Becoming an Entrepreneur:
An Interpretive Phenomenological Study Exploring how Entrepreneurs Describe their Experience Becoming Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

Although small business entrepreneurs make enormous economic contributions to local and national economies, extant research on entrepreneurship was focused more on objective and less on subjective factors, even though the latter offer more opportunities for theory development. In exploring the descriptions of lived experiences of entrepreneurs as subjective factors, this study departed from that usual tradition of research in entrepreneurship. Using the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm of the qualitative methodology, the study reconstructed the lived experiences of participants becoming entrepreneurs, and reinterpreted their experiences to bring to the fore the background theories at play while participants transitioned into entrepreneurs. Using the double hermeneutic lens, the study found that entrepreneurial idea and entrepreneurial identity emergence, cognitive capacity of participants, fear of failure, and mentor and family support systems were all at play in the lived experiences of participants as they became entrepreneurs. This study could contribute to efforts in designing psychological and practical mechanism to deal with the emotionality of fear of failure and inform the development of cognitive training programs to support both nascent and practicing entrepreneurs.
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But I dedicate this dissertation to the sacred memory of my mother, long gone, and to all men and women who fight every day the challenges of entrepreneurial practice, in the hope of making better the lives of their families and those of their employees.

Key words: Entrepreneurship, Identity, entrepreneurial identity, emergence, liminality, transition, fear of failure, mentor support, cognition.
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Chapter One

An Interpretive Phenomenological Study Exploring how Entrepreneurs Described their Experience Becoming Entrepreneurs.

Statement of the Problem

Although 99.9 percent (29.6million) of all business enterprises in the United States are owned by small business entrepreneurs (Small Business Administration; 2017), the phenomenon of how individuals become entrepreneurs has not been understood. In part this is because research on entrepreneurship has been primarily focused on objective factors such as education level, length of work experience, and membership in a business network (Hoang & Gimeno, 2005). Hoang & Gimeno argued that there was need for subjectively oriented research (focused on “individuals’ perceptions, attitudes, and motivations toward entrepreneurial activity) because the subjective research with its approach to entrepreneurship as a transition is “a more promising avenue for theory development” (p.4).

Even then, focusing on subjective factors mentioned above is simply a focus on responses to environmental stimulations and does not address the mechanics of the phenomenon of becoming entrepreneurs. The study agreed with Garcia-Lorenzo et al. (2017) that “current research tends to focus on examining fixed qualities, thereby rendering invisible what goes on during ‘in-between’ entrepreneurial processes” (p.2), and that “it is in this ‘betwixt and between’ however, where we can better observe how creative organizing action, play, and improvisational entrepreneurial processes occur” (p.2). Further, Garcia-Lorenzo et al. (2017) argue that “by focusing on entrepreneuring as a process, it is possible to engage with the in-between to understand how these contexts enable creative practices to shape new forms of organizing
actions. However, this liminal threshold is rarely observed in organizational or entrepreneurial studies, especially in relation to ordinary entrepreneuring and common creative experiences in conditions of crisis” (p.2). Finally, Daniel & Ellis-Chadwick (2016) have argued “despite the parallels between entrepreneurship and liminality, only a relatively limited number of entrepreneurial studies have drawn substantially on the notion of liminality” (p.440).

Referencing the above arguments, the problem of practice for the study was that the phenomenon of how individuals become entrepreneurs has not been fully understood because prior research has not addressed the lived experiences of individuals as they transitioned into entrepreneurs.

This chapter is organized in several sections. The first section discusses the purpose statement. Thereafter the significance statement is presented followed by the positionality statement. The research question is then presented. The final section discusses the theoretical framework for the proposed study.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative and interpretive phenomenological study was to explore how entrepreneurs described their experience of the transition process of becoming entrepreneurs. It was anticipated that the study would generate data and information that could advance research on the phenomenology of entrepreneurship and that nascent entrepreneurs could use to set their expectations of the process of becoming an entrepreneur. In order to explore their lived experiences, the study focused on exploring what the entrepreneurs experienced, and how they experienced it. The lived experiences of practicing entrepreneurs
were explored in the context of the three phases of transition proposed by liminality theory, namely, the detachment phase, the liminal phase, and the aggregation phase (Van Gennep, 1908; 1992; Turner, 1967; 1969).

**Significance of the Research Problem**

*Significance to theory*

Hoang & Gimeno (2005) argued that “past research sought to find enduring personality traits and other dispositional measures that predispose individuals to entrepreneurship, but with poor results. A more promising avenue for theory development lies in explicating the nascent entrepreneurial process as a transition that is characterized by deeper identity dynamics” (p.4). The study was, therefore, significant in the sense it was designed to be a transition study that would generate data and information that could advance research efforts on entrepreneurial phenomenology. This approach, as argued by Hoang & Gimeno (2005), could provide opportunities for theory development as well.

*Significance for practice*

The study was also significant because the result could be used by nascent entrepreneurs to model expectations of what it means and takes to become an entrepreneur. For example Daniel & Ellis-Chadwick argued that only a limited number of research papers on entrepreneurship have drawn upon the notion of liminality even though “it is in the ‘betwixt and between’ where we can observe how creative organizing action, play, and improvisational entrepreneurial processes occur” (Garcia-Lorenzo et al.; 2017). Therefore exploring the lived experiences within the liminal phase of the entrepreneurial transition would generate data and information that nascent
and practicing entrepreneurs could use to model their expectations of what it takes or involves to become an entrepreneur.

Also, the study could, inadvertently though, be significant in addressing the challenge of understanding the emergence of organizational identity (Hoang & Gimeno, 2005). In exploring the emergence of individual entrepreneurial identity, and since organizations are made up of individuals, the emergence of organizational identity could be understood more by understanding the emergence of identities of seminal individuals in those organizations.

**Positionality statement**

Positionality of the researcher may influence data collection and interpretation by influencing his cognitive and hermeneutic processes. This section of the study addresses positionality with this view in mind.

*Defining positionality*

Carlton-Parsons (2008) defined positionality as a “concept that acknowledges the complex and relational roles of race, class, gender, and other socially constructed identifiers” (p.1129). The key premises of positionality, the author argues, are that “individuals construct an understanding of the world, and perceive themselves to occupy a particular location within the reality they construe” (p.1129). As a researcher, I was aware that I could unconsciously bring to the study my own understanding of the world and the hermeneutic interpretation of events and phenomena in the lived experiences of the participants. Both my own understanding of the world and my interpretation of it could have affected the research questions I formulated and the interpretation of the results from data analysis.
Dimensions of positionality

Briscoe (2005) split positionality into several dimensions. These dimensions, according to Briscoe, included the demographic dimension, the ideological dimension, and the discursive dimension. In addition, Bourke (2014) argued that being that research is a process, the objectives of the research and its various stages may be unintentionally or unconsciously influenced by the researcher’s subjectivities. These subjectivities, from which “we can never truly divorce ourselves (Bourke, p.3),” could be demographic, ideological, or discursive, and include biases, experiences, blind spots, and personal beliefs.

Role and Experience

My role and experience as an entrepreneur, a business developer, and business managerial leader, was valuable to the conduct of a high quality and relevant study exploring the lived experiences of entrepreneurs. In addition to the above profession and practical experience, my graduate level academic knowledge (Masters and Doctoral) was valuable to the study, and contributed to the production of a relevant, practical, but yet rigorous study with both practical and academic utility. But I was also aware that my experiences and knowledge were not definitive, but that there could be many more entrepreneurial experiences than my own which could explain certain entrepreneurial phenomenon in a better way.

Identity

Parsons (2008) warned researchers to look out for racial identities and biases deeply rooted in the minds of both researcher and respondents, and audiences. These social justice factors (race, class, and gender) could impact the study at any level by unknowingly or unconsciously, shaping behaviors and thoughts of both researcher, respondents, and audience.
However, the distribution of the participant pool of the study was such that a comparative analysis focused on race, class, and gender factors would not yield meaningful results.

**Bias**

In conducting the study, I was aware of two specific biases identified by Tetlock & Levi (1982), namely, self-attribution bias and self-presentation bias. Because of Self-Attribution Bias, I could attribute favorable study outcomes to myself and avoid any results that may not enhance my feelings of personal worth and effectiveness. Through the Self-Presentation Bias, I could fit the results of the study to make me look good before and approvable to my dissertation committee and to my audience, thereby avoiding embarrassment. Both these attributions could impact the study in the sense that they would influence me to accept only study outcomes that either enhanced my self-esteem, or communicated a great public image of myself. I took the position that results not fitting my expectations were important because they could be pointing out something that I did not know, and that could be important to other researchers and practitioners.

**Intuition**

As a researcher I had power and control over the type of data to be collected and the interpretation of that data. I did not use my power to influence the collection of data such that only data I deemed would fit my expected results would be collected. In addition, re-interpretation of the lived experiences of participants was not based on my intuition because that could have corrupted the integrity of the study results. Since intuition is “automatically activated (De Neys, 2012, p.2)” when someone engages in a reasoning task, it was all the more important that I constantly checked that where the answer was unclear, I was not tempted to use my
intuition to favorably re-interpret the collected data in place of logical facts. I stuck to actual responses and set aside those responses deemed unclear and unusable.

**Personal Beliefs**

Positionality would also be affected by my personal beliefs on entrepreneurship and general business development. I managed my personal beliefs by reminding myself that there could be alternative views to my beliefs that may explain certain entrepreneurial or organizational phenomena clearer and better than my beliefs. I was also aware that my lived experiences as an entrepreneur were not definitive and could be different from those of participants.

**The Research Question**

The study used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the tool for empirical inquiry into how entrepreneurs described their lived experiences of becoming entrepreneurs. IPA was developed by Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2012). They argued that IPA and is almost always concerned with “bigger and more significant experiences where the individual is prompted to contemplate, take stock, worry, and try to make sense of what is happening. Indeed each of these experiences is a major thing happening to the person, which has an existential significance, and which engender a considerable amount of mental activity” (p.188). Informed by this proposition, the central question of the study was:

How do entrepreneurs describe their experience becoming entrepreneurs?

