 years towards Ph.D. (P.E.), NCCP Level III theory course conductor</td>
<td>Married, no children</td>
<td>*volunteering for non-profit org. which bid for a tournament, quit a full time job to organize it</td>
<td>*currently trying to decide whether or not to continue consulting and if so whether or not to stay in the fitness and sport industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>business related courses (continuing ed.), previous job as branch sales manager in a bank, YWCA fitness instructor cert.</td>
<td>Married, no children</td>
<td>*was interested in weight training and wanted to combine business with fitness</td>
<td>*her work in the fitness industry was always a side line: found fitness businesses to be unresponsive and were unable to meet her financial goals (still contracts out to fitness industry occasionally)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Entry Factors</td>
<td>Exit Factors</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.Sc. (SFU), Dance Diploma, ACE Instructor, BCRPA Level III trainer, Registered Fitness Appraiser</td>
<td>Married, no children</td>
<td>*motivated to be her own boss, needed a second career after leaving pro. dance, had previous success presenting fitness workshops</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.Ed. (major in PE), YWCA trainer of fitness leaders, BCRPA cert.</td>
<td>Living with same sex partner</td>
<td>*lost full time job, but had thought about starting own business before</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.Sc. (kinesiology), health and fitness cert., STFA cert.</td>
<td>Married, one child (girl age 2 1/2 yrs.)</td>
<td>*lost full time job, but had thought about consulting before</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>20's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Diploma (ex. science), courses at SFU (kinesiology), ACE cert., BCRPA Wt. Training Level I &amp; II</td>
<td>Living with opposite sex partner</td>
<td>*seized the opportunity because bosses started to subcontract to instructors</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.A. (english &amp; psychology), art courses, ongoing yoga and transformational psychology</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>*psychic told her to teach yoga, had previous experience in business ownership</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>40's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>BCRPA personal trainer and exercise to music fitness certification</td>
<td>Married, 2 children (teenage boys)</td>
<td>*realized she was in a size plus phobic society and wanted to start a program to improve people's attitudes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.P.E., 2 years of Sport Med. Science, other courses in areas of business weakness (e.g., accounting)</td>
<td>Married, 2 children (boys ages 3 and 6 1/2 yrs.)</td>
<td>*had wanted to take time off and be home with her family: approached by a women's network about developing a coaching program, appreciated her work and kept her on</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
development provided variations on the same theme of organizing, developing, and presenting workshops. The aspect which differed was the type of workshops presented and the information provided.

Some of the women perceived their services to be different from male consultants in the industry because they believed women consultants were more sensitive to client needs and more intuitive about human dynamics. Jill explained that:

*I think [being a woman] makes me more sensitive to my clients and in today's day and age, I think people want that sensitivity, better listening skills. And there is a time to support people and a time to push people and having that intuitive sense kind of helps.*

**Clients Serviced**

The unique niche the women created for their businesses was based on the different clients they targeted. For example, the personal trainers' services varied in terms of the types of clients they serviced (e.g., individuals with injuries, deconditioned adults, women). By developing specific services or a specific client base, the women did not have to compete as much with each other for clients. Instead, they were more able to share information and advice with other consultants about what has or has not worked for them.

Some gender related concerns that arose for the women during interactions with clients included body image and the fact that clients had gender preferences in terms of whom they hired. Anne felt that women consultants were constantly trying to perfect their appearance because they associated getting business with presenting themselves “as fit”. She noted the irony of adopting unhealthy practices to achieve this goal when she commented that:
Now when I sit back and look at everyone I know in the industry, I can’t honestly say that I don’t know anyone that doesn’t over exercise if that’s the least of their problems. And they do all kinds of other weird things too. I’m serious. I look at these people and I used to think, well that person’s relatively healthy and then you realize that well, they never eat dinner, they’ll exercise 2 or 3 hours a day.

The frustrating part of this, she explained, was that often she saw “the fit” individuals receive the contracts and clients, while other consultants who were not necessarily as “fit” looking but who had greater knowledge or expertise did not.

Another way body image affected the women consultants, which emerged during the first focus group validation session, was that how they dressed influenced how they were perceived by clients. Sylvia commented that she had attended a conference on how to dress carefully in a business suit in order to make the appropriate first impression when conducting organizational development consulting with corporations. She noted:

Shallow as it may seem, if [nothing else] it allows you to get into the safe zone, so you can alert them with your brilliance.

Barbara reinforced the importance of appearance and making an impression on clients when she commented:

A good example is that I had my husband say to me, well where are you going to leave your bike, where are you going to change? And I said well, I am the bicycle person. I should be able to ride up, but there are occasions when you do have to think, how much is this going to compromise my credibility with these people that don’t know who I am.

This comment is even more significant as it highlights the undermining nature that the consultant’s support network can have upon their body image. By pointing out that Barbara must
“dress to impress” and cannot simply be herself, her partner is further perpetuating the stereotype that women must “manage their gender”.

Body image was closely tied to the content of services provided by the personal trainers because many of their clients were very concerned about their own body image. As a result, the consultants dealt with psychological issues relating to body image in their consulting sessions. This finding was confirmed during the validation focus group sessions when the personal trainers commented that the majority of their clients had some type of body image problem. As a result, it was necessary to be very careful about creating a realistic and positive body image for them. Jane preferred to say, “I’m going to help you fit into your body” and not “I’m going to make you lose weight and look like Madonna”. As a result, Jill explained that having some kind of counseling skills provided the consultant with a great advantage. However, she was careful to explain that it was important for the consultant to realize when their clients’ issues around body image were extreme and they needed to be referred to a psychologist.

The other gender related issue was the perception that some clients preferred female fitness and sport consultants, while others preferred males. Although some of the women consultant worked with both male and female clients, Table 2 reveals that many of the women were working primarily with female clients. Norma felt that being a woman had allowed her to contract out to two female client-based fitness organizations. She explained that because many of her clients at these organizations were dealing with very deep-seated issues (e.g., being pregnant, having miscarried), they sometimes had emotional outbursts. Her clients have told her they would not feel comfortable having these reactions in front of a male trainer.
As well, Norma commented that some of her male clients preferred male trainers because they felt that a “guy with cut muscles” would be more of an expert than a woman who did not have the same shape. Jane felt that, among some clients, there was a belief that men provide “tougher” workouts than women, thus women had to work harder to earn respect. On the other hand, Jane felt that her smaller size was an advantage when personal training because it reduced some of the competition between clients and trainer.

Types of Contracts

The final area related to the background of the women’s businesses is the type of contracts offered. The women offered a variety of services to their clients, based primarily on their individual interests. These ranged from short term contracts that could be simply a one-time orientation to a weight room, to long term contracts that developed an ongoing relationship between consultant and client lasting several years. Contracts with organizations, as opposed to individuals, had more of an ongoing nature.

Definitions of Entrepreneurship and Consulting

To understand the nature of consulting as a form of entrepreneurship, women were asked for their definitions of these terms. The term entrepreneurship was initially difficult for the women to define. This was because many of them did not see themselves as entrepreneurs, but merely as being self-employed. Kim noted:

*I never would have [considered myself to be an entrepreneur] until you posed this question to me.*
The following themes arose when they interpreted the meanings of the term based on their experiences: “starting new things”, “doing the same stuff differently”, “taking risks”, “starting your own business”, and “hiring employees”.

“Starting New Things” and/or “Doing the Same Stuff Differently”

One area where there was some debate amongst the women was whether an entrepreneur is someone who develops a new product and/or service, or is doing the same thing that has been done before, but differently. Kim commented, after thinking about it, that an entrepreneur could simply be someone offering, “a product or service that has a growing need in our culture” (e.g., education related to health and fitness). This notion of requiring a tangible product to be considered entrepreneurial was also an issue for Lisa. She considered one of her friends to be more entrepreneurial than her because she had a business that delivered a specific product. However, several of the women commented that they felt entrepreneurs were able to do “the same stuff differently” by adopting a new approach or method that had not been thought of before. Jane also felt that it was necessary to be “thinking of new ideas”, while Shandia added the notion of “continually looking forward”. As a result, the portrait of an entrepreneur that evolved was an individual who was able to come up with new ideas, different solutions and would never allow themselves to become “stagnant” (Shelly).

Taking Risks

Another main theme linked to the definition of entrepreneurship was the notion of taking risks. Lisa commented, “I mean there’s always a risk and to be an entrepreneur, I think you have to take risks”. She believed that entrepreneurs do not always know what the end result will be,
they just know where they want to go. Denise noted that when she first started her business it had her “running and jumping off cliffs” without first assessing the economic realities of the venture. Now, she believes:

\[
\text{I've learned to put out a parachute. And that means I assess situations, I do my math. I see if its going to be financially feasible for me to do this and, if not, am I willing to take a chance on this?}
\]

Anne felt that taking risks was a necessary aspect of entrepreneurship, but she did not see herself as a risk taker. Instead, she believed her partner was much more willing to take risks and together they provided a nice balance to the business.

“Starting Your Own Business”

A third theme included in the women’s definitions of entrepreneurship was the notion of self-employment or, using their words, “starting your own business”. Alice noted that she felt like an entrepreneur when other people (interested in becoming self-employed) approached her for advice. Jane and Anne commented that they felt like entrepreneurs because they had opened their own businesses and did not require supervision.

“Hiring Employees”

The final theme related to entrepreneurship was being able to hire employees. This was a concern addressed by two of the women who felt they were not as entrepreneurial as other people they knew because they had not yet hired employees. Kim noted that she would not have previously considered herself to be an entrepreneur because she works on her own. As well, Lisa identified a friend, who also owned her own business but had hired employees, as being more entrepreneurial than herself.
The Nature of Consulting in the Fitness and Sport Industry

In this section, the results describing the nature of consulting in the fitness and sport industry are provided. To illustrate the stages of business growth, the women helped to construct a framework and situated their businesses within it.

The Process

The process of consulting involved five different stages: making contact with clients, dealing with possible rejection, negotiating contracts, providing the service, and attempting to secure repeat business. Making contact involved determining who potential clients were and selling the services the consultants had to offer. All of the women, except for Shelly, operated their businesses on a local basis. Shelly, however, conducted the majority of her work through a national organization. For the most part, relationship building and networking were crucial to getting contracts. Attending conferences and meetings, following up through referrals, and calling clients directly were the methods used to make contacts. The clients included a wide range that differed depending on the type of consulting offered. For example, the women in organizational development tended to work more with companies, while the personal trainers and woman in alternative health operated on more of an individual basis. A similarity among the clients was that the consultants commented a “consultant-client fit” was important to ensure that both parties benefited as much as possible from the exchange process.

“Being rejected” was seen as a normal part of doing business that could lead to other contracts in the future. Contracts were negotiated to serve the needs of clients. Longer term contracts were desirable because they provided some stability. The majority of the women had at
least one long term contract that tended to be with the organization they had previously worked with on a full-time basis. Once relationships had been initiated, the consultants worked hard to develop and maintain them. This involved following through on the contracts by providing good service and communicating with clients regularly to guarantee that they were satisfied. To reduce the amount of time spent attracting new clients and gearing services to their needs, many of the consultants focused on getting repeat business, which in turn sometimes led to additional referrals.

A Framework of the Phases of Consulting

Additional insights into the nature of consulting were obtained when the women were asked to comment on the stages of growth that their businesses were in. Business often began with a “quiet” period when there were insufficient contracts, then moved into a hectic phase if the business took off. The “hectic” phase was often followed by a shift into “a busy but balanced” phase where decisions had to be made about whether or not to expand.

Rather than depicting business development in a linear fashion, the women noted that it was possible to exit or re-enter consulting during any of these phases or transition points (see Figure 1). A revision the women made to the initial diagram proposed by the researcher based on the subjects’ accounts was to emphasize the cyclical nature of consulting characterized by periods of high and low business activity. Cyclical stages of growth meant that the boundaries were permeable, allowing for movement back and forth depending on a number of personal and business related factors. Some women also located their businesses at transition points between stages of the framework.
The Phases

The quiet phase.

The quiet period was described mainly as a time when the consultants become familiar with the industry and consulting. Developing contacts and marketing aspects of their business (e.g., developing a name, obtaining business cards and brochures) consumed the majority of time at this phase. Barbara, a woman who was new to the industry, was the only one who located her business in this category. Barbara did not want to rush into her new business because she was completing work at her previous job. There were, however, other women who identified with this category because they had (for various reasons) taken advantage of the flexible nature of consulting to reduce their business work load. Norma was one of the women who had come back to this stage because her business was in a "lull". She was not taking on too many contracts because she anticipated becoming a primary care giver for her elderly parents who were encountering health problems.
She was also looking to “discover a new path somewhere” for her business, but she was not sure yet what that path would be. One other woman (Jill) identified with this category because she had taken a maternity leave and was concentrating on developing more contacts for her business upon returning. She was, however, still conducting some work on her business by developing a more thorough business plan.

The hectic phase.

During the hectic phase of consulting, the women took on as many contracts as possible in order to facilitate business growth. Some of the women had difficulty saying “no” to requests for their services because they were continually concerned about not having enough business. As a result, they had very hectic schedules and sporadic hours characterized by traveling throughout the day to a number of facilities and clients. Jane described a typical day as follows:

“Living in my car a lot! Kind of sporadic, and all over the place. Some mornings I have to be up at 5:30 a.m. and it ends at (if I’m lucky) 6:30-7:00 p.m. Some other days, like today it started at 9:00 a.m. and it won’t end until 10:00 tonight, but I have breaks in between. So, it’s just all over the place, it’s a rollercoaster.”

This period was characterized by a very heavy workload, but there was recognition of a need to achieve a balance with other parts of their lives.

There were two other women who felt their businesses were located in or near this phase. Beth was just moving into a hectic period and talked about taking on additional contracts, while working on marketing and the promotional aspects of her business. As a result, she commented:

“So, I not only have to do the research to create that product, but I have to market it as well. So, I have to do the promotional plan; I have to find the leads; I have to call them up; I have to get the work; and then I have to deliver
the work and then still, the next day, I have to do promotion for the next week because there’s not work there and so you have to play all the roles.

Stress was paramount in the hectic stage. Shelly revealed that trying to develop her business and arrange appropriate child care had caused so much of a strain that she had become physically ill. This made her realize that she must establish a better balance for herself and she was determined to move her business into the next phase, “busy but balanced”.

The busy but balanced phase.

Although some women felt they had finally achieved a sense of balance in their lives, this phase still contained cycles of high and low periods in their businesses. For example, there were times when the women were extremely busy and working long hours, but they were able to get through these times because slow periods would follow, which would allow them more time for themselves and others. The women who located themselves in this stage had learned how to say “no” to clients. This was in sharp contrast to the hectic stage where the women took on too much and were unable to achieve a sense of balance.

There were five women who identified with the “busy but balanced” stage. Denise felt her business and personal lives were very balanced because of the hard work she had put in to achieve a balance. She had tried to ensure a balance was maintained between her partner, her children, her business, and her self. The notion of maintaining a balance between work, family, and self was also very salient for Alice who placed spending more time with her daughter and partner as a priority over developing her business. However, during the validation focus group session, she said the hectic stage best described her situation because of her recent move to a partnership as her legal form of business. This transition had caused her to move back into a
“learning” period. Another woman who identified with the “busy but balanced” period was Sylvia. She had finally managed to find a point where her business was not compromising her “quality of life”. She had negotiated a balance between a full time job, her business, and her family. However, many of her friends still viewed her as a “workaholic”. Kim also identified with this category, but interpreted it in a different way. For her, the business had complemented her personal life and had even improved her relationships with her family and friends. She explained:

Yoga provided a path in life for me that led me to having a sense of my spirituality which is completely different from religion, and having that sense of being connected to my spirituality. Feeling like I'm a soul, expressed in a human body and that soul has karmic reasons to be here and create here and makes me feel very rich because everything I do has a deep meaning to me. And just my lifestyle and the influence of my yoga, my practice has enriched me in my relationship with my family and my friends and it's allowed me to travel.

The “deciding whether or not to expand” phase.

The women in the “busy but balanced” phase explained that leaving this stage and deciding whether or not to expand was a challenge. The businesses of Lisa, Denise, and Alice were getting to a point where they could expand. Their concerns were reflected upon by Anne when she explained that many of the consultants she knew worked such long hours because they could not afford to hire others to help them. As a result, the consultants took on all of the contracts themselves to keep their businesses growing. Lisa was currently struggling with whether or not she should hire an employee, obtain a partner, or stay as an independent. Her preference was to partner up with another independent on a project basis to provide added expertise for her business. During the interviews, Alice had not been thinking about expanding
her business; however, during the focus group sessions she revealed she had recently entered into a partnership with a male consultant in the industry. This had allowed her to develop her business by adding an additional skill set through the partner. However, it also had thrown her business into a "whirlwind" of new activity and learning.

Denise felt that at certain stages of business development, it becomes necessary to obtain assistance from others in the areas where you lack experience and expertise. This was the reason she had developed a networking group for her business. Her business was growing, but was still not large enough to hire other consultants. As a result, she had set up a group of 15-20 individuals (with an equal number of women and men) from a variety of different professions who met once a week to discuss each other's business concerns. By setting up the networking group, she was able to obtain expertise to further develop her business without having the extra cost.

The "exiting" phase.

"Exiting" was the fifth stage identified by the women as being a part of the consulting stage of growth. This was the phase when the women either left the fitness and sport industry and/or consulting. Those who had left or were thinking about leaving were primarily concerned with achieving a balance for themselves by obtaining greater economic stability. Three women identified strongly with this stage. Lisa was still in consulting but had recently moved away from the fitness and sport industry because she did not find it financially rewarding. Another woman (Shandia) was currently trying to decide whether or not to stay in consulting or to obtain a full-time position in the fitness and sport field. Economic stability and pension benefits were figuring
prominently in her decision. The notion of financial insecurity contradicts with the financially rewarding description of the fitness and sport industry that initially drew the women into the field. However, the women explained that although they were able to charge more for their services working as an independent, contracts were not guaranteed and were cyclical in nature. Therefore, the women did not receive a “regular” pay cheque and sometimes had to wait for several months to be paid. Beth labeled this as a “cash flow” problem and explained it as follows:

> Cash flow is hard. You’re waiting to get the money and sometimes, like I just called somebody today about a workshop I did on the 21st of November and I wasn’t paid for it yet. So, I’m trying to develop some strategies and I’m learning the hard way not always trust people that you have to be sort of the ‘dog with the burlap bag’. You have to call people and say, ‘Listen, this is what...’. You know, you wait 30 days and then you call, and you call, and you call, until you get paid because you’ve got bills to pay.”

Although Beth had not left the industry and was still enjoying being a part of it, she shared the concerns of Lisa and Shandia.

Anne was definitely in the exit phase as she had completely left both consulting and the fitness and sport industry a few years ago. She was now operating a medical practice with her partner. She wanted the opportunity to escape the stress and competitive nature of the fitness and sport industry as illustrated below:

> And what I noticed with my colleagues is that I was pretty good at saying no after awhile, I think because I knew I was eventually leaving and it was really hard to get time with my husband. So, I started to become really good at saying no and realizing that they’re not paying me any extra to work the weekend, to work until 8 or 9. And so, I noticed my colleagues would plan more special events and they’d just end up spending all of their time working and
sometimes working for nothing. And they didn’t follow their own advice which was a big trend people were looking for.

Shifting from one type of fitness and sport consulting to another or re-entering the field after a period of time were identified as career options. Jane commented that she knew other people in the industry who had started teaching fitness classes, moved into personal training, and then moved onto other areas, such as natural homeopathy. This notion of being “pulled" back into the industry was also commented upon by Anne. Since leaving the industry, she has felt a “pull” to move back into it again. She has started taking fitness classes again and was interested in possibly returning to do some teaching or training in the future.