**Theoretical Framework**
Liminality Theory (van Gennep, 1908; 1992; Turner, 1967; 2008; Bettis & Mills, 2006) was the theoretical framework for the study. The study defined liminality as the state of being in the liminal space, the continuum of time and events from the time an individual makes the decision to become an entrepreneur to the time the new business stabilizes and begins to mature. Just as Turner’s (1969) initiands emerged out of their initiation experience with a new identity as men or women, participants in the study emerged with an entrepreneurial identity passing through the transition.

**Development of liminality theory**

Van Gennep (1992) introduced the concept of liminality when analyzing rites of passage of groups or individuals from one state or social world to another. He broke down the rites of passage into three categories, namely, “rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation” (p.11). He called rites of separation pre-liminal rites. Transition rites were called liminal rites, and incorporation rites he called post liminal rites. Turner (1969) popularized the concept of liminality when he studied rites of passage among the Ndembu people of modern Zambia. He concurred with van Gennep that “all rites of transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation” (Turner, 1967; p.94). He further proposed that the first phase of separation “comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group from an earlier fixed point in the social structure. During the second phase (liminal period), “the state of the ritual subject (the passenger) is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the past or coming state” (p.94). In the third phase “the passage is consummated” and the ritual subject was in a stable state once more with all the rights,
privileges, and obligations of that new state, and was expected to behave according to the customs and ethical standards of the new state.

**Applying Liminality Theory to the study**

The three stages of transition articulated in liminality theory were used to frame the lived experiences of participants when they were transitioning into entrepreneurs. Participants were asked to explain their experience of the detachment process, their lived experience of the liminal stage, and also their experience of the aggregation phase of the transition. Just as the initiands were transformed into men and women through their lived experience of the initiation process, framing the study using liminality theory helped the study explore the formation or emergence of the entrepreneurial identity in the participants transitioning into entrepreneurs. The theoretical framework also informed the design of the secondary interview questions. Finally, the emotionality accompanying initiations as transitions for boys and girls also informed the exploration of the emotionality of the participants in the study when they transitioned into entrepreneurs.

**Rationale for using Liminality Theory**

Choosing liminality theory to frame the study was based on the fact that other transition studies of similar scope have used it as their theoretical framework (Bettis & Mills, 2006; Smith’ 1994; 1996; 1999; 1999; Van Gennep, 1908; 1992; Turner, 1967; 1972). In addition, the transition of the participants from non-entrepreneurial types of individuals (a pre-liminal individual) to entrepreneurs (in this case a post liminal individuals) with entirely new
entrepreneurial behaviors that are subject to standards and ethics of entrepreneurship, made liminality theory an even better aligned and rational framework for the study.

**Competing theories**

William Bridges Transition Model (Burke, 2014; p.179) could be an alternative theoretical framework. Bridges called the first phase of a transition “endings.” This is “the process of letting go of the past and of previous ways of doing things.” He also emphasized the need for people to achieve some closure by celebrating what was good about it. Bridges called the second phase “the neutral zone, - a period of time in which the individual is neither in the past nor in the new phase” (p.179). He theorized that individuals “experience this phase as a state of limbo and emotional disconnection and as ambiguous and often anxiety provoking” (p.179). Bridges called the final phase “new beginnings, the time when organizational members start to focus on new goals and priorities, begin to try the requisite new behaviors, and are psychologically prepared to move ahead” (p.179). However, this theory is focused on the management of the transition and lacks the depth to address the mechanics of the transition itself.

Another alternative theoretical framework could be the theory of social change proposed by Lewin (1948). Lewin theorized three stages in the process of change, namely, unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. Unfreezing is equivalent to detachment in liminality theory, changing is equivalent to the liminal stage, and refreezing is equivalent to aggregation. Both theories agree that there must be a strong motivating force to move an individual into the process of change, or in this study, into liminality in order to be transformed into an entrepreneur. That motivating force unfreezes or “thaws” (Burke, 2014; p.124) the individual so that there can be movement across the liminal space, and change could begin. Once the individual has been changed, the new
individual must be re-frozen to seal in the change. For this study, the “sealing in” resonates with the third phase of aggregation, when the individual’s identity is fully transformed into that of an entrepreneur.

Conclusion

The problem of practice for the study was that how individuals transition into entrepreneurship has not been understood. Therefore, the purpose of his qualitative and interpretive phenomenological proposal was to explore how entrepreneurs became entrepreneurs by asking them to describe their lived experiences of becoming entrepreneurs. Liminality theory framed the study. The qualitative methodology and its philosophical assumptions allowed the study to focus in detail on the lived experiences of a small number of participants in the study. Using the IPA as the approach of empirical inquiry provided the study with the phenomenological, hermeneutic, and idiographic constructs that informed the designed of the central question of the study and guided data analysis.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature for the study exploring how entrepreneurs describe their experience becoming entrepreneurs. The review focuses on entrepreneurial identity and emergence because in describing their experience becoming entrepreneurs, participants were in essence describing the emergence of the entrepreneurial identity. The review has three major sections. The first section reviews literature on entrepreneurial identity and entrepreneurial identity emergence. Here the concepts of identity, entrepreneurial identity, and emergence are reviewed in detail using literature from sociology and complexity science where these concepts have been researched in detail. The sociological approaches by Stryker (1980) and Stets & Burke (2003) in explaining the emergence of self and identity find support from complexity theory using the work of Lichtenstein & McKelvey (2007), Lewis (2012), Capra & Luisi (2014) and Richardson & Stephan (2007). The second section reviews literature on the internalization of the emergent entrepreneurial identity. The final section reviews literature on the transfer of learning problem as it applies to the transfer of emergent and internalized entrepreneurial identity to the actual practice of entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial Identity

Defining entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is the process of discovering and exploiting opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman (2000), and individuals who internalize specific entrepreneurial behaviors of identifying and exploiting opportunities are said to have an entrepreneurial identity. Support for the centrality of entrepreneurial identity to the practice of entrepreneurship was found in the
work of researchers such as Murnieks & Mosakowski (2007), Celuch, Bourdeau, & Winkel (2017), Shane & Venkataraman (2000), Duening & Metzger (2014), and Shepherd & Patzelt (2018). Entrepreneurial identity is a construction (Ireland & Webb, 2007; p.916; Duening & Metzger, 2014) of role identities (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2018), and matters to the practice of entrepreneurship because it motivates entrepreneurial behavior (Murnieks & Mosakowski, 2007). From the above, the cognitive capacity of the individual transitioning into an entrepreneur was an important consideration (Celuch, Bourdeau, & Winkel, 2017) because it determined the extent to which an individual understood his or her experience of phenomena and therefore the depth of internalization of a particular phenomenon.

**Sociology of entrepreneurial identity emergence**

This subsection discusses these concepts of self and self-concept and uses them to lay the foundation for understanding entrepreneurial identity and how it emerges.

*Self*

Stryker (1980) argued that there is a reciprocal relationship between self and society, and that self always acts in a social context in which other selves exist. Further, he argued that the self influences society through actions of individuals usually by creating organizations and networks and institutions to put forth agendas that favor the individual or collective membership, and in return, “society influences the self through its shared language and meanings that enable a person to take the role of the other, engage in social interaction, and reflect upon oneself as an object” (Stets & Burke, 2003; p.1). Thus the entrepreneurial self practicing entrepreneurship in a society influences and is influenced by that society through interaction and reflection.

*Self and self-concept*
Based on the work of Mead, Stets & Burke (2003) argued that in symbolic interactionism, “self emerges out of the mind, the mind as arising and developing out of social interaction, and patterned social interaction as forming the basis of social structure” (p.4). Being that “the mind is the thinking part of the self” (p.4), it is “able to point out meanings to itself and others” (p.4), “made possible by language” (p.4). Over time as humans point out who they are to themselves and to others, they develop a concept or view of who they are, and thus embodies content and structure (p.4-5). This is the self-concept. Stets & Burke (2003) conclude that “generally, the self-concept is the set of meanings we hold for ourselves when we look at ourselves” (p.5). This self-concept is based on “our observations of ourselves, our inferences about who we are, based on how others act toward us, our wishes and desires, and our evaluations of others” (p.5). Thus an entrepreneur, for this study, is one who observes himself or herself, and is observed by others, as an entrepreneur, and the practice of entrepreneurship, according to him and others, is simply a dimension of his or her self-concept.

Identity

Since “self emerges in social interaction within the context of a complex, organized, differentiated society, the self must also be complex, organized, and differentiated as well, and as such ‘self reflects society’” (Stryker, 1980 in Stets & Burke, 2003; p.7). From the above argument, Stets & Burke (2003) concluded that because both society and selves are differentiated, “there are as many selves as there are different positions that one holds in society, and thus different groups who respond to the self” (p.8). They further argue, “the overall self is organized into multiple parts (identities), each of which is tied to aspects of the social structure. One has an identity, an ‘internalized positional designation’ (Stryker, 1980; p.60) for each of the different positions or role relationships the person holds in society. The identities are the
meanings one has as a group member, as a role-holder, or as a person…What does it mean to be a father, or a colleague, or a friend? The meanings are the content of the identities” (p.8). Applying this sociological identity concept leads to the conclusion that entrepreneurial identity was just one of the many identities in the participants. Future research may explore the intersectionality of these multiple identities in an individual and how these many other identities may progress or regress the emergence of an entrepreneurial identity.

Dimensions of entrepreneurial identity

In line with arguments by Stets & Burke (2003) and Stryker (1980), Hoang & Gimeno (2005), basing their argument in role identity theory, concluded that entrepreneurial identity was a multi-dimensional and dynamic construct “intimately linked to emergence processes such as socialization” (p.5). They identified four dimensional constructs that described how the individual defines the entrepreneurial role and his or her attachment to that role. These dimensions include identity attributes, identity content, role regard, and identity centrality.

Identity attributes

Hoang and Gimeno (2005) argued that there are personal characteristics that distinguish people occupying an entrepreneurial role. Common distinguishing traits include innovative, persevering, dynamic, autonomy, individualistic, and risk-taking.

Identity content

This dimension of entrepreneurial identity focuses on content or activities that are perceived to be associated with the practice of entrepreneurship, in short, it focuses on what entrepreneurs typically do. Bearing risk and managing uncertainty, opportunity identification and
exploitation, new venture creation, organization building, are some of the principal activities of entrepreneurs (Hoang & Gimeno, 2005).

*Role regard*

The role regard dimension focuses on the positive to negative assessments that individuals have about the entrepreneurial role. The argument here is that since belonging to an organization with a positive external image can reinforce a member’s own identification with the organization, a positive external image of entrepreneurship reinforces identification with the practice of entrepreneurship.