“Struggles” Associated with Consulting

The women identified several struggles associated with consulting, but several of them were quick to clarify that they did not view these struggles as problems, but rather, as opportunities. Many of these “opportunities” arose because as a consultant, it was necessary to be competent in a wide range of areas, that is a “Jill of all trades”. Several women contrasted the generalist nature of consulting and operating a home-based business with the specialized work roles they had occupied previously. As a result, many of the women had taken courses in their weak areas to increase their knowledge. The main struggles facing the women included negotiating finances, time management, and assessing value.

Negotiating Finances

Managing cash flow and accounting were the two aspects of financial management that concerned most women. Cash flow was a major issue because of the time lag between completing the contract and getting paid. In this respect, consulting was different from traditional
occupations where remuneration for services occurs on a regular basis. As a result, the consultants were forced to learn to live with financial instability. Beth noted that over time,

> You realize and you develop the confidence that you can pay your bills and the work will come in and its all going to be O.K. And sure there might be some times that are really tough, but you're going to be O.K. any ways.

For others, not having enough money to pay bills related to the business and personal expenses (e.g., rent, food) or to invest back in the business was a reality.

Negotiating finances also involves keeping track of client contracts. All of the women except for Kim, who had previously owned and operated a small furniture business for four years, had little previous experience in accounting and found this to be one of the most difficult and challenging tasks they had to perform. Many of the women had taken additional courses to supplement their knowledge background in accounting, financial management, and bookkeeping. However, Jill commented that these courses were often not practical enough, nor did they relate directly to consulting in the fitness and sport industry. Another woman (Norma) had received accounting assistance from her partner.

**Time Management**

Eight of the women felt that time management was essential to success in fitness and sport consulting. Finding time to do administrative work (e.g., business planning, accounting, or contacting clients), to develop their product and/or service, and to spend with family and friends was a challenge for these women. Those who had been in business for several years had learned to occasionally turn down clients or contracts to allow themselves enough time to organize and develop other aspects of their businesses.
Organizing child care was another area of time constraint. Alice noted that once the child care was actually organized or "settled", it did not create as many constraints on her time. However, even though her partner was very supportive, she was still primarily responsible for driving her daughter to child care and picking her up. Shelly was in the process of modifying her current child care situation to allow her more time in the day for her business. Her eldest son was in grade one and therefore attended school until 2:30 p.m. She had arranged for him to be picked up and stay with a baby-sitter until 5:00 p.m. to coordinate the pick-up of her other son who was in day care.

Assessing Value

A third challenge identified by many of the women was related to assessing value. This challenge had two components: recognizing self value and selling it to clients.

Recognizing self value.

Self-confidence was an issue for two of the women (Kim and Lisa) because they found it difficult to acknowledge the specialized expertise they had to offer. Kim made several presentations before she developed enough confidence to stand in front of a class without doubting her skills. Lisa found confidence to be an issue when she realized at one point that her target audience had a higher post-secondary education than she did. Initially, she allowed self-doubt to shadow her personal style. It was not until she recognized her personal style was why clients had originally hired her that she was able to overcome this self-doubt. However, overcoming self-doubt made her learn that she should just "be yourself, [and] do what you can do best".
Others lacked self-confidence with respect to their business skills and their ability to make their business successful. Beth voiced this concern when she stated,

_This morning I realized I’ve been doing this for more than a year and I still have some money in the bank. I still have some savings and things can only get better, right. I mean why worry so much about it, it’s not like its only been a month, its 13 months and I’m still doing it. So, 5 years from now I can stop worrying because I’ve been doing it for 5 years._

A final concern addressed by the women was assigning a monetary value to their services. This was especially a concern during the start-up phase of a business. Alice noted, “I think the same occurs with anybody who starts a business, you start to rationalize I think I should charge this much, everybody else is.” Determining what other people in the industry charged was the main strategy the women used to establish fees and assess how much the market would bear. Considering their personal goals and the bottom line required to operate their business were other aspects the women considered when setting their prices.

Sylvia, Shandia, and Barbara believed assessing value was more difficult for women than for men because women tend to undervalue their skills. As a result, they felt that women tend to “over deliver and under charge”. As an example, Sylvia stated:

_Male consultants charge three, four, and five times more than I and frankly, my estimation of the product or the delivery is [that] I’m not overly impressed with it._

_Being perceived as having value by clients._

The second part of assessing value was overcoming the challenge of how to make clients perceive their services as valuable and necessary. Six of the women (Norma, Denise, Barbara, Jill, Anne, and Shandia) found it difficult to make their clients recognize “the need to pay a good
dollar for their services" and not be seen as merely "fluff" or "fitness bimbos". These women felt their services were sometimes perceived by people as less important and worth spending money on than others, such as health care and education. Norma expressed this clearly when she commented, "I always hold my breath and then just say what [the price is]". Denise reinforced this point when she noted that she had just recently raised her prices and was "floored" when she got her first client because she did not think they would be willing to pay the higher amount for her services.

Shandia felt that making clients recognize the value of a consultant’s services was particularly difficult when working in the not-for-profit sector. Because staff in these types of organizations tend to be completely dedicated to their organizations, they expect consultants to "show the same commitment by waiving or lowering part of [their] fee". Jill believed one of the reasons why personal trainers found it difficult to make clients realize the value of the service was because recreation centres were able to keep their fees lower due to tax subsidization. She noted that there seems to be a belief in the industry that, "when you work in recreation because you are enjoying it, you have a great lifestyle, you don’t deserve to get paid that much for it".

Strategies for Keeping the Business Viable

The strategies used by the consultants to overcome some of the “struggles” associated with consulting included relationship building, developing alternative components to their business, and constantly staying in touch with their clients.
Relationship Building

Relationship building was viewed as an essential component of consulting business development and growth. Relationship marketing through networking was the primary method the women used to promote their businesses. This included "getting known", meeting potential clients, and finding out more about their potential target market. Although reaching more people was a concern for the majority of the women, it was especially a concern for those just starting out in business. Of the women who were not interested in promoting their businesses further, Norma and Jane currently had too much work and had to turn some down, while Alice has been trying to keep her business small to concentrate more on her parenting role.

Relationship building also allowed the women to talk to other people in the industry, to share ideas and suggestions which served as a form of social support. During the focus group sessions the women acknowledged that having a chance to talk to other people was an invaluable experience that helped to overcome some of the social isolation they would otherwise experience in their home-based businesses. Sylvia reiterated this when she said:

> When you work in a work place where you are with peer groups or social groups or certain people, your network place; [but] when you're working out of your back bedroom, I think you have to really make an effort, a conscious effort to connect into other professional groups in order to keep the network going.

For some of the women, relationship building either within the fitness and sport industry or with other related professions had provided them with some of their referrals. Jill referred clients back and forth with psychologists, physiotherapists, counselors, and massage therapists. As well, Kim had physiotherapists, exercise therapists, and doctors recommend their clients to
her. Beth had some clients referred to her by other women consultants within the industry who were in a slightly different area.

A concern raised by Jill about building relationships was that she preferred to make contacts in related professions outside the fitness industry because consultants within the same industry viewed her as a competitor and therefore were not open or willing to share information. She commented that:

*There are enough unfit people out there and enough of an unhealthy population that there is more than enough market for all of us. And, if we worked together we would come across as more professional.*

However, she felt that as long as people remained wary of sharing information due to their belief about business scarcity, she would continue to build relationships more with other related industries (e.g., psychologists, physiotherapists, massage therapists). Sylvia also raised the concern that competition for contracts may influence consultants' ability to network when she commented:

*I think that in the consulting business everyone is out there trying to make a living. So, the mere competitive nature of trying to get pieces of work would isolate women from actually networking effectively. So, I think part of that is systemic in that you are not going to get a group of people who are all competing for the same business in a room, sharing their trade secrets.*

The issue was clarified further during the validation focus group sessions when the women were asked if they saw each other as competitors or as part of a network. All of the women except Anne saw themselves as part of a network. Denise explained that:

*I think women still want to be competitors, but more and more we are starting to understand that we are co-workers and part of a much bigger*
network. We want to be competitors, but I don't think that is part of our nature. I think women are meant to be part of teams.

Barbara believed that because consultants find their own unique niche, they do not have to compete with each other and are able to work together. However, Anne noted that although "networking is a huge part of consulting", there were still a few consultants who were very competitive with each other for contracts.

Developing Alternative Components of Their Business

Another strategy used by the women to allow their businesses to grow was developing additional product or service lines. For Denise, adding more product meant developing new classes or services. In the last year she had added a day time circuit training class and a walking club to her offerings.

Although Lisa was currently researching whether or not to add public workshops to her business, she clarified that developing the business did not necessarily mean increased volume. Rather, developing the business could simply mean changing the current way of doing business. She felt it was important to never sit back and take things for granted, but rather to be always looking for new ways to maintain the momentum and provide further growth. Changing the way of doing business was also the strategy that Jane used to provide growth for her business. She tried to focus her business so that she was now able to tell her clients exactly what her area of expertise was. Jane explained:

I think it sort of started off like I tumbled into it and then I just sort of tumbled along and then strategies, I would say, now its become a little more specific. I can tell people what I'm into now. I'm into skipping, boxing, and running and pretty much everything, but if someone were to come up to me and say, 'I want to do a
"triathlon", I couldn’t say to them, ‘O.K., then I’ll take you on’. It would be more like, ‘O.K., I’m going to get the help of two other people’ or ‘Here’s a group or an organization that is better.’

**Constantly Staying in Touch with Clients**

The final strategy identified by some of the women as being important to the development of their business was to constantly stay in touch with their clients. This involved: listening to clients and obtaining feedback through evaluation.

Listening to clients was identified as an important way of ensuring that customer satisfaction resulted in repeat business. Some of the consultants explained that obtaining feedback or finding ways to touch base with clients was necessary to continually to improve their businesses. Methods the women used to obtain feedback included handing out evaluation forms at the end of workshops, consulting with clients before and after presenting their workshops, and contacting existing clients either over the telephone or through correspondence.

**Fitting Consulting into Their Daily Life**

A variety of issues were raised by the women surrounding how their businesses fit into their personal lives. They all mentioned that it was impossible to keep the two completely separate. One of the women felt that work and personal life had such a large influence on each other that unless a consultant recognized the overlap she could not be as efficient and/or effective. Several also commented that their businesses could consume their lives if a balance between two was not negotiated.
Finding a Balance Point

All of the women recognized that there was a need to achieve a balance point between their business and personal lives, but they had to work hard to create this balance. Most of the “newer” business women (e.g., Beth, Shelly) were still looking to attaining one in the future. The women had a variety of definitions for balance which included: “having enough clients or classes but not too many so you have time for yourself, family, and friends”; “being able to pursue your dreams because you are not focused solely on work”; “being able to have it all”; and “being able to help others”. The women felt that it should be easier for consultants in the fitness and sport industry to negotiate a balance because of the flexibility provided by consulting and because wellness was the focus of their businesses.

Challenges with Obtaining a Balance

The main challenges to achieving a balance were: “having a sense of guilt about not constantly working on business growth”, “being an overachiever”, “taking on too much”, and “tending to over-prepare”. Beth felt guilty if she took a break from her business because she believed she should, “be out there getting some more [work]” to make her business grow faster. Norma found a balance difficult to achieve because she saw herself as an overachiever and as a result, she tended to take on too much. Jane and Lisa also felt that it was very easy to take on too much; while for Sylvia, a balance was challenging because she tended “to over prepare”. Even though the flexibility of consulting allowed women consultants to take time out from their business when they needed to, many found it challenging to actually do so.
The Flexibility of Consulting

Several of the women enjoyed spending time away from their businesses with their family, friends, or by themselves. The flexibility of consulting in terms of being able to organize and develop their own schedules and hours allowed them the chance to achieve a greater balance between their business and personal lives. Traditional jobs operate on a 9:00-5:00 basis, however, the women in this study were able to modify their schedules to suit their own needs. Alice had reduced her work schedule to a part time basis to allow her to spend more time on her “parenting role”. Jane, on the other hand, only modified her schedule when she started to get too “burned out”.

The Importance of “Practicing What I Preach”

Beth and Jill believed it was easier to justify a need to build balance into their lives because their businesses were in wellness-related areas. As a consequence, they felt it was important to be “practicing what I preach” to clients.

The Women’s Relational Systems

In order to understand the women’s daily life and what they were required to “juggle” with their business life, it was necessary to examine their relational systems. This included family, friends and colleagues, mentors and role models, and professional organizations.

Family

As noted in the section on the women’s background, a diverse range of family and marital situations were included in this study (see Table 1). All of the women with a partner noted that it would be difficult for a consultant to do her job as completely or effectively if her partner was not
supportive of her and the business. Partners provided assistance in various forms: moral support, assistance with aspects of the business (e.g., presentations, administrative work), supporting the women’s fluctuating incomes, assisting with child care, and giving up part of the house to an office space.

However, the women with young children (Alice and Shelly) noted that despite the fact that their partners helped out with child care, they still assumed the primary care giving responsibility. As a result, many noted that time management was a challenge, in terms of making time for family; organizing child care, schooling, and work; and picking up and delivering of children.

Friends and Colleagues

Another group whom the women drew support from was friends and colleagues. Most of these individuals were other women who were either business associates or had been long time acquaintances. Many of the women noted that business associates often become friends and provided an invaluable opportunity to communicate with supportive people. Lisa expressed this point:

*I have a circle of individuals through clients that have turned into friends. Just people you get to know over the years that are either in consulting or the human resource field. So, that’s my network where you can pick up the phone and just talk to them or if I was involved in larger sized projects, if I wanted to, I could probably search the market through some of my connections and maybe find someone to hook up with.*

This assistance helped the women to solve problems or provide guidance with some issues they were addressing. This support allowed the women to draw upon each other’s experiences.
Several of the women had assisted other women who are looking to become self-employed and have had other women assist them. As well, Beth, Shelly, Kim, Shandia and Jill had received referrals from some of their friends and colleagues.

The main problem the women mentioned surrounding friends and colleagues was finding time to spend with them because their business and family take up such a large part of their lives. A concern for Beth, Kim, and Barbara was that their friends undermined their efforts at self-employment. For example, Beth commented:

> I've noticed that I've [got] one or two friends, one in particular, and it's funny because she realizes this. And she'll call me and say, 'I just found this great job in the paper. Why don't you apply for it?' And I'll say, I have my own business.

This comment implies that consulting was viewed by some as a marginal occupation because of the financial insecurity associated with it.

During the validation focus groups, the women reiterated the importance of maintaining a supportive circle of friends and explained why their friends, for the most part, were very supportive. Some women explained that they only kept supportive people around them. As Sylvia stated during one of these sessions, “It didn't happen by accident. You recruit that system.” Norma noted that it could sometimes be difficult to let go of unsupportive friends but that it was necessary in order to maintain a positive and supportive environment around them.

**Mentors and Role Models**

Each of the women identified several mentors and role models who had been inspirational. For mentors, the women all identified other women, the majority of whom had been their instructors in the fitness and sport industry or had provided them with some of their
contracts. Two of the women (Sylvia and Lisa) identified women who were not in the fitness and sport industry but who they felt had successful business lives. The consultants felt that their mentors helped to reinforce their strengths and abilities and occasionally helped to push or prod them into presenting workshops or training.

For role models, the consultants identified other women in the industry who did not have direct contact with them, but who had successful businesses and had provided the consultants with guidance and confidence through their success. However, Jill found it difficult to find a role model because to her "success [was] not just success in business and financial success from the business, but also leading a balanced life".

Professional Organizations

The final group that provided consultants with support was professional organizations. Some of the women belonged to associations for networking purposes (e.g., Promotion Plus, Human Resource Management Association), while other organizations provided them with up-to-date information on the latest advances in the fitness and sport industry (e.g., British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association, British Columbia Association of Kinesiologists).

There are a number of professional organizations in the fitness and health area, as well as organizations for both women in business and women business owners, but none of these cater specifically to women fitness and sport consultants. In fact, Shandia was interested in developing a data base of women consultants for networking purposes and would do so if she could find a way to make it financially feasible.
As well, even though there are several professional organizations that the women could belong to, many (Lisa, Shelly, Jill, Sylvia) felt they did not have enough time to fully utilize them as much as they would like due to their busy schedules. Many of the women said they wanted to spend more informal time with the members of professional organizations in order to share experiences and information.

Definitions of Success

This final section will provide a context for the women’s experiences by examining their definitions of success. Success meant: "being happy with what I do", "satisfying others", "achieving a balance in their lives", and "being financially secure to some extent".

"Being Happy with What I Do"

Most women associated success with enjoyment in their work or "being happy with what I do". Because their work was mentally stimulating, satisfying, and challenging, it gave them satisfaction and a feeling of success. Kim experienced an "incredible feeling of well-being" from the classes she taught. Shandia expressed a sense of pride in all of the consulting work she had done. Operating their own businesses gave the women a sense of pride in themselves, and several felt successful because of this. Beth was proud of herself for taking a risk and starting her own business. Barbara was also proud of herself for "not just floundering" during her transition period of moving from a full-time job to becoming a consultant.

"Satisfying Others"

Another aspect of success was a need to satisfy others including clients, contractors, and their peers. Jane noted that when clients "turn around and say, my knee used to hurt but now it
doesn't, she feels successful and good about herself. For Norma, satisfying others included two
dimension: "being able to influence positive change in people's lives", and "being sought after
by conference or convention organizers". In contrast, Sylvia's definition of success was based
more on how her peer group perceived she was contributing to society, and whether they felt she
was making the world a better place. Lisa took the notion of whether she was satisfying her
clients and others one step further by using it as an objective "numerical" measurement of her
success. In a seminar she attended about how to start up a consulting business the lecturer noted
that if at the end of two years, 90% of your business is repeat or referral, then you are successful.
Lisa found repeat business to be a better measurement of success than achieving specific financial
goals.

"Achieving a Balance in Their Lives"

A third dimension of success identified by the majority of the consultants was achieving a
balance in their lives. Alice clarified the meaning of this as having a "balance between those
things you enjoy doing and those you have to do" (e.g., time spent with friends, family, and
work). Volunteering, traveling, or vacationing were aspects that a few of the women considered
important to include in their "balancing act".

"Being Financially Secure"

A final theme emerging from the women's definitions of success was the notion of having
some type of financial security. Several of the women mentioned that consulting in the fitness
and sport industry enabled them to obtain a higher income than in other positions within the
industry. However, a concern highlighted by the women was the economic instability associated
with operating as an independent. Although this economic instability was a concern for the women, it did not carry over into their definitions of personal success. In other words, those women who had not achieved financial security did not consider themselves unsuccessful. Rather, several of the women commented that it was important to define their success not solely based on financial goals. Lisa explained that "it will come if you are good at what you do". Yet, financial stability played a significant role in several of the women's definitions of success. For example, even Lisa who noted that financial goals are not the best measures of success, said the reason she has left the fitness industry was because she could not fulfill her financial goals. Another woman, Jill, was hoping to improve her financial success through more business planning, she noted, "I have higher financial aspirations for myself" through more business planning.

Summary

In summary, this study found that gender and gender relations underpinned the women's business experiences. In terms of the sample, the women consultants seemed to come from a privileged background. All of the women in this study were physically fit, highly educated, white, middle to upper class women. It is uncertain whether this is unique to this study or whether it is representative of other women consultants in the fitness and sport industry.

As well, all of the women operated their businesses out of their homes which provided not only benefits (e.g., low start up costs, income tax advantages, and flexible work schedules) but also some drawbacks (e.g., never getting a break from home or office work, having to schedule family around work, and not having any pension plan or employee benefits). Gender relations is
evident in the women’s choice to operate a home-based business because of the importance placed on the flexibility of work schedules and the ability to, thereby, combine family and work.