*Identity centrality.*

Identity centrality as a dimension of entrepreneurial identity captures the subjective importance of an entrepreneurial identity within an individual’s self-concept (Hoang & Gimeno, 2005). According to Hoang & Gimeno, centrality is determined by the relative position of the entrepreneurial identity to other identities that make up the entrepreneur’s self-concept. They also argued that development of identity centrality is rooted in social validation received in interactions between entrepreneur and other members of the social setting within which an entrepreneur practices entrepreneurship. Thus identity centrality is linked to entrepreneurial behavior within that particular social setting (Hong & Gimeno, 2005).

**Entrepreneurial Identity Emergence**

**Emergence**

Emergence is the auto-process of generating new phenomena of higher complexity out of the interaction and relationships of lower complexity phenomena (Capra & Luisi, 2014). In
addition, Lewis (2012) defined the concept of emergence as referring to “the possibility that, when certain elements or parts stand in particular relations to one another, the whole that is formed has properties (including causal powers) that are not possessed by its constituent elements taken in isolation. The properties that arise when the elements are arranged in the requisite way are known as emergent properties” (p.368). Capra & Luisi (2014) agree with Lewis (2012) that “emergent properties are the novel properties that arise when a higher level of complexity is reached by putting together components of lower complexity. The properties are novel in the sense that they are not present in the parts: they emerge from the specific relationships and interactions among the parts in the organized ensemble” (p.154-155). These definitions also agree with the view of Richardson & Stephan (2007) who proposed that the concept of emergence may be rooted in chemistry in which “the chemical combination of two substances produces a third substance with properties different from those of either of the two substances separately, or of both of them taken together” (p.91).

The study agreed with researchers that entrepreneurial identity is a construction, (Ireland & Webb, 2007; p.916; Duening & Metzger, 2014) using processes of acculturation and assimilation (Duening & Metzger, 2014; p.10) with the cognitive capacity of the participants transitioning into entrepreneurs as central to the transition process (Celuch, Bourdeau, & Winkel, 2017) resulting from acculturation and assimilation processes. In so doing, the study acknowledged that entrepreneurial identity is an emergent phenomena. Further support for the argument of entrepreneurial identity emergence is provided by Shepherd & Patzelt (2018) who proposed that entrepreneurial identity is a composite of entrepreneurial micro identities (or role identities) which emerge from role practices and internalization of different entrepreneurial roles.
Emergence of these micro identities may be backgrounded by liminal processes and emotions of fear and uncertainty.

**Emergence and entrepreneurial identity**

The study drew upon complexity science in its attempts to analyze entrepreneurial identity emergence because the concept of emergence has been researched at an advanced level within complexity science. For example Lichtenstein & McKelvey (2007), using agent-based computational models, identified common patterns of emergence. After familiarizing themselves with over 300 computational modeling experiments (p.96) they found that complexity studies of emergence could be organized into four hierarchical levels of emergence common to organization and management theory. These four levels are emergent networks (level 1), emergent groups (level 2), emergent hierarchical complexity (level 3), and emergent coordination complexity (level 4).

*Level 1 emergence: Networks*

This level focuses on how network-level properties come into being through the interactions across moderately heterogeneous agents. The two important concepts in this level are the concept of self-organization and the “edge of chaos” concept. Lichtenstein & McKelvey (2007) based self-organization on power laws that initiate disruptions when certain conditions exist. They use the example of a sand pile that gets disrupted by an ongoing series of punctuated avalanches as the sand pile reaches a certain size and based on its diameter. The key point for this study was that certain initial conditions must exist for the self-organization and emergence of new properties to occur. Although self-organization of the entrepreneur and emergence of the
entrepreneurial identity may seem random, there are complex communications based on interactions (known and unknown), that are behind both self-organization and emergence. It is therefore, not surprising that Lichtenstein & McKelvey (2007) found early studies in complexity conducted at the Santa Fe Institute which found a class of dynamic order in cellular automata models that lead to self-organization and order creation. This class was labeled “the edge of chaos,” the region of self-organization (p.99) in which emergence occurs. With particular applicable relevance to this study, the edge of chaos was the transitional or liminal phase (with evident emotionality and uncertainties) between detachment, when the individual detached from an old identity and begun transitioning into the entrepreneurial identity but before fully aggregating the entrepreneurial identity.

Level 2 emergent groups

This level deals with how interactions among agents generate emergent order in the form of semi-autonomous groups. Emergence in this level results in the formation of groups of self-organizing agents. For example cellular automata studies on sociology of racial behavior helped to explain how agents with similar interests became grouped together in a physical space (Lichtenstein & McKelvey, 2007). This level, in general, explains group formation based on shared interests, whether they be organizational groups, political groups, or groups of nations forming to share or defend their common interests.

The emergent social networks for the entrepreneur are important because the relationships serve as conduits through which important information flows to and from the entrepreneur. The networks can at the same time represent the interests of the entrepreneur against government actions perceived negative for the network, and also to enhance social
legitimacy for the entrepreneur to continue conducting business in their communities without fear of being asked to leave those communities. Out of the information flowing in the emergent social network to and from the entrepreneur could emerge strategic opportunities for the entrepreneur, and thus lead to level three emergence.

Also worth considering in this level of emergence is the concept of Supervenience which, according to Lichtenstein & McKelvey (2007), is a crucial characteristic of emergence. It is the “mechanism by which higher level components intervene to alter the behavior of the lower-level components” (p.101). This is important considering an individual has multiple identities and in a network may be interacting with multiple other selves with multiple identities too.

Supervenience may explain how those with higher or stronger identities may support or discourage the emergence of entrepreneurial identity and thereby shape behavior of other entrepreneurs in the network of entrepreneurs or in society.

*Level 3 emergent hierarchical complexity*

Using strategy as an example, Lichtenstein & McKelvey (2007) indicated that an emergent strategy was generated by individual-and group-level interactions. “However, the cumulative impact of these innovations can only be defined in terms of corporate strategy, competitive advantage, and dynamic environmental adaptiveness, which reference a “higher” organizational level” (p.102). Displayed in this example is a hierarchy showing “three distinct and interdependent levels, namely, agents, groups, and organizational dynamics” (p.102). Supervenience in this case is seen in the fact that corporate strategy, resulting from interactions of lower level agents and groups, is then used to alter the behavior of those same agents and groups so that corporate interests could be realized.
Level 4 emergent coordination complexity

Lichtenstein & McKelvey (2007) admitted that “once multilevel hierarchies form, causal flows become far more complicated; new coordinating structures and regulation processes must emerge to maintain adaptive capability” (p.102). They concluded that “level 4 emergence may never stabilize, and the multi-layered system is constantly in flux” (p.102). This study agrees with Kimberly (1979) that at this level, the organization set up by the entrepreneur would have attained its own identity divergent from that of the entrepreneur, and thus this level would fall outside the consideration of the study. Kimberly (1979) argued that though entrepreneurial identity and organizational identity may be synonymous in the nascent stage, they are likely to diverge over time as the venture grows and institutionalization processes take hold.

The process of emergence

Capra & Luisi (2014) outlined the process of emergence as follows:

Disturbance: There should be a trigger event to disturb the open system in order to set the process of emergence in motion. Being that an individual is an open system taking in information and materials, processing them, and outputting products and services, the thought and decision to become an entrepreneur is a product of some triggering experience. The study explored what triggered or disturbed the participants and led them to decide to become an entrepreneur.

Amplification of trigger event: There must be an active network of communication with multiple feedback loops to amplify the trigger event. The amplification may be linked to hermeneutic interpretation and understanding of the opportunity, and as such reflective thinking on the opportunity may also support idea amplification. Particularly, the study explored how the initial
triggers were amplified resulting in the participants embarking on the entrepreneurial transition process.

*Instability:* In this stage the system experiences instability of chaos, tension, uncertainty, or crisis. “At this stage the system may either break down, or may break through to a new state or order, which is characterized by novelty and involves an experience of creativity that often feels like magic” (p.319). Participants in the study discussed the chaos, the tension, uncertainty, and crises that eventually led them to transition into entrepreneurship.

**Other considerations**

Two other concepts are important in understanding the process of emergence in participants as dynamic systems. One is the concept of dissipative structures, the other, the bifurcation point.

*Dissipative structures*

Prigogine & Kondepudi (2015) introduced the concept of dissipative structures, or non-equilibrium structures organized and maintained by dissipative processes. In classical thermodynamics, the dissipation of energy in heat transfer, friction, etc., is always associated with waste. Prigogine’s concept of a dissipative structure introduced a radical change in this view by showing that in open systems dissipation is a source of order (Capra & Luisi; p.159).

The importance of the concept of dissipation, in this study, was in its potential to help explore and understand how and why the participant entrepreneurs, among the many roles they could have played, chose to give up (equivalent to excessive heat in Prigogine’s theory) what they gave up, and kept the roles they kept, in order to stabilize the new enterprises they were
developing. The role choices made here directly linked to role identities they developed, and consequently to the overall entrepreneurial identity they developed.

_Bifurcation point_

Prigogine’s theory of dissipative structures argued that not only do these structures maintain themselves in a stable state far from equilibrium, but that they also even evolve. “When the flow of energy and matter through them increases, they may go through new instabilities and transform themselves into new emergent structures of increased complexity. The system encounters a bifurcation point at the point it branches off into entirely new states, each characterized by a specific attractor, where new structures and new forms of order emerge” (Capra & Luisi, 2014; p.159). This concept lead the study to explore how the initial entrepreneurial idea they conceived evolved or emerged into a different idea that was more meaningful for practice than the original idea. Innovation or the emergence of new ideas from existing practice are important considerations here, and one identity characteristic of entrepreneurs is that they keep a register of these emergent innovative ideas (McGrath & MacMillan, 2000) for future development into enterprises. Thus the concept of bifurcation could also explain why entrepreneurs don’t just do one thing, but are usually engaged in many other entrepreneurial ventures that evolved and branched out of existing entrepreneurial ideas or practice.

**Entrepreneurial Identity Internalization**

This sub section reviews extant literature on the concept of internalization of emergent entrepreneurial identity.