To provide a context for the women’s experiences with entrepreneurship, their definitions of this term were examined. The meanings of entrepreneurship were multi-faceted and included concepts related to innovation and creation in terms of starting new projects and developing new ways of conducting work. As well, the women expressed having pride in themselves for being willing to take a risk and start a new business. One of the most interesting findings, however, was that the women had difficulty defining themselves as entrepreneurs. This may have been because they felt that they were not contributing to society as they did not hire employees or sell a tangible product.

To illustrate the process of consulting, from the women’s point of view, a framework consisting of five phases was developed. The framework was designed to be fluid and dynamic, allowing movement back and forth between categories. Gender relations influenced the women’s movement throughout this framework as they tried to accommodate traditional female roles and negotiate a balance between their business and personal lives.

“Struggles” associated with the operation of a consulting business emerged as an important area to examine. Negotiating finances (cash flow and accounting), time management, and assessing value were the main struggles that the women highlighted. One aspect of negotiating finances involved confronting clients for payment. This was difficult for the women because they were trying to develop relationships with their clients. Time management was partially concerned with balancing work and family. As the women had primary responsibility
for the household and the arrangement of child care, in addition to operating their own businesses, they continually encountered time constraints. Finally, assessing value involved determining a value for the consultant’s services. Because of the dominant role that masculinity has in our culture, the women tended to under-value themselves and their services.

In order to address these challenges, the women utilized a variety of strategies. The importance of networking and relationship building was identified as being vital to consulting. The formation of relationships with individuals was influenced for a large part by gender relations. As individuals interact with one another, gender related issues arose, such as body image issues and the preferences by clients for either male or female consultants.

Using gender relations as an explanatory framework drew attention to the importance of examining not only the women’s business experiences, but also their personal lives. The flexibility of consulting enabled the women to achieve more of a balance between their personal and business lives; however challenges were still encountered. Some of the challenges to achieving a balance resulted from the women’s feelings that they needed to prove their competence. As a result, they experienced guilt if they were not constantly working at developing their businesses. As well, when they were working on developing their services, they tended to take on too much and to spend too much time on it.

By examining the women’s personal lives, the importance of a relational system was highlighted. These systems included: family, friends and colleagues, mentors and role models, and professional organizations. For the most part, these groups were supportive of the women and their businesses. However, some of the women commented that their friends could be
undermined their efforts because they associated consulting with financial insecurity. This, however, consisted of only a small group of people who tended to be dropped from the women’s relational system. As a result, the women were able to surround themselves with supportive systems which made them feel connected and helped to validate their sense of identity. Another important finding was that their relational systems did not merely provide the women with support. Rather, the women benefited from giving support, assistance, and feedback to others through a two-way process.

Finally, to better understand the women’s experiences with consulting, their definitions of success were considered. It was interesting to find that financial security only played a minor role in their definitions. Instead, concerns about balance, others, and enjoyment were all listed as being equally important.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Much of the literature on consulting and small business entrepreneurship has adopted a gender-neutral stance which ignores how the social construction of gender relations shapes how business is done (Acker, 1995). As a result, Sheppard (1992, p. 152) contends that women’s business experiences have been examined through the “filter of the dominant gender culture” that overlooks their realities. In this chapter, alternative explanations for the findings are proposed and a critique of the small business and consulting literature is provided.

Who Can Enter?

The women in this study belonged to a privileged demographic group. They varied in terms of marital status and family situation, but otherwise they represented a white, well-educated, middle class demographic. This finding confirms previous research by Hisrich and Brush (1988) who uncovered similar demographic patterns for women business owners in the United States. Thus social class and race appear to determine, in part, who enters the field of consulting in the fitness and sport industry. As well, the women were all physically fit and engaged in regular physical activity, another indicator of privilege (Cole, 1993; Messner & Sabo, 1990). Their high level of education also highlights their privileged status.

Drucker (1993) has drawn attention to the importance of education as a prerequisite to involvement in “knowledge-based” careers. The shift to a knowledge-based economy has placed the “educated person” at the center, which in turn has placed the uneducated person at the margins (Drucker, 1993, p. 210). All of the women in this study had some type of post-secondary education (such as a degree in physical education or business administration) and
several had also taken courses in related areas. However, Collinson et al. (1990) explained that women often have better educational credentials than men at similar levels in organizational hierarchies. They suggested that because of societal power differentials based on gender, women have had to work harder and have better qualifications than men in order to compete. This supported the women's comments that they believed they were working harder than other men in the industry. However, as no men were included in this study, it was not possible to make a direct comparison. Women often also have less access to the informal networks that are a vital source of information for career advancement, and thus rely on advancing their education in a bid to remain competitive.

While the women in this study represented a privileged group, Young and Richards (1992) have contended that small business entrepreneurs are viewed as marginal participants in the economy. They suggested that women are turning to entrepreneurship because they have been blocked from more traditional forms of employment. Some of the women confirmed this notion of marginality when they revealed that they were victims of corporate downsizing. Furthermore, they did not label themselves "consultants" because others associated the term with unemployment or financial instability. Rather, they attempted to legitimize their leadership roles by choosing more traditional titles such as principal, director, and CEO.

The women in this study identified their "disenchantment with an existing job" as the main reason for starting their businesses which helps explain the research question examining how women got into consulting. Inflexible hours that had made it more difficult to combine work and family responsibilities, encouraged some of the women to invent new forms of
employment for themselves. Moore et al. (1992) recognized that dissatisfying experiences in the traditional work force were a primary motivator for women to start their own businesses. This finding contrasted starkly with Berrett et al.’s (1993) study of male entrepreneurs who were more likely to start their business in the fitness and sport industry because it related to a hobby, they had previous experience in other businesses, or they were continuing a family oriented operation. Acker (1992) explained that the gendered dominant logic of many traditional organizations places women at a disadvantage in terms of the gender patterning of jobs, wages, and advancement opportunities. Because women occupy lower positions within organizational hierarchies, they are more likely to be affected by corporate downsizing as those in positions of power strive to maintain their status.

Operating a home-based consulting business was the alternative form of work to which the women turned. All of the women in this study operated their business out of their homes which presented a number of challenges for them that will be elaborated upon in the next section of this chapter.

Nature of Consulting in the Fitness and Sport Industry

To provide insights into the women’s business experiences, this section focuses on the nature of consulting. Although the women seemed open in their responses, it is important to consider that they may have been providing “politically correct” responses. Therefore, they may have been “painting a rosier picture” than what truly exists in consulting. This section offers possible explanations as to how gender relations influenced the women’s definitions of entrepreneurship, the phases of consulting, and the struggles associated with consulting.
Definitions of Entrepreneurship

Determining the women’s definitions of entrepreneurship was one of the research questions of this study. The women did not see themselves as entrepreneurs and the meanings they were able to attribute to the term differed from those found in the literature. They were more apt to define themselves as “self-employed” and defined “more successful” business owners who hired employees and sold products as entrepreneurs. Many previous researchers have defined only those business owners who hire employees as entrepreneurs (Collom, 1981; Scott, 1986). This definition ignores the large number of sole-proprietorships who are consultants. Perhaps the reason why the women drew attention to the need to hire employees was because they felt they would be contributing more to society by paying the wages of others. Perhaps delivering a tangible product further legitimizes the role of the entrepreneur in their view.

Some of the other themes that the women could relate to in terms of definitions of entrepreneurship were the notions of innovation and creativity. Initiating completely new projects and constantly striving to up-date their services were major preoccupations of the women. Perhaps their commitment to innovation and creativity reflected their desire to satisfy others. By concentrating on constantly improving their services, the women would presumably be better able to serve the needs of their clients by being able to stay in touch with their needs.

Taking a risk to start their own businesses was the final theme related to their definitions of entrepreneurship. Finding new ways of conducting business was a major source of pride that, for the most part, made up for the financial insecurity experienced in trying to forge new directions. This may have been what helped to keep the women in the consulting industry.
The Phases of Consulting

Most models of career development and stages of organizational growth are depicted in a linear fashion that progress from an entry phase to a final exit point (Bellman, 1990; Gray, 1985; Kubr, 1986; Shenson, 1990). When the women were asked to describe what their work entailed, their responses revealed that it is important to view consulting as a dynamic cyclical process with a number of possible entry and exit points.

A focus on gender relations provided additional explanations for stages of business development and subsequent career choices. The “start up” phase was usually a quiet time for women consultants as it took time to establish a new business and build up contacts. The “hectic” phase was characterized by an inability of the women to say “no” to business opportunities, possibly because they constantly felt that they had to prove themselves as competent consultants. Collinson et al. (1990) explained that because women and men do not begin at the same “starting line”, women sometimes feel compelled to “work harder” in order to prove their competence. Furthermore, work alone did not define the hectic phase, as juggling domestic and child care responsibilities figured prominently in the women’s descriptions of this phase.

However, some of the women reached a point when they did not need (or possibly want) to continue competing with the burden of proving their competence. In the “busy but balanced” period, some of the women reduced their workload in favour of attaining a better balance in their lives. In a couple of cases, serious stress-related illnesses were the trigger factor that led the women to re-evaluate their priorities.
Business expansion is usually a logical consequence of business success. In fact, some have suggested that a business must continue to grow or it will stagnate (Zuckerman, 1990). In this study, there were several examples of women resisting pressures for business growth. One possible explanation for this finding, is that the women were much less motivated by financial success than finding a balance in their lives. Business expansion would have been in conflict with the balance that they were trying to achieve. One of the other women had recently developed a partnership as an alternative strategy to maintain her values and at the same time allow her businesses to expand.

Finally, the women who decided to or were thinking about leaving the fitness and sport industry were tired of trying to negotiate their personal definitions of balance and sought other employment opportunities as a result. Economic insecurity was a major source of stress that was partly attributed to the tendency of women to under-charge for their services. The service sector is becoming increasingly dominated by women and their wages are considerably lower than their male counterparts (Belcourt et al., 1991). The tendency to undercharge is likely related to the devaluation by society of women’s work.