**Identity Internalization and Learning**
Murnieks & Mosakowski (2007) proposed that “certain individuals hold salient entrepreneurial identities, which motivate them to act as entrepreneurs” (p.1), and that these identities are “cognitive schema that results from the internalization of a role into a person’s self-concept” such that it “defines who one is” and answers the question “Who am I?” (p. 2). They also argued that “an identity represents the internalization and incorporation of socially held behavioral expectations into one’s own sense of a self-concept” (p.2).

Since identity is a central to entrepreneurship (Celuch, et. al., 2017; Murnieks & Mosakowski, 2007), self-identity, “an outcome of a process by which a person mentally connects themselves to an area of conduct” (Celuch, et. al., 2017; p.4), is thus an important concept for entrepreneurial identity in the sense individuals cannot view themselves as entrepreneurs unless they make a mental connection to their entrepreneurial identity. This view was supported by Self-identity theory which argues that “it is through a process of internalization that self-identity tied to behavior becomes a more salient aspect of an individual’s overall self-concept, thus increasing in importance as a source of future action as well as consistency of action” (Celuch, et. al., 2017; p.5).

Once a role has been internalized, that role has been learned by the individual who has internalized it. Internalization and learning are supported by critical reflection. On this point Jones et.al., (2014) posited that “how entrepreneurs reflected on their experiences was also critical in ensuring that deeper learning could occur, leading to a more useful ‘stock of experience’ on which entrepreneurs could draw” (Reuber & Fisher, 1999 in Jones et al 2014).

In addition, Jones et.al. (2014) proposed four ways of entrepreneurial learning, namely, learning by doing, reflective learning, social learning, and emotion and affective learning.
Learning by doing: Taking action is imperative for learning to occur. May occur in many areas such as learning about oneself; learning about the business as it is created; learning about leadership and management of others; and learning about the context the business operates in.

Reflective learning: Without reflective practices, “it is clear that a person can engage in actions, have experiences, and yet they may not necessarily learn from those experiences” (Jones et al., 2014; Gibb, 1997). Reflective practices allow individuals, in this case entrepreneurs, “to take forward their learning, enables them to become more competent as entrepreneurs, and helps guide their future actions” (p.139). In general, “reflective learning can lead to change in how individuals see themselves and how they interact with the context in which they operate” (p.139).

Social learning: Learning for entrepreneurs is inherently social (p.139) and decision making in entrepreneurial ventures are often collaborative (seeking out consensus with employees) or at least guided by an entrepreneur’s wider networks (p.139) such as testing out thoughts with spouse or talking to a mentor or engaging with key others in the supply network. Trust, respect, and shared experiences are therefore important drivers that can guide entrepreneurial action and encourage learning, and therefore are important considerations in exploring transfer of learning.

Emotion and affective learning: Social learning is inherently affective because “interactions between people involve a diversity of emotions, which are linked to the relationships and their history” (p.140). Entrepreneurship is itself “an inherently emotional journey as entrepreneurs are recognized to experience forms of emotional exposure linked to owning a business” (p.139). Exposures include financial exposure from taking personal financial risk, relationship risk from pressure entrepreneurship can create for the family, and social risk from the consequences of failure (p.139). These exposures can create high levels of emotions for entrepreneurs and encourage a greater degree of learning (p.140). Certain events and crises that have higher levels
of emotionality (such as a near death experience for the business) may be critical in bringing about significant learning and lead to effective learning transfer or change (p.140).

**Transfer of Learning to Practice**

As discussed above, entrepreneurial role practice develops into entrepreneurial role identity that eventually results in entrepreneurial identity. In teaching entrepreneurship (whether in class, through practical experience, or from mentors), what was been taught must be learned by the potential entrepreneurs, and what was learned must be transferred to the actual practice of entrepreneurship. Practice of what was learned is important so that role practices could be internalized and begin shaping emergent entrepreneurial identity. Therefore the transfer of learning to practice was an important consideration for the study. The transfer problem in individuals learning entrepreneurship could affect entrepreneurial identity emergence. The following section reviews literature on the transfer problem in some detail.

The dismal rate of learning transfer has been a prevailing issue reported by researchers in entrepreneurship education, and this issue is called “the transfer problem” (Jones et al. 2014; p.135; Saks & Belcourt, 2006). Gibb (2009) also argued that “there is a demonstrable marked absence of a capacity to transfer the ‘learning’ into the ‘how to’ of ‘doing’ in the context of the business” (p.210). In a 1992 literature review on learning transfer, Tannenbaum & Yulk found that as few as 5% of learners transferred their learning to the work place. The study used Broad’s (1997) definition of learning transfer as “the effective and continuing application, by learners, to their performance of jobs or other individual, organizational, or community responsibilities, of knowledge and skills gained in the learning activities” (p.2). In arguing that transfer is a core
concept in learning, Leberman, McDonald, & Dolye (2016; p.3) quoted Desse (1958) in describing the importance of transfer of learning:

Practically all educational and training programs are built upon the premise that human beings have the ability to transfer what they have learned from one situation to another…The basic psychological problem in the transfer of learning pervades the whole psychology of human training…there is no point to education apart from transfer.

Leberman et al. (2016) further argued that transfer helps individuals learn by facilitating the storage, processing, remembering, and retrieval of information, and that every time learning occurs, previous learning is used as a building block. They also argued that not only is transfer “the very foundation of all subsequent learning, but it is also important for other cognitive activities such as thinking, reasoning, planning, metacognition, decision making, and problem solving” (p.3). Further still, they argued it is the “very essence of understanding, interacting, and creating," and is “the ultimate aim of teaching and learning” (p.3).

Leberman, McDonald, & Dolye (2016) also discussed the levels and types of transfer.

*Positive transfer*

Occurs when learning in one context improves learning or performance in another context.

*Negative transfer*

Occurs when previous learning or experience inhibits or interferes with learning or performance in a new context.

*Simple versus Complex transfer*
Simple transfer occurs when little or no effort is required to apply what has been learned in one situation to a new situation. Complex transfer occurs when significant effort and cognitive thinking are required to apply what was learned in one context to another context.

Near and far transfer

Near transfer occurs when transfer is within the same context or between a task in one context and a very similar task in another context. Far transfer describes transfer of learning from one context, say a school context, to a non-school context, such as learning mathematics in a school context and applying the same mathematics in making investment decisions (Leberman, McDonald, & Dolyle; 2016).

Conclusion

This review of extant literature has shown support for the centrality of entrepreneurial identity to the practice of entrepreneurship. Based on arguments rooted in identity theory, entrepreneurial identity is a multi-dimensional and dynamic construct intimately linked to emergence processes such as socialization. The four dimensions or constructs of entrepreneurial identity discussed in this chapter describe how the individual defines the entrepreneurial role and his or her attachment to that role. These dimensions include identity attributes, identity content, role regard, and identity centrality. Literature also supported the view that entrepreneurial identity is a construction of role identities, and that it, entrepreneurial identity, matters to the practice of entrepreneurship because it motivates entrepreneurial behavior. Since the individual must interpret, reflect, learn, and internalize his or her lived experiences, the cognitive capacity of the individual transitioning into an entrepreneur holds centrality to the emergence of entrepreneurial identity and transfer of practical aspects of identity dimensions to the practice of entrepreneurship.
Chapter Three: Research Design

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to explore how entrepreneurs described their experience becoming entrepreneurs. The study was designed as a qualitative study in order to access the rich and deep experiences of participants. To compliment the choice of the qualitative methodology, the study used the interpretive phenomenological analysis as the approach of empirical inquiry. Being that this study was a transition study, it was appropriately framed by liminality theory with its three stages of transition, namely, pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal stages.

This chapter is organized in several sections. The first section discusses the qualitative methodology in detail, and is followed by a section on IPA as the tool of empirical inquiry for the study. The third section discusses participants, the sample size, sample characteristics, and sampling procedures used to select the participants. The final section details the procedures for data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation and representation.

Research question

The research question was designed to guide the design of a transition study among practicing entrepreneurs, exploring their experiences of the transition process into entrepreneurship. It subsequently informed the choice of the theoretical framework and the methodology. It also influenced the choice of the IPA as the approach of empirical inquiry into how entrepreneurs describe their experiences becoming entrepreneurs. Given all the above, the central question of the study was:

How do entrepreneurs describe their experience becoming entrepreneurs?
Qualitative Research Approach

Since there is no one way of doing entrepreneurship, and that each lived entrepreneurial experience is different for different individuals in different contexts, and that each lived experience must be explored in detail to understand what was experienced and how it was experienced, the study was designed to be methodologically qualitative. One of the major characteristic of the qualitative research methodology is that it explores a problem in detail so that the central phenomenon under investigation could be understood (Creswell, 2015). Therefore the choice of the qualitative methodology made it possible for the study to explore the lived experiences of participants (what they experienced as they transitioned into entrepreneurs and how they experienced what they experienced) in detail so as to answer the central question of the study. In addition, the choice was also informed by Butin (2010) who pointed out that the qualitative methodology could be deployed in a research whose purpose was to explore a phenomenon by asking the “what, why, or how” (p.79) research questions. Such explorative studies, he further argued, had an interpretivist perspective because they sought to construct truth by pursuing the “meaning” (p.59) of the phenomenon under investigation. Similarly, the study was constructivist and interpretivist because each lived experience of the participant was unique, and had to be reconstructed and interpreted (double hermeneutics) in order to be understood. Further, as in qualitative methodology, the open-ended nature and design of questions in this qualitative study were intended to capture participants’ experiences in detail. This characteristic had high utility in this study because, as a phenomenological study, it is centered on capturing in detail the lived experiences of participant entrepreneurs.

In addition to the above characteristics, the qualitative methodology informed the choice of tools for data collection and analysis. For example, the choice of using an interview
questionnaire as the data collection instrument and type of interview questions asked to the participants were all informed by the characteristics of the qualitative methodology to dig deep into details of lived experiences of participants. As such the methodology aligned with the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the approach of empirical inquiry because both advocate small sample sizes, rich and dense data collection, and are constructivist–interpretivist philosophically (Creswell, 2015; p.16; Smith, 1999; Smith, 2012).

**Philosophical assumptions**

Since the lived experiences were different for different participants, and because similar experiences could be interpreted and understood differently by different individuals, the qualitative study was philosophically constructivist-interpretivist. The study acknowledged, as Ponterotto (2005) did, that instead of there being a single objective external reality, there was, instead, “multiple, apprehendable, and equally valid realities” (Ponterotto, 2005; p.129). Thus the study had to reconstruct the experiences of the participants, and then based on that reconstruction, re-interpret the descriptions of lived experiences of participants as they became entrepreneurs. This was the double hermeneutic approach that is central to the IPA approach of empirical inquiry. Ponterotto further supports the alignment of the philosophical assumptions of the qualitative methodology and the IPA construct of double hermeneutic by arguing that the constructivist position, “espouses a hermeneutical approach, which maintains that meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep reflection… which can be stimulated by the interactive researcher-participant dialogue” (p.129). It is this philosophical alignment between the qualitative methodology and the IPA that made possible the deep exploration of how participants described their experience becoming entrepreneurs.
Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

In alignment with purpose of the study, the qualitative methodology, and the central question of the study, the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chose as the approach of empirical inquiry into how participants described their experience becoming entrepreneurs. IPA has three constructs, namely, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. The following sections discuss these constructs in detail.

The Three Constructs of IPA

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was developed by Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) as “a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (p.2). The researchers built the IPA method of analysis on three constructs, namely phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. These constructs are all rooted in the philosophy of knowledge. Being that the purpose of the study was to explore how participants described their lived experiences of becoming entrepreneurs, the study found the IPA to be an appropriate tool of empirical inquiry.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the “philosophical approach to the study of experience” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; p.11) and “provides us with a rich source of ideas about how to examine and comprehend lived experience” (p.11). This construct of IPA guided the study in the design of research questions that were broad enough and open ended so that rich data could be captured from participants concerning their lived experiences as they became entrepreneurs. The study explored the lived experiences of participants dealing with emergent phenomena in the pre-liminal, the liminal, and post liminal stages of their transition into entrepreneurs.
Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the “theory of interpretation” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It is concerned with the “methods and purposes of interpretation…whether it is possible to uncover the intentions or original meanings of an author… and what the relationship is between the context of a text’s production and the context of the text’s interpretation” (p.22). The study sought to explore the lived experiences of participant entrepreneurs by reconstructing and then reinterpreting their lived experiences. The participants provided their understanding of the experience but the study looked beyond, through the double hermeneutic, to what was really going on in the background through a theoretical and hermeneutical lens (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012).

Double hermeneutic

The study, using IPA, assumed that participants in the study were sense-making individuals, and as such their accounts of lived experiences were attempts at making sense of their experience. IPA also recognized that access to this participant experience depended on what the participants told the researcher about their particular experience, and that the researcher needed to interpret what the participants recounted to the researcher in order to understand the participants’ experience. The IPA researcher in this case was engaged in a double hermeneutic (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012) because the researcher was trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of what they had experienced. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2012) concluded that “although the primary concern of IPA is the lived experience of the participant and the meaning which the participant makes of that lived experience, the end result is always an account of how the analyst thinks the participant is thinking – this is the double hermeneutic” (p.80).
Idiography

The third construct of IPA is idiography, “concerned with the particular” (Smith et al., 2009; p.29) “in the sense of detail and therefore depth of analysis” (p.29). The focus on the particular was important because “IPA is committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena have been understood from the perspective of particular people in a particular context” (p.29). This construct was important for the study because it narrowed the focus on particular individuals with particular experience so that rich details of these participants and their lived experiences could be collected for analysis. In the study, the particular individuals were particular entrepreneurs and particular lived experiences were their particular lived experiences as they transitioned into entrepreneurs in their particular lines of businesses in particular locations. The particularity of the idiographic construct made sense for the study to use a small sample size in agreement with the general proposition of the IPA that “IPA utilizes small, purposively-selected and carefully situated samples, and may often make very effective use of single case analyses” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012; p.29).

Rationale for using IPA

The rationale for using IPA as the theoretical framework for the study was rooted in the alignment between the purpose of the study and the construction of the research question, on one side, and, on the other side, the construction of the IPA as an approach of empirical inquiry that had tools that could be deployed to answer the research question and satisfy the purpose of the study. The lived experiences of participants in the study as they transitioned into entrepreneurs could best be explored and understood using IPA constructs, namely, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. Thus the alignment between the purpose of the study and the
research question on one hand, and the tools of analysis in IPA on the other hand, made the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis the appropriate tool for empirical inquiry for the study.

**Applying IPA to the study**

Since IPA was built of three constructs, namely, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, its application to the study was considered the application of these three constructs to the study. The phenomenology explored in the study was the description of lived experiences of the participant entrepreneurs. The lived experiences described by participants spanned the space of time from the pre-liminal, through the liminal, and ending with the post-liminal stage of the transition. The phenomenon was the essence of the study out of which data for analysis was generated.

The hermeneutic construct guided the reconstruction and reinterpretation of the descriptions of lived experiences of participants in the study. Looking at the lived experiences of participants through the double hermeneutic lens made it possible for the study to see the mechanics of theory working in the background of the lived experiences of the participants as they transitioned into entrepreneurs. Finally, the idiography construct reinforced the independent nature of the lived experiences of each of the participants in the study. Each lived experience was particular to each specific participant. Each lived experience was also particular to a specific context.

**Participants**

The participants in this study were practicing entrepreneurs in Los Angeles, California.
They all had sufficient cognitive, verbal, and linguistic capacity to describe in detail their lived experiences as they transitioned into entrepreneurs. Three of the participants were mentored by mentors/advisors from the Entrepreneurial Center and the other two did not have any mentors. At the time of the study, all participants were still operating their businesses.

**Sample size**

In line with other IPA studies (Creswell, 2015; p.16; Smith, 1999; Smith, 2012), the study interviewed a sample of five participants. The justification for the small sample size was based on Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2012; 1999a; 1999b) who argued that “because IPA is an idiographic approach, concerned with understanding particular phenomena in particular contexts, IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes” (p.49). The choice of a small sample size was also informed by the characteristics of a qualitative study outlined above in the opening section of this chapter, and the constructivist/interpretivist philosophical assumption adopted by the study. Both suggest using a small sample size. As Creswell (2012) indicated, the number of participants in a qualitative study is “small so that participant’s views are obtained” (p.16) in sufficient detail through what Ponterontto (2005) describes as hermeneutical approaches which “maintain that the meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep reflection, and this reflection is stimulated by the interactive researcher-participant dialogue” (p.129). Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) agree with Creswell (2012) in stating that “qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth” (p.31).

**Sample characteristics**

*Biographical data*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Type of business</th>
<th>Year started</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Tactical Apparel</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Phone Accessory</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matty</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Music Mix/Mastering</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Taco Catering</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Print Shop</td>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Homogeneity**

The study followed the guide of Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2012) that the sample should be homogenous unless non-homogeneity is a characteristic important for analysis of the phenomena under investigation. All participants in the study were practicing entrepreneurs and as such had lived experiences of becoming entrepreneurs.

**Cognitive capacity**

The second characteristic was that the participants needed to have cognitive capacity to articulate in detail their lived experience of becoming entrepreneurs. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2012) argued that “from inception IPA has included a concern for cognition” (p.187) because it is connected to phenomenology and hermeneutics, and that since IPA is concerned with
examining how participants make sense of their lived experiences, understanding these experiences is not possible without sufficient cognitive capacity.

**Sampling procedures**

The participants in the study were “purposively” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2012; p.48; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; p.31) selected on the basis they could provide insights into the lived experiences of their transition into entrepreneurs. This was in line with Creswell’s definition of purposeful. It meant that “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2012; p.156).

**Research site**

Although not necessarily important to the study, as much as possible, the interviews were conducted at the sites where the participants conduct their business based on the belief that sights, sounds, and smells could provide stimulation for new questions and insights for the study.

**Types of data**

The study collected data from interviews with the participants. Interviews were guided by a questionnaire that ensured all relevant questions were asked and responded to.

**Procedures**

The first step in the procedure of conducting this research study was to obtain IRB approval in satisfaction of the requirements of the doctoral program at Northeastern University. After obtaining the approval, the study commenced data collection and thereafter data analysis. This section is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the procedure for data collection,
and the second outlines the steps in analyzing the collected data.

**The Entrepreneurial Center**

The Entrepreneurial Center runs entrepreneur education programs and offers Incubator and Accelerator Programs for small and midsized businesses seeking growth. The center provides each of their clients with a lead mentor who conducts monthly progress meetings, helps develop and set goals, and also connects clients with specialist mentors. The mentor program is focused on helping businesses build sustainable revenue, guides in development of business strategy and better cash flow management. The center runs cohort classes of 20 Incubator and 10 Accelerator clients annually. The Incubator Program runs for 12 months and is for small and midsized businesses that want to grow their businesses from 5 to 20 percent in two years. The Accelerator Program runs for 6 months and is intended for Innovation Driven Enterprises (IDE) that want to grow their businesses from 15 percent or more over the next two years.

**Data Collection procedure**

Once the IRB application was approved, the study begun the process of collecting data for analysis. Data for the study was collected in three phases.

**First phase**

The researcher approached the local chamber of commerce to identify potential participants. The chamber of commerce suggested that the Entrepreneurial Center was more appropriate for the type of study the researcher had proposed. The researcher targeted and sent invitations to about fifteen potential participants including two who were not mentored by the center. Five entrepreneurs from the center agreed to participate, but one of them dropped out because her pregnancy had advance so much, and the other responded too late. These two were
replaced with the non-members of the center. After accepting to participate in the study, the researcher introduced himself to potential participants. The researcher also answered any questions the potential participants had before asking them for informed consent to participate in the study. Once informed consent was obtained, the researcher collected biographical data on the participants. Biographical data included the age, gender, race, education level, marital status, years in business as an entrepreneur, type and size of business, number of employees.

**Second phase**

The second phase involved conducting in-depth interviews using questions that were open-ended, general, and focused on understanding the description of lived experiences of participants as they became entrepreneurs. Among the three interview types, namely, telephone interview, focus group interview, and the one-on-one interview, the study used the one-on-one format. In conducting the interviews, the study also followed Creswell’s (2013) advice to utilize two recording devices, one to serve as back up to the other, in case the other malfunctioned.

**Third phase**

This stage involved interview transcription. After data transcription, the researcher read and re-read the transcript in order to determine whether there were gaps in the data that warranted clarification from the participants. No major gaps were identified.