The “Struggles Associated with Consulting

The women cited a number of “struggles” associated with their work as consultants. These included managing gender, negotiating finances, and assessing self value.

Managing Gender

The women commented throughout the study that how they presented themselves influenced the amount of business they obtained. For example, they had to manage their dress
and appearance so as to make the “right” first impression. This need to manage one’s gender has been documented in previous research (Burrell & Hearn, 1990; Vipperman, 1990). The women may have been negotiating their gender in order to “fit” with the stereotypes associated with being business women in the fitness and sport industry. Sheppard (1992) explained that women manage their gender so as to appear both “feminine enough” and “business-like enough”.

Body image was another theme related to managing gender that is relevant in the fitness and sport industry. In particular, the personal trainers noted the muscular definition of their bodies influenced the perceptions held by their clients. As a result, some of the women believed they were placed at a disadvantage to their male counterparts who were more muscular. Laberge and Sankoff (1988), explained that middle class women profit from investment in the body because professional success appears to be a function of image or appearance. However, they believed women do not have a choice in whether or not they negotiate bodily appearance and conform to the dominant norms. As a result, Laberge and Sankoff (1988) contended that women will constantly under-rate their appearance and spend more time on “beautifying” activities (such as improving physical fitness). This maintains the norms of society which objectify physical appearance (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1990).

Negotiating Finances

Another struggle that the women faced in the development of their businesses was negotiating finances. Government programs designed to increase the number of women in small business have focused on deficits in the financial area, a strategy that implies women are inherently weak in this area. Although negotiating finances is an issue for both genders, the
women in this study had worked in front line “people-oriented” occupations in their previous positions within the industry and, therefore, did not have the opportunity to develop their financial skills (Zuckerman, 1990). Thus, it is more likely that the women’s difficulty in the financial area was due to gendered divisions of labor, rather than biological shortcomings.

Few studies have addressed the struggle of “waiting to get paid” which is more of an issue for consultants than regular salaried employees. The collection of accounts receivable had a major impact on the cash flow of the women’s businesses and created considerable insecurity. One reason why some of the women expressed difficulty with “getting paid” may have been because taking care of themselves financially was in conflict with their desire to develop close relationships with their clients. Yet, it was also found that obtaining payment became less of a concern over time as the women developed strategies to deal with the issue. Some of the more experienced consultants said they had learned to become more “assertive” which implies that they were adopting more stereotypically “masculine” approaches to dealing with the financial side of their businesses.

“Assessing Self Value”

Assessing self value is a theme that is often reduced to “how to set a price for services” in the business literature (Vipperman, 1990). For the women, “assessing self” was more complicated as they were essentially selling their bodies as instruments of physical fitness, as well as their knowledge. Studies have found that gender-role stereotyping leads females to expect males to perform better in certain tasks and to devalue or decrease confidence in their own abilities (Lirgg & Feltz, 1989). Female modesty or honesty are possible explanations suggested
by the literature for women’s lower self-confidence (Corbin, Landers, Feltz, & Senior, 1983). However, assuming that women merely lack self-confidence or are more modest, ignores the societal and cultural power imbalances that exist in society that result in the devaluation of women’s work (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1990; Cole, 1993; Messner & Sabo, 1990).

Several of the women in this study had a difficult time assigning a value to their services. Instead, they talked about “over-delivering and under-charging”. At the same time, the women said they had to prove their value to clients in order to win contracts. This supports Collinson et al.’s (1990) work explained that women have to prove their competence while it is often assumed that men are already competent. The need to prove competence and assure their clients of their knowledge and expertise may have been what led the women to “over deliver”. Ultimately, comparisons with the prices established by other consultants served as the benchmark for assessing value.

Strategies to Develop Their Businesses

This section addressed the research question regarding the strategies the women used to keep their businesses viable. Two of the main themes that emerged from this analysis were: “building relationships” and “working harder to keep ahead”.

“Building Relationships”

During both the interviews and the validation focus group sessions, the women emphasized the importance of building relationships for a variety of reasons. Social isolation was particularly salient as all of the women operated their businesses out of their homes. As a result, they developed networks of support including colleagues in the field, friends, family, mentors and
role models, and professional organizations. These groups provided advice, gave referrals, and validated the women's choices as they tried to adopt new ways of conducting business. Sheppard (1992) found that business women wanted to know who their strongest allies were. However, a lack of time made it difficult for the women to spend as much time with those in their social networks as they would have liked.

However, obtaining support was not the only reason why relationship building was important to the women. Young and Richards (1992) contended that the relational dimension is important to women entrepreneurs not only because it allows them to feel connected, but also because it allows them to give to others. Being able to "satisfy others" or make clients feel good about themselves was a prominent theme in the women's definitions of success.

Acker (1992) noted that organizations may not intend to consciously reinforce gender relations which create exclusions, but do so through the interactions among individuals. In this study, some of the women made conscious decisions to eliminate those who expected them to perform traditional roles from their networks. Maintaining only supportive individuals may have helped to validate the women's sense of self or the choices they were making.

Another way relationships were used by the women to transform traditional business practices was through the promotion of their business. The document analysis revealed that many of the women did not use traditional forms of advertising (e.g., magazine and newspaper articles) (Zuckerman, 1990). Instead, they relied on relationship building with clients. Attending conferences and meetings, talking to other people in the industry, and letting others know about their businesses provided the women with contacts and helped to up-date their services.
Traditional advertising was still considered to be important by some of the women as a method for keeping their business name visible. As well, improvements and advancements in technology, such as the internet, were other options for "getting their name known" in the industry or another method of initiating relationships. This finding supported Gurstein (1995) who suggested that home and neighbourhood planning need to incorporate "high-tech communications capabilities in the future as design features".

A relationship building component was even more important for consultants because it enabled them to acquire repeat business with existing clients. This involved listening to clients and obtaining feedback from them. By staying in touch with their clients, the women were able to further improve their businesses and determine how to modify or improve it. It also ensured the women did not stagnate and instead were able to maintain their momentum. The need to constantly stay in touch with clients supported the findings of Bellman (1990) who noted that this contact allows the consultant to develop greater understanding of their clients.

"Working Harder to Keep Ahead"

Another strategy that emerged was the need to "work harder to keep ahead". Although this is a theme that is important for both male and female entrepreneurs (Bellman, 1990), it is even more important for women as they must work even harder to prove their competency (Collinson et al., 1990). For consultants, their product and/or service is themselves, therefore, the women in this study explained that after a point it gets difficult to keep growing in terms of volume. As well, some of the women were not interested in growing because they wanted to
maintain a balance in their lives. As a result, growth did not necessarily mean increased volume but could instead mean adopting creative and innovative strategies to conducting work.

**Fitting Consulting into Their Daily Life**

The results of this study revealed that in order to better understand the women's business experiences, it was important to consider how work, family and time for self were intertwined because the women emphasized that these could not be viewed as dichotomous entities. These results related to the research question examining how consulting fits (or does not fit) into the women's daily lives.

**Their Personal Experiences**

Perhaps the examination of the women's personal lives was more applicable to this study because it examined women in the fitness and sport industry or wellness related fields. Several of the women noted it was easier to take time out for themselves when needed (e.g., for fitness or leisure purposes) because of the importance of being a good role model for their clients. However, at the same time, the women also acknowledged that time for themselves (or leisure) was the "first thing to go" when their schedules became too busy. The women having the most problems attaining a balance were those in the hectic phase of consulting, which was not surprising given that they were trying to prove themselves within the industry. Not only were the women looking to take time out for themselves, but they also wanted time to spend on their relationships with others.
Relationships with Others Outside of Work

Part of understanding how consulting fit into the women's personal lives included understanding the relationships they were a part of and conceptualizing them as a two-way process that involves both the giving and receiving of support. Gallos (1989) expressed the importance of studying women's diverse relationships when she stated that women's boundaries between professional work and the rest of their lives are more permeable than men's. This allows women to see relationships and family as critical to work and therefore makes it important to consider the variety of family styles and intimate relationships which they may be a part of.

Family

Sheppard (1992) found that competing demands of work and family were one of the top eight concerns of women managers. As more women are entering the job force, family issues which were previously thought of as less important and solely women's concerns are now being considered in the literature.

Research has shown there are a variety of family types and within each of these there are also a number of challenges which need to be considered (Baber & Allen, 1992; Blumberg, 1991; Carrier, 1995; King, 1993). Single women have been responsible for all of the household responsibilities and may also experience loneliness (King, 1993). In this study, the single woman had built a network of friends to avoid feelings of loneliness, to feel more connected, and to help to validate her identity. However, she did comment that her work life affected her ability to spend time with friends because of the long hours.
The women who were living with a same sex or opposite sex partner supported King (1993) who found that couples are becoming more egalitarian and supportive in nature. All of these couples commented that their partners shared equally in the household labour. Baber and Allen (1992) also suggested that these cohabiters may be constrained by society’s stigmatization of them, yet nothing was mentioned by these women. Perhaps this was because they were not familiar enough with the researcher to expand upon such intimate issues.

The married women also said that there was a more egalitarian sharing of household responsibilities since they had started their businesses. This supported previous research which has found that more men are taking part in the day to day family responsibilities (Firestone & Shelton, 1994). Another theme from the literature related to married women which Blumberg (1991) noted was that couples are putting off having children and placing their education and careers first. However, studies have also shown that men are less likely to put off having children because a family is an asset to their careers, whereas for women it tends to be a liability (Frisby, 1992). The decision to put off having children was commented on by three of the women in this study (Norma, Lisa, and Barbara) who had all decided either to put off having children or to not have any at all.