**Data analysis procedure**

This section followed Creswell’s (2013; p.180) break down of data analysis procedures into three processes. The first process involved data organization and preparation for analysis, followed by data reduction into themes through coding and code condensing processes. The final process involved data representation.
Data organization

Data organization involved ensuring the interviews are appropriately transcribed and typed using a word processor that could not present access challenges to the researcher at the time of analysis by either corrupting the data or losing it altogether. Once the data was organized, the researcher read and re-read the transcripts, writing memos (ideas, key concepts, short phrases) in the margins of the transcripts in preparation for the next process of coding.

Coding and code condensing

Coding involved aggregating the data in the transcripts into small categories or groups of information and assigning labels or codes to each of these categories (Creswell, 2013). Coding in this study used both first cycle and second cycle codes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). First cycle codes were codes assigned to data chunks while second cycle codes (or pattern codes; p.86) were codes developed out of the first cycle codes and were intended to group the first cycle codes into a “smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs” (p.86). Miles, Huberman, & Saldana further described second cycle or pattern codes as “explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of material from first cycle coding into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis. They are a sort of meta-code” (p.86).

Data interpretation and representation

Once the coding process was complete, data interpretation commenced. In this study data interpretation involved “abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of
the data” (Creswell, 2013; p.187). Interpretation also relied on the relationships within and between the first and second cycle codes. The study linked the results to the larger research literature of other studies conducted by other researchers. The nature of the data made it unnecessary to represent it or repackage into visual presentations.

Criteria for Quality Qualitative Research

Ethical Considerations.

Ethical issues that needed to be considered included ensuring that the study was worthy in the sense it would contribute significantly to a broader domain of individuals and organizations, and not just for the sake of publishing. It followed that the researcher needed to have the competence to carry out the research and produce a study of good quality. It was also important that the researcher obtained informed consent from the participants by disclosing to them the full information about what the study involved. Another important ethical issue was privacy in the sense the study could not intrude the privacy of participants. The study also ensured the confidentiality of data by keeping all information in password-protected files and deliberately made the sources of data anonymous.

Credibility

While it was not possible to test the credibility of data through triangulation of sources, credibility was assessed by probing the participants to provide deep experiential information that only an individual who had gone through a similar transition could describe. The idiographic nature of the participants and their lived experiences meant only them could provide the data for analysis. There were also times when a participant made reference to changes in California law
banning sale of sugary foods in public schools and also made reference to the recession of 2008. In these cases both these events could be checked and verified.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of his qualitative and interpretive phenomenological study was to explore how entrepreneurs described their experience becoming entrepreneurs. The qualitative methodology and its interpretive-constructivist philosophical assumption, on one hand, and the interpretive phenomenological analysis as the approach of inquiry, on the other hand, aligned with the purpose of the study to capture and analyze detailed data on descriptions of lived experiences of participants becoming entrepreneurs. The data and information that was collected was input into answering the central question of the study. The study had five participants who were purposively selected. All the participants were still running their businesses and possessed sufficient cognitive and verbal skills to enable them clearly describe their lived experiences becoming entrepreneurs.

After the interviews were transcribed, data analysis, which involved data organization, coding and code condensing, revealed emergent themes across the descriptions of lived experiences of participants as they became entrepreneurs. These emergent themes are presented and discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter Four: Results

This chapter describes the results of the interpretive phenomenological study conducted among entrepreneurs in the South Bay area of Los Angeles, California. It focuses on the significant themes that emerged from the coding and analytical processes of the data generated from interviews of participants. The study makes a contribution to academic efforts addressing the inadequacy of research data and information on the subjective factors of entrepreneurship, especially in relation to entrepreneurship as a transition process. The purpose of this IPA study was to explore how entrepreneurs describe their experience of the transition process of becoming entrepreneurs. Accordingly, the central question of this study was: How do entrepreneurs describe their experience of becoming entrepreneurs?

The chapter is divided into three major sections. The first section presents the characteristics of the participants in the study. The second section presents themes that emerged from the analysis of interview data. The emergent themes covered include the emergence of entrepreneurial ideas, the lived experience of the transition process into entrepreneurship, the lived experience of the end of the transition process, and the role of mentoring and family support systems during the transition process. The final section concludes the chapter.

Characteristics of Participants

There were five participants in the study. Three participants, Jim, Tim, and Matty, were from the South Bay Entrepreneurial Centre, an organization that supports entrepreneurs by matching them up with mentors and advisors. Abigail and Larry were not members of any professional organization.
Jim

Jim is 48 years old. Jim attended West Point and later UCLA. He was in the Special Forces as a paratrooper and fought in Afghanistan. He was medically discharged due to knee injuries sustained in parachute jumps. Jim set up his business in 1997 when he was 28 years old. Jim’s company custom designs and manufactures packs, cases, bags, holsters, slings, pouches, belts, covers, and accessories. His customers typically include special operations and conventional soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines, law enforcement, medical and rescue personnel, aviation and vehicles systems manufacturers, corrections, bomb technicians, federal agents of all agencies, film professionals, world adventurers, sportsmen and urban-wear developers.

Jim still serves in the US Army as a Major. He employs former pilots, parachutists, divers, SEALS, infantrymen, all who bring their extensive military knowledge and experiences to the design and manufacture tactical gear for army and law enforcement personnel.

Tim

Tim is 50 years old. He is a high school graduate. He retired as a police officer from the Los Angeles Police Department to take care of his wife who was also a police officer from the LAPD. She had been shot and paralyzed by a robbery suspect she was chasing. After the wife was paralyzed, Tim was moved to the detective office. Because detectives do not wear police uniforms, Jim did not have a good place to stick a radio, and so he kept forgetting the radio in the car while in suspects’ homes doing interrogations. Jim created and patented a swivel belt clip to solve this problem. The latest product Jim has developed is the phone flipper. Phone flipper is
an accessory that one can attach to the back of the mobile phone and makes it possible for one to flip the phone to the back of the hand and make the hands available while the phone hangs at the back of the hand. The inspiration for the phone flipper came from an incident involving Jim’s daughter. One evening his daughter was lying in bed texting. The phone fell from her hands and into her face. Jim thought there was a better way to text and avoid incidents like the one involving her daughter. To solve this problem, Tim designed and begun the manufacturing of the phone flipper.

**Larry**

Larry is 50 years old and did not finish high school. He was born in downtown Los Angeles to immigrants with roots in Latin America. As a young child he lived in East Los Angeles. His dad owned a body shop and taught him to sweep the floor of the shop, but Larry refused to learn the work his dad did because he didn’t want to get dirty. He fell out with his father and when he was 18 his mother died. Due to the animosity from his dad, Larry left home to live on the street with his friends. Though he differed with his dad, he valued the idea of owning a business and being his own boss. A friend of Joe gave him a job in a donut shop as night time baker and cashier. When the friend moved to El Pollo Loco, he took Larry with him to work night shift and do a bit of management. Eventually Larry worked at a restaurant that specialized in grilled chicken, but then left to join his friend who owned Yum Yum donut franchises. His friend encouraged him to buy his own franchise and Larry bought his own. The 2008 recession hit his business hard, and the new regulations in California banning the sale of donuts and sugary drinks within school premises worsened the business performance. Larry sold the franchise back to the corporate office. After discussing with his wife, Larry decided to use his
grilling skills to set up a taco catering business in the South Bay area of Los Angeles. For five months he placed fliers of his business on cars parked along the streets. His break came when he got a call from a writer on the television show Two and Half Men. He had placed a flier on his car and was wondering whether Larry could cater at his block party. Today Larry caters over 38 parties a month, and turns away just as much business.

**Matty**

Matty is 38 years old and holds a degree in music. He is a music producer and a mixing and mastering engineer. In 2008 he won an award as best hip hop/RB producer for his work on a celebrity singer’s song. Matty has been in the music industry for over 15 years and has been running his business of mixing and mastering songs for the last four years. The first eight years were spent working in a Boston recording studio. Matty saw a lot of recording studios go out of business and close down due to technology changes in the recording industry. He decided to leave Boston and move to Los Angeles. He set up his mix and mastering business as an online business in order to provide new musical artists with access to high quality mixes and masters that major labels provide their superstar artists. This allowed him to offer his services to anyone in the world that had a song that they needed to mix and master.

**Abigail**

Abigail is a 43 year-old female immigrant from the Philippines and owns a printing business. Her business prints passport photos, restores old pictures, prints t-shirts, banners, and buttons for political campaigns, funerals, marriages, and graduations. She bought the business from 80 year-old entrepreneurs of Korean descent who were retiring. The business primarily
serves the community from the South Pacific Islands. Prior to acquiring her business, Abigail owned a vaping store with her then husband. It was when she needed banners and other promotional materials that she came to store she would later buy in January 2018.

Overview of Emergent Themes

This section describes the major themes that emerged from the analysis of interview data. Several themes on lived experiences of participants emerged out of the first order coding process and were condensed into four major themes during the second order coding. Some themes from the first order coding were retained as subthemes under the second order overarching themes. The major emergent themes of the lived experiences described by entrepreneurs as they transitioned into entrepreneurship include the following:

Theme 1: Emergence of the entrepreneurial idea
   Sub theme 1: Emergence initiated by new network information
   Sub theme 2: Emergence initiated by lived experience at work
   Sub theme 3: Emergence initiated by a changing economic landscape

Theme 2: Transitioning into entrepreneurship
   Sub theme: Planning the transition
   Sub theme: Emotionality and the fear of failure

Theme 3: Support system: Mentoring and Family support

Theme 4: End of transitioning into entrepreneurship

Theme 1: Lived Experience of the Emergence of Entrepreneurial Ideas
Although the emergence of an entrepreneurial idea does not necessarily establish a raison d’état for transition into entrepreneurship, being that many entrepreneurial ideas emerge but remain unpursued, emergence of the entrepreneurial idea in this study actually established the raison d’état for embarking on a transition process into entrepreneurship for the participants. The study found differences in lived experiences of entrepreneurial idea emergence among participants. Yet what was common to all was that emergence of the entrepreneurial idea was a result of information communicated to and absorbed and processed by the participant into an actionable business idea that was actually implemented into an actual business. The information so communicated came to participants through the connectivity of their networks of lived experiences with people, events, and organizations. One participant in the study came across this particular information through a supplier of services to the business where she was employed, others got their ideas from experiences at work, and another got his idea from observing a network of taco suppliers and identifying that there was a gap in the network and therefore existence of opportunities that could be taken advantage of.

**Emergence initiated by new network information**

While running a vaping shop with her then husband, Abigail always printed her promotional materials at Photo Express, owned by an elderly Korean couple in their late seventies. The idea of owning such a shop had never crossed her mind until one day the couple told her that they had been trying to sell the business to fellow Koreans but had not received any offers, and wondered whether she would be interested. At the same time she was in the process of divorcing her husband and the divorce provided the finance needed to pay for the business.
I'm 43. I acquired this business. This is a new business for me, a new venture for me. The old owner had this for twenty-seven years. It so happened that they're of age to retire already. So they mentioned to me that they are trying to sell this for a couple of years now but nobody was buying it. I think they're just selling it through their same race but nobody was interested.

And when he mentioned it to me I said I'm interested since it's already like a community business. Yeah it's been here for a while. And people know this business for a long time and they come here. So yeah I got interested. I asked him to give me the reports, profit and loss and everything. It's not a big big you know kind of business but I like it in a way. So this is my business by myself. Alone. My first business was with my ex-husband. And that's where I got my money to buy this business.

Emergence initiated by lived experience at work

The study found that emergence of some entrepreneurial ideas was initiated by lived experiences of the work that employed the participant. For example, the phone flipper, the swivel clip for police radios developed by Tim and the police, and military tactical gear by Jim all emerged out of their personal experiences and observations as policeman and special forces respectively. In these two cases, tragedy plays a role. For Tim, it was the paralysis of his wife from a robber’s bullet that led the LAPD to move him from street patrol as a uniformed police office into non-uniformed detective work, and therefore lacked a belt designed to hold a police radio.
I was a police officer with Los Angeles Police Department and but I didn't get hired there until I was twenty eight and I worked as a in South Los Angeles as a gang officer for almost my entire career. My wife was also a police officer and in 2010 she was shot and paralyzed by a robbery suspect that she was chasing who just robbed a liquor store at a gas station. And so she had continued to work for about seven years after that but with a lot of complications with her department let me retire. But during that time, I had. I think it was right before right after she was injured I was I went I started working in detectives and then were in plain clothes and detectives uniforms and it was no good place to stick a radio to carry a police radio comfortably. And it's very dangerous not to keep your radio with you even when you go in somebody's house and you're going to interview even a victim or a witness. Sometimes they have other people in the House that are criminals and they think you're there for them.

So it turns sideways so you need you need your radio with you at all times for help. Right.

So I kept forgetting my radio in the car and at the desk and stuff and if there's going to be a better way. So I created a swivel belt clip for it. That was really comfortable. My all my partners liked it. And then I started learning about 3-D printing and I started making products with that but said maybe I can make a business out of this you know and maybe I can shorten my career with some supplemental income from a business.

As a Special Forces paratrooper, Jim damaged his knees in parachute jumps and was medically discharged from the army. While in the army he had noticed that the tactical gear was poor in quality and design. Jim combined his experiences including sewing he learned in Junior
High, sales he learned working in a gun store, and his military experience, to set up a small business.

[00:00:46] I started the company in nineteen ninety-seven, so I just turned twenty eight.  
[00:00:57] I'd spent time in the Army as a lieutenant and so I basically used my military organizational training to structure how I would build a small business from scratch. So military we'd have staff meetings and we'd have the administration the operations supply the information and so information being marketing supply raw materials operations being production and then administration as H.R. and so I had experience seeing how a small unit a company size unit was led and organized and managed in a in the military.  
[00:01:51] So rather than build business school I worked with that was in the military. I learned how to sew and in junior high school. So I had the technique down while serving in the army I saw a lot of bags and pouches and belts that were somewhat poorly designed. And I worked in the Special Forces area of the military and so there was a need for customized equipment and so I saw a need or a niche to fill and I identified that I could make that there was enough of a niche that I could make money filling that requirement.  
[00:02:48] So I started sewing on my own. I came I was at that time I got into the reserves I had a job working in a gun store. And so I saw how the civilian sales environment functioned. So it took my military experience and combine it with the sales gun sales business and I saw how people purchased and put a markup on. I saw what was how advertising worked.
[00:03:23] I saw how it was distributor level pricing and then there's that level pricing and her distributor and dealer pricing.

[00:03:38] And then I decided I wanted to do this as you said as my 9 to 5 job.

**Emergence initiated by a Changing economic landscape**

The study found that entrepreneurial ideas could also emerge in response to changing economic circumstances in individuals by triggering in them a fight for survival. This was evident in the cases of Larry and Matty, both who, when their economic landscape changed due to events outside their control, had to transition into entrepreneurship in order to economically survive. According to Larry,

[00:00:06] Yeah I told my wife that you know the donut shop business was killing us because our sales dropped like half 50 percent because of what had happened the recession. Because you know the schools. All the contracts that I had with the schools were starting to get terminated because they didn't want sweets in schools anymore. So we we started losing a lot of money and we started cutting back at the donut shop. Then it got to the point where I told my wife you know we're working too many hours for the benefit for the money that we're making it just it's not profitable anymore.

[00:00:36] So we talked and I asked. I told her you know I probably need to go back to working at the restaurant chains and so forth. But she knew that that's not what I really wanted. So we thought about it and I told her Well maybe I should start catering in this area and that area was all the South Bay.

The situation for Matty was similar:
The reason I started my company was I saw that a lot of the recording studios were closing in in the business I was in and was changing and so it was really just kind of a survival move….

**Summation**

In consideration of the emergence of entrepreneurial ideas, data in this particular study shows that an entrepreneurial idea could emerge from an individual’s professional network information system, or learning in organizations with which the individual is involved, or could emerge out of changes in an individual’s changing economic landscape. Abigail got her entrepreneurial idea from her professional network. Jim got his entrepreneurial idea from his military organization. Matty’s entrepreneurial idea emerged due to impending closure of the organization he worked for, and the closure would change his economic landscape.

**Theme 2: Lived Experience of the Transitioning into Entrepreneurship**

**Sub theme: Planning the transition**

The study also sought to explore the entrepreneurs lived experiences of the transition. The study asked the participants to describe their experience of the transition. It found that, in one way or another, participants planned their transition into entrepreneurship. In planning to transition, the participants were indicating that they had made the decision to begin the process of acquiring a new identity, the entrepreneurial identity.

Among the participants, Jim planned his transition:

Jim  [00:03:48] So I left the gun store because I didn't think it's right to be really doing aside. Business was working for someone else. And so I went to work for the high schools the
local Los Angeles Unified School District. As a substitute teacher. And that gave me a lot of latitude. Realistically probably three out of four times I'd go to a classroom the teacher would just leave it leave a video for the kids to watch even though I enjoyed teaching. They just leave a video.

[00:04:29] So I sit there and so at that point I was being paid twenty five bucks an hour two and I could fill in business license forms I could fill in trademark and patent trademark applications back then and got some formats for writing business plans and try to look at all the different aspects so I get later I was writing my marketing information and then go home and transpose it into a laptop at first I would subs to teach every day for five days a week and then I did it for Monday Wednesday and Friday only and then I switched it to Tuesday and Thursday. It's Monday Wednesday and Friday I'd be sewing all day otherwise late at night. I teach so until 1:00 in the morning go to sleep go to work come back and then so in the evening that's where we start from there.

Larry, who transitioned because he was forced to find new sources of revenue for his young family, prepared by reaching back into his lived experiences and skills of barbecuing different foods as well as his welding experience. He used his barbecuing skills to design a menu for his tacos. He used his welding skills to make his own grills in order to save money:

[00:00:55] But I knew how to barbecue many of my types of foods. So I said OK we're going to start with tried to start with chicken. I start with a couple things. And the funny thing about it is you know I had a lot of falling out with my dad. We didn't see eye to eye. A lot of things and that's one of the reasons. Another reason I didn't take the business other than I didn't like getting dirty. So because I didn't want to invest a lot of money that
I did at that point didn't have I built my own grills No. I bet people don't believe me. But then I showed my Instagram and I showed my pictures of me building the grills and they're I was out when I was with my father. You know he did teach me how to weld and I learned how to weld in high school also. You know back then we had welding skills classes and I learned how to well there and then because I've been with my dad. A lot of times I learned how to work metal. So being in the food industry I knew the type of equipment I needed to do specific types of catering but to buy that equipment was expensive and I needed I needed modified equipment to go out and do these things. So I built my own grills my own certain things that I needed and we tried doing barbecue and it was okay but it was too much work for the amount of money we were getting so you know I tried a couple of other different foods and at that at that time you know it was the era of food trucks. Yeah and they were mixing and doing stuff in and then tackles were becoming very very popular at homes and offices and cooking alongside. So I told my wife let's do that. I started catering not to the donut shop but all the customers that I had you know telling me I might be doing this. I know we're doing this and all it took was one customer to give me an opportunity. And that customer funny funny as it was was a writer for that for that show Two And A Half Men before it for before it was cancelled. And he gave me an opportunity to go look at his blog and do a block party and you know I did it and it was pretty good. You know it's not it wasn't as good as I do it now yeah but it was decent and they liked and they were excited. And from there I picked up one party another party and it started to grow. I mean that year I must have done like seven parties let's say because I did his party like in September before that year was up back in 2009
and I did a seven or eight parties that year and I was excited I was like wow so my wife my God that's a lot of parties.

Matty left Boston and moved to Los Angeles to begin building his website that would be the central piece of his business. Abigail spent two months studying financial and performance reports from the Korean owners of the business she was buying in order to familiarize herself with the business. During these two months she prepared and convinced herself that she would proceed with the purchase, even though she was worried about the uncertainty of the business, and whether she would get back her money once she bought the business.