Women who have children have to consider how child care will be organized. Firestone and Shelton (1994) and Gurstein (1995) both found that even when employed full time, women were more likely to be responsible for the household, caring for children, and arranging for a substitute for when they are at work. The result is a "double day" for women (Firestone & Shelton, 1994, p. 45) or possibly a "triple day" if they are the primary care giver for their aging
relatives (Gee & McDaniel, 1993). This was confirmed by the women in this study who noted that, although they had partners who were supportive of their desire to operate their own businesses, the women were still responsible for the organizing and scheduling of child care and household responsibilities.

**Friends**

Another important relational system for the women in this study was their friends. Several of the women noted that in consulting, colleagues often become friends. Zuckerman (1990) has previously documented the development of friendships with colleagues. A possible reason for these friendships may be that the women who share similar experiences will be more understanding of the challenges and rewards of this kind of work and therefore help to validate each others’ identities. Previous studies on women managers have shown that friendships outside work can be difficult to form because of the time pressures of work (King, 1993). This finding was supported in this study by several of the women and may be one of the reasons why they formed friendships with other colleagues. However, the women also noted the flexibility of consulting allowed them to take time out for friends if needed.

**Mentors and Role Models**

All of the women in this study identified other women who had acted as their mentors and role models. As well, most of these women were within the fitness and sport industry (e.g., instructors or contractors). Previous studies have noted the importance of offering mentoring opportunities and developing role models for women as ways to increase their opportunities in management (Wentling, 1995). However, the women in this study did not value their mentors
and role models solely for the opportunities which they could provide, rather the women were also concerned about giving back to them in some way. Previous research has shown the difficulties women may have finding a female mentor or role model, especially given the male dominance in management (Staudt, 1993). Perhaps due to the growing number of women who are choosing consulting as a career in the fitness and sport industry, most of the women in this study were able to quickly identify a female mentor. However, one woman (Jill) noted she could not identify a female role model because she has found it difficult to find someone in the industry who is leading a balanced life. She believed most of the women she knew either spent too much time on their business or too much time with their families.

Professional Organizations

As noted by Frisby (1992), an important aspect to consider in women’s support structures is their memberships with professional organizations. Vipperman (1990) commented that professional organizations can provide an opportunity for networking. In this study, all of the women identified with several professional organizations. They identified many organizations related to fitness, health, and sport; however several felt it would be useful to have an association specifically for consultants in the fitness and sport industry. Membership in an organization provided the women with professional development opportunities (or education) and the chance to develop additional relationships. Membership with a professional organization was, therefore, another way for the women to feel connected and have their identities and choices validated.
The Illusive Balance

Schor (1991) provided an explanation for why the women found it so difficult to achieve a balance. The amount of time society is spending at their jobs has risen steadily in the last two decades (Schor, 1991). As a result, the increased leisure time that was supposed to be associated with the end of the Industrial Revolution has not been achieved (Schor, 1991). One of the explanations provided for this increase in time spent at work is the shift to a consumer oriented society and the need for purchasing power (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). In addition, in an era of corporate down sizing, those with jobs are working harder in order to retain them.

Some research has previously shown it is more difficult for women to compartmentalize their time into household labour, paid work, and leisure time (Harrington & Dawson, 1995). As a result, paid work and household labour are allowed to intrude on leisure time (Firestone and Shelton, 1994). This constraint on leisure was reinforced by this study especially in relation to the women who had younger children still at home. However, some of the other “newer” business women (who did not have children) also reported constrained leisure time. Despite the flexibility consulting provided, their business and family tended to take precedence over leisure. This may have been a result of the women’s desire to prove their competence. By devoting the majority of their attention to their business and family roles and ensuring competence in both of these areas, the women may in a sense be validating their sense of self-worth.

One of the unique aspects of the women’s consulting businesses that allowed them more of a chance to achieve a balance was the flexible nature of the work. The flexibility offered the women the chance to better combine work and family, be able to take time out for themselves,
and be able to include other activities besides work in their life (e.g., volunteering, traveling). This finding supports recent research which has recommended the development of flexible work schedules for their employees (Coolidge & D'Angelo, 1994; Rose, 1996; Rosen & Lovelace, 1994). Organizations that offer flexible work schedules, temporary part-time arrangements, or at home-work arrangements are being labeled as “family friendly” and have been linked to greater organizational commitment and reduced employee stress (Rosen & Lovelace, 1994).

Yet, the women in this study revealed that at home work arrangements are not without their struggles. The main issue revolved around negotiating time for administrative work, developing their product and/or service, balancing family and/or child care, and finding time for themselves. Previous research on time management has assumed that if the individual develops priorities, sticks with them, and plans, they will be effective at managing their time (Bellman, 1990; Vipperman, 1990; Zuckerman, 1990). However, this study found that due to the multitude of demands on women’s time, setting schedules and priorities do not necessarily solve the problem of time management.

Definitions of Success

In this next section, the women’s definitions of success will be examined to address the final research question of this study. The women did not define success solely in financial terms, the measure most commonly used in the business literature. Instead, success was linked to “being able to achieve a balance”. This substantiates Gallos’ (1989) work who found few women feel reassured of their social identities by occupational and professional success alone.
Instead, as indicated by Frisby (1992), alternative definitions of career success for women need to be addressed.

The women had a multitude of definitions of balance which were tied to their family and marital statuses. However, the interesting point to note was that the lone single woman in the study was also concerned with finding a balance so she could spend more time with friends.

The other themes which emerged in the women’s definitions of success were linked to a two way process of relationship building (Young & Richards 1992). Success, for most of the women, involved ensuring both their clients were satisfied and happy as well as themselves.

Implications for the Small Business Entrepreneurship Literature

Based on the results and analysis of this study, this section examines the implications for the small business entrepreneurship literature by highlighting the information that needs to be considered in order to produce a better explanatory framework of women’s business experiences. This includes recognizing the fluid nature of consulting and the importance of viewing work, leisure, and family as highly interrelated. Attention is also drawn to understanding the experiences of women who are no longer consultants as well as meanings attributed to success, entrepreneurship, and consulting. Finally, the importance of considering the contextual factors influencing the social construction of gender relations and how they underpin the experiences of women consultants within the fitness and sport industry are discussed.

The Need to Acknowledge the Fluid Nature of Consulting

Several limitations have existed with previous typologies for understanding women entrepreneurs. For example, Goffee and Scase’s (1985) typology and Cromie and Hayes’ (1988)
framework classify women entrepreneurs based on their marital status and the presence of children respectively. These frameworks do not account for the cyclical nature of the various stages of business development. The women in this study negotiated these stages in different ways as they attempted to find a balance between work and their personal lives.

The Need to Acknowledge the Diversity of Women’s Situations

Not only is it important to acknowledge the fluidity of consulting, but also it is important to recognize the diversity of women’s situations. Drawing on feminist literature challenges one to consider who has access to the benefits of working as a fitness and sport consultant. While it is not possible to draw conclusions about the demographic makeup of women consultants based on the small sample size in this study, there is evidence to suggest that the women who are able to make these types of business succeed represent a privileged demographic.

The Need to Recognize a Relational Component

Another important consideration is the salience of the relational dimension on women’s business experiences. Relationship building was found to be important in this study, not only in terms of developing, maintaining, and advancing the women’s businesses, but also in terms of validating their self identities. As well, the importance of relationships was carried over to the individual’s personal lives. A relational system of family, friends, role models, mentors, and professional organizations all made the women feel more connected which helped to offset the isolation experienced in a home-based business. In addition, relationship building should be viewed as a two way process because it was evident that the women benefited significantly from satisfying others.
The Need to Obtain an Integrative View of Work, Leisure, Self, and Family

Previous literature on small business entrepreneurship has tended to treat work and family as a dichotomy (Gallos, 1989; Tom, 1993). Instead, it was found that work, leisure, self, and family were highly interrelated and must be taken into account to more accurately understand the women’s business experiences. When these other dimensions of the women’s lives were considered, the notion of finding a balance emerged as an important theme to address. The women were interested in achieving a balance between their business and personal lives which meant they had to occasionally sacrifice some of their own leisure, work and/or family commitments.

The Need to Recognize Those Who Have Exited

Most studies of small business entrepreneurship focus on those currently in business. Including the experiences of those who have gone out of business is important if a more accurate picture of the experience of entrepreneurship is to be obtained. An interesting point to consider is that although high business failure rates are consistently cited in the literature (Foley & Green, 1989), little consideration is given to the role that human agency plays in decisions to cease operation. The results of this study suggest that individuals made conscious decisions to switch into another line of work in order to achieve a better life balance even when their businesses are financially successful. This decision does not necessarily represent business “failure”. In addition, the decision to exit is not a finite point associated with business failure as the woman who was contemplating re-entry into the business testified.
The Need to Consider Women’s Alternative Meanings of Success

In the small business and consulting literature, success is usually defined and measured in financial terms. While being able to survive financially figured into some of the women’s definitions of success, the notion of achieving a balance between work and family was much more salient. In part, the notion of balance evolved from the fitness and wellness ideology associated with the type of work the women were in.

Paving Attention to Meanings

The women in this study appeared to have difficulty identifying with either of the terms entrepreneurship or consultant, yet these terms have been continually used in the literature. Part of the women’s struggle with the term entrepreneurship may have been because they did not believe they were contributing enough to society as they did not provide a tangible product or hire employees. The difficulty the women had with the term consultant revolved around the marginality and financial insecurity associated with using it as a label. Instead the women saw themselves as risk takers who were constantly striving to improve their businesses through innovation and creativity.

The Need to Recognize Social and Contextual Factors

Another area much of the research on small business entrepreneurship has ignored is the social and contextual factors which influence business development. For example, research has focused on the psychological traits associated with successful entrepreneurship (Fagenson, 1993; Royal Bank, 1994). Yet, assuming that individuals who have these traits will be successful entrepreneurs ignores the power imbalances that exist within society that tend to undervalue
women's work and roles as compared to men's. The influence of these power imbalances could be seen in the women's concerns about assessing self-value. The women believed they undervalued themselves and therefore undercharged for their services in comparison to men in the field. At the same time, possibly in an attempt to prove their competence, the women felt they worked harder than other men in the industry and did not charge representatively for the extra service.

The Need to Recognize the Fitness and Sport Industry

Finally, despite the growth in the fitness and sport industry (Minister's Task Force Report on Federal Sport Policy, 1992; Sport Ontario, 1992) and the fact that it is becoming a large part of our popular culture (Hall, 1991; LeClair, 1992), little attention has been given to the entrepreneurs responsible for this growth (Berrett, et al., 1993). This study found that these individuals can provide unique insights into the process of entrepreneurship. As well, additional themes emerged as being important to consider that had not been previously addressed in the literature. For example, body image issues were found to be very important to the women in this study, yet previous literature related to small business entrepreneurship has not addressed whether these issues are relevant to other entrepreneurs.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research is needed to uncover more about the experiences of women consultants within the fitness and sport industry. The following outlines some recommendations for future research:

1. Very little is known about the experiences of entrepreneurs in the fitness and sport industry, consultants in the fitness and sport industry, and consultants in general. Therefore, further
research is needed to determine whether the experiences of the women consultants in this study are similar to: 1) other female consultants, 2) other female entrepreneurs in the fitness and sport industry, 3) other female entrepreneurs, 4) male consultants, 5) male entrepreneurs in the fitness and sport industry, and/or 6) male entrepreneurs. Research which tries to uncover the experiences of women and men in these areas needs to focus on the power imbalances that exist and how gender influences the individuals’ experiences. As well, these studies should address the notions of marginality and privilege further.

2. Similarly, due to the general lack of information about consultants in the fitness and sport industry, the following questions also need to be addressed: Is consulting in the fitness and sport industry a unique type of consulting? How are these entrepreneurs transforming the nature of conducting work?

3. Further research is also needed that details the specific process of consulting. For example, this study did not directly examine the women’s delivery of services to clients, but rather, was based on the women’s explanation of this process. As a result, it was impossible to detail the dynamics involved in the client-consultant relationship. Research into this process and how gender relations influence it would be useful. However, the researcher should first determine a method of reducing the invasive impact that their observations may have.

4. The theme of balance emerged as important to the women in this study and further examination of this concept would be useful. The women believed that consulting allowed them the chance to better combine work and family than is possible in some more traditional occupations. The struggles involved in negotiating this balance would be useful to further understand in order to determine whether it is possible to: “Have it all”. This could be done by concentrating more closely on either the family or self dimensions highlighted in this study.

5. This study highlighted the importance of considering individuals who have gone out of business as a way of better understanding business experiences. However, this study was only able to scratch the surface of these individuals’ experiences. Therefore, further work is needed that details why these individuals are deciding to leave, what they are turning to instead, whether they ever decide to return, and if so, what pulls them back. As well, the literature on small business entrepreneurship has considered those individuals who have left a business as having “failed”, yet none of the exiters in this study labeled themselves as such. Instead, they had made a conscious decision to pursue other alternatives. Further research is needed that examines the dynamics involved in leaving a business and the influence of human agency.

6. Another issue that would be useful to conduct further research on is the notion of “success”. All of the women in this study considered themselves successful, yet their definitions included a variety of different aspects from what the small business entrepreneurship literature has previously addressed. Traditionally, success has been defined in financial terms, yet this was only one aspect for the women in this study. As well, the financial attention seemed to be
more related to simply security, rather than the search for “fame and fortune”. Further research to determine whether this is similar for other women and men would be useful.

Practical Recommendations

Too often research is criticized for its inability to provide practical applications. In fact, several of the women included in this study commented that what they would find most useful to them would be “practical, down-to-earth, useful” information. As a result, the following recommendations were put forth on two levels, one for the women entrepreneurs and the other for policy makers (e.g., government, banks, business consultants).

For the Women

1. One of the most important aspects that women fitness and sport consultants need to develop is a networking group. This would allow the women to develop relationships with others who have similar experiences and would enable them to feel more connected. They would also be able to exchange ideas, receive guidance, and provide support for one another. A concern which would need to be addressed in doing so, however, is when the meetings could take place. The women, at least in this study, had varied schedules which could cause challenges in terms of finding a common time. With the advancements of technology, setting up an address on the internet for women consultants to communicate with each other could possibly be one way of achieving the benefits of networking without having to actually meet. However, this may lead to feelings of isolation as they would still not have any direct social connection.

2. If it were not possible to develop such a networking group, another option that would also facilitate relationship building would be to develop a seminar series of women consultants’ experiences. This approach would allow women to share information, receive assistance, and provide guidance for others which would again help to validate their sense of self identity. As well, these meetings would permit interaction among individuals which is in contrast to some of the other forms of educational workshops available for consultants.

3. Better child care alternatives are also needed to allow women who decide to have children to negotiate their business and family lives. The women who had children noted they spent a large amount of their time organizing and scheduling child care and, then, once it was organized; transporting their children. As well, with the increase in home-based businesses, more neighbourhood child care facilities which several women could access would also save large amounts of time in transportation and pick up of children.
For Policy Makers

1. One area that policy makers need to consider when developing programs for women fitness and sport consultants is taking into account the women's (themselves) different meanings and experiences. This could be done by simply asking the women what they need or want. For example, one of the women in this study was quick to explain that the certifications they are required to take are not applicable to their work with the general population. Instead, the certifications tend to be targeted towards individuals working with an athletic population. As a result, the women are forced to waste both time and money maintaining certifications which they are not utilizing.

2. Another consideration that policy makers should address is related to the courses which are being offered women fitness and sport consultants. Most of the women in this study had taken additional courses in their areas of weakness. Yet, many commented that these were not always relevant for consultants. As a result, they were forced to learn more by a process of "trial and error". Courses that would be more useful to these women would be ones with an interactive component. This would enable the women to interact more with other individuals who have had similar experiences and build a relational network with them that may last beyond the course. As well, they would be able to share each other's first hand knowledge and experiences.

3. It is also important for policy makers to recognize that the process of consulting is fluid and dynamic and involves movement both forwards as well as backwards. If this is taken into consideration, attention will be given to the fact that small business ownership is not a stable process. Rather, the women may experience high and low periods of growth as well as moving both in and out of the industry. As a result, if an individual is in a low period of growth, it does not mean that their business is unsuccessful as it could be followed by an equally high period of growth.
REFERENCES


I have received the attached letter of introduction for my files and I understand that which is required of participants in the study entitled "Entrepreneurship in the fitness and sport industry: How gender relations underpin the experiences of women consultants".

I CONSENT to participate in the study.

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

I DO NOT CONSENT to participate in this study.

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

I CONSENT to having the interview tape recorded.

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

I DO NOT CONSENT to having the interview tape recorded.

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Questions for those women who are currently fitness and sport consultants:

1) a) What types of roles are consultants performing in the fitness and sport industry?
   b) How do you see these roles changing over the next 3-5 years?

2) a) What led/drew you to consulting?
   b) How long have you been a consultant?

3) a) Tell me about your business (e.g., services, clients).
   b) What does your work as a consultant entail?
   c) Can you describe your role from the beginning to the end of a typical contract with a client?

4) What strategies have you used to keep your business going?

5) a) What problems have you encountered along the way and how have you dealt with them?
   b) Were the problems at the beginning, the same as the problems now?
   c) What challenges do you foresee for your business in the future?

6) What influence have others had on your business (e.g. family, friends, professional organizations, mentors, lending institutions, competitors)?

7) Do you have children and/or a partner?

8) How does your work fit into the rest of your life?

9) Do you think being a woman has influenced the development of your consulting business?

10) a) Do you see yourself as being successful?
    b) How do you define success?

11) a) Do you consider yourself to be an entrepreneur?
    b) What does entrepreneurship mean to you?
Questions for those no longer in the business:

1) a) What types of roles are consultants performing in the fitness and sport industry?  
   b) How do you see these roles changing over the next 3-5 years?

2) How did you originally get into fitness and sport consulting?

3) a) Tell me about your business (e.g., services, clients).  
   b) What did your work as a consultant entail?

4) Why did you leave the consulting business and/or the fitness and sport industry?

5) a) Do you think being a woman influenced the development of your consulting business?  
   b) Did it influence your decision to leave?

6) What influence have others had on your business experiences (e.g. family, friends,  
   competitors, lending institutions, clients, professional organizations, mentors)?

7) a) What are you doing now?  
   b) How does it compare to consulting in the fitness and sport industry?  
   c) If you had to do it all over again, would you do anything differently?

8) a) Do you consider yourself to be an entrepreneur?  
   b) What does entrepreneurship mean to you?
APPENDIX C
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1) What themes do you feel are important in order to understand the experiences of women fitness and sport consultants?

2) The following themes have emerged from the data analysis process:
   a) obtaining a balance can be challenging (success is balance)
   b) negotiating finances are challenging
   c) a social support system is necessary
   d) the nature of consulting allows women to achieve an alternative work relationship
   e) assessing value both for self and clients creates challenges
   f) body image of self and clients has a large influence on fitness and sport consultants
   g) home-based businesses offer both benefits and drawbacks
   Are these the key themes? Do you see any others?

3) A framework of consulting as a form of entrepreneurship has been developed based on the information from the interviews (see Figure 1). Does this represent your experiences with consulting? If not why not? How could it be better adapted? Where do you consider yourself to be in this process?

4) What advice would you give to other women entering this business?

5) How do you feel about this meeting? Do you view each other as "competitors" or as part of a network?

6) How would you like to have the results from this study communicated to you?
Appendix D: Q.S.R.NUD.IST THEME CHART

Gender

Daily Life

Leisure/Self
Family
Work

Definitions
Nature of Consulting
Strategies
Relational System

Success
Entrepreneurship
Types
Stage of Growth
Challenges
Entry-Exit Factors
Networking
Product/Service Lines
In Touch with Clients
Family
Friends & Colleagues
Mentors & Role Models
Professional Organizations

Consulting
APPENDIX E
RESEARCH TIME LINE

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