**Sub theme: Emotionality and the Fear of Failure**

The study also sought to explore how participants described their emotions during the transition process. All participants, with the exception of Jim who had military training as special forces, identified the fear of failure as the emotion that was generated by the transition process. In considering the interview data, the fear of failure did come as a surprise to the study because the data shows that the participants were not engaging in the entrepreneurship as experiments but as a matter of survival for themselves and their families. For example, Abigail used her money from her divorce settlement and agonized whether it was prudent for her to spend it on buying a business with all the uncertainty surrounding it. Matty confessed it was scary because he “had put all eggs in one basket” and doubted whether his idea would even work since no one had ever tried to do what he was doing. Similarly, Larry had invested a lot of time marketing his new business pressured by the fact that he needed to find a source of money to support his family:
Yeah but yeah it was brutal at the beginning. I mean I walked a lot pick up some cars left and right I mean I told my wife oh my God I must walk 10 12 miles today and I don't normally walked in twelve miles but I had to in order to start a business. People don't realize that you have to do sacrifices. What scared me the most probably failing because you know I had my wife and at that point when we started the business we had a two year old little baby already. And I was like geez you know I I've invested so much if this doesn't work... Yeah you know that was probably my biggest fear that we would do all this work and in the long run it was not going any where it was just a fad that you know maybe past.

I'll tell you this much. The only thing that worries me now I've had my business. I'm going to say about 10 years. Community admits it's been doing well but I see a lot of competition. There's a lot of people out there because I see them on Yelp and then I go do some surfing on the Web.

There's a lot of people that target the specific area that I do which is all the SBA Carson. I consider the topic. So there's a lot of new companies coming up and I know that they're new because they've only got a couple of reviews and I see these guys and I tell my wife what look business is going to get tougher because these guys knew what these guys are doing is it trying to undercut other taco guys price wise.
Similarly, Matty experienced the fear of failure generated by the fact that this was the first time he was moving into entrepreneurship, and running a mix and mastering service as an online option had never been done before:

[00:01:45] Well I mean it was kind of scary but but the fact that I'd been in the music business for so long and it's kind of a crazy business to be in your eyes kind of waiting on your next check it wasn't that scary. My concern was was it even going to work. I mean there weren't there was like a ton of growth in there too because I'd never created a Web site or done any of that or learned how to market or learned how to do search engine optimization and all that… it was scary because I was putting all my eggs in this basket. I took all my money and and started this Web site and started marketing and all that. So that was this the emotional experience that was was being scared. I have a family to support and so forth. So it was a little nerve wracking jumping in but I've always kind of been a no go with plan A and burn down Plan B kind of guy.

Jim, a former Special Forces, responded that he was not afraid but worried competition, congress shutting down, being sued by an employee, or anything happening to his business over which he had no control.

[00:11:23] Yeah well I'm a soldier so I don't know there's a lot that scares you

[00:11:30] Once you've been to war but because of that I think I developed a very very organized progression so I knew when I started working was working as a teacher I knew that if it didn't work out I just go back to teaching and then I'd be a teacher until I had enough money and then go to a different thing.
[00:11:23] Yeah well I'm a soldier so I don't know there's a lot that scares you.

[00:17:52] There are a lot of things that can worry you but it can all be engaged and dealt with loss of customer rip off of my designs by somebody offering a cheaper brand. Legal maneuvering. I watched one company a competitor who's really it's owned by a very horrible person and watch this guy sue another company just for no reason. A bogus reason because he was angry at an ad that other companies employee. He lost a two million dollar lawsuit and said he would drop the lawsuit if that company fired that guy. My fears are things like getting caught up in in me means sideswiped by something that you didn't expect employees coming in and suing. Labor issues.

[00:19:04] Congress shutting down and me losing all my contracts. I was very I mean something I dealt with I didn't take a paycheck for about close to three years and laid off a lot of people.

[00:19:17] But I kept the company afloat so that scared me I guess.

[00:19:23] But you know something I dealt with Yeah there's the unknown factor or even the factory you counted on but you just can't you hope that when it happens it doesn't happen to a point where it overwhelms you.

[00:19:45] You know you're gonna have a competitor who is gonna try and beat you up when he'll beat you out on a price on one project. Another guy come in and beat you out on a price project. But if you have ten projects total and competitors beat you out on every single one of those probably not going to happen but if it does. Yeah yeah you're fucked.

**Summation**
In exploring the participants’ lived experiences of their transition into entrepreneurship, the study found that the participants in this study prepared in one way or another for the transition into entrepreneurship. In doing so they were preparing to begin the process of acquiring the entrepreneurial identity. Once they begun the process, the study data showed that the fear of failure was evident in all the participants. Data also showed that one participant with high military training was not afraid of failure during transition because he would fight (as in a war) to win, but if the business still failed, he would simply regroup, plan, and get back in the same business, or in a different business.

**Theme 3: Lived Experience of Mentoring and Family Support Systems**

The study also found that even though the transition process was difficult for participants, each of the participating entrepreneurs had a support system during their transition into entrepreneurship. The support systems included either a mentor or a family member or both. In describing their experiences of the family and mentor support systems, participants indicated they wouldn’t have achieved what they achieved without the mentors or family support. For example Larry, the Taco entrepreneur, calls his wife the partner and friend and reflects that in the name of his business. Asked about his support system, Larry responded that:

I mean there was times my wife would go with me to do to drop the flyers and I'd be pushing the stroller putting flyers on the cars hoping that people would get in.

My wife and my wife's mother helped us a little bit here and there when we needed money but we had money.
My wife is my support my rock she's my silent partner. Yeah. You know she doesn't go up to that many gigs with me maybe once or twice here and there but she you know she keeps me on my toes she says oh did you get that done. Oh thank you. I remember when it comes to the business you know she's really good about remembering things. I mean I'm good too. But I've got more on my mind. She does. Yeah. But she's my rock. If I need anything you know to talk to about maybe new plans streamlining more products. I'll ask her would she. What did she think. No she gives her honest opinion.

And now you know she's always been supportive except she always tells me you know don't bite off more than you can chew. So what she does is she actually holds me back because I want to I wanted some time I wanted to take the world. And she's like You can't do that. You've had to take it a little bit at a time. A little at a time. Yeah. You know I'm I'm too anxious. I like to go all in. And then she tells me nope let's think about it. So yeah she she actually does help me in many ways and she tells me you know don't slow down because when it comes to things that I want to do like I get so excited you just want to get. I just want to do it. And she tells me No no remember we didn't come this far because you just do it like that you you gotta think. Yeah. So she has she really helped me out a lot of people don't know that you know. But let me tell you when it comes to giving me moral support or advice I mean her biggest advice to me is probably like slow down no I don't go that fast. Slow down and it works. I mean because you know she doesn't do much you're not gonna give me bad advice. Yeah.
Jim the former special forces had more appreciation for the mentoring at the Entrepreneurship Centre where he has been paired up with who he says is an amazing mentor. Though in military terms, he also acknowledged his employees as a support, a sort of symbiotic support between him and them. Jim also differentiated the support between his family and the support from the mentor program. The family provided economic support, specifically financial support. The mentor program provides the professional support he needs to manage and grow the business.

[00:25:21] Yeah. My family my family was there if I needed a couple of thousand dollars kid could borrow at one point if I needed ten or fifteen thousand dollars I borrowed it.

[00:25:36] But that was purely financial. That was at the beginning was throughout. But first borrowing a thousand dollars means the world then you know five years later a thousand dollars. That's like a third of your paycheck your pay your company labor.

[00:28:17] I utilized consultants and training programs all along the way I did the small business development center and I would take half the classes in marketing and half the classes in quick books you know things like that. I got involved with this huge organization and got a lot of information how to rise to the next level. There. And then they introduce me when they set up the Entrepreneurship Centre. Yeah. And I got connected with a consultant there. It was brilliant man who really helped me build these production capabilities.

[00:29:02] And so there's a there's investigator's really great mentor manager. She's a team group leader.
So they've been mentors and leaders all along the way. But those are people I could call to find out how they dealt with the same problem.

I never could rely on a family for good advice on how to deal with business. I was never there. My fiancé I've have been with close to a decade now and she's paid for the family bills. She's a she's a doctor. So when I couldn't take a paycheck she supported me by paying for the food and paying mortgage on the house that we share. That's supporting me but I wouldn't ask her for advice on should I choose this kind of a business loan or this kind of a business loan. So I keep business at work.

Some people would say I work hard at work so that I can make enough money so I can support them. I kind of feel that way but it's more I need to build this up so I can have something for the family. Yeah but it's not. I'm not worried about putting food on the table because Suzy will put the food on the table for Charlie. OK.

But you know as a soldier you're you learn that you join the army because you want to serve the greater good and serve the nation and defend the citizens. When you get into combat you fight for the person next to you your teammates you know that if you don't execute your part of the team's role.

Your teammates can die. And so you fight for those people. so I come to work.

I'm supported by my staff if I need to ask questions of someone outside of my staff I have consultants and other company owners and through the visage group of people I can call and get their support. So to me as a soldier I think that's changed my my outlook somewhat.
Tim also had great appreciation for the mentoring program at the South Bay Entrepreneurship Centre and provided a description of how the program has worked for him:

… It would be nice to have more business mentorship so that's why I went to the Entrepreneurial Center. And just I'm just sitting in that room listening to other people and you're like Oh yeah I did that or I've been through that or I fix that or that's coming for me.

Or just hearing all their stories and then just knowing that they're having the same frustration of holding the ball by themselves up in the air you know and it's so valuable you know and then being accountable every month where you like you know it's tomorrow's meeting. So I've got to give you the update. And what my goals are gonna be for next month really.

Disney has been consuming my life and that's really all I got to talk about with them. But that's what they're all waiting to hear about. I wish I had a good answer for them. I don't want to be disappointed but the saga continues. You know as this happened. Yeah kind of thing.

Yeah but just getting that their take on stuff and their experience and just listening to them and it's invaluable.

I love it.

So they assigned a mentor to me.

Matt who is a Marketing guy for Mattel and other toy companies and stuff and great fantastic guy.
He spends time with me kind of helps me troubleshoot problems you know. He stays in touch and like a sounding board and then he's also connected me to a lot of people like when I was first looking for a licensing partner. He found out through his contacts some Chinese manufacturing companies locally.

He found me a company a promo company that offered me a deal but he offered me a much higher deal. I couldn't resist.

So he hooked me up to the patent attorney. Stuff like that.

Yes having those introductions and the somebody credible you know to help you with that. And it has been excellent.

You know just having someone that listens and wants to help you solve them solve your problems your current problems and yeah he's got a lot of experience so it's nice.

For Abigail, the elderly Koreans from whom she bought the business stayed on as advisors and mentors for two months, and agreed to be available to answer any questions about the business beyond the two months. Matty, with his music business, continues to be mentored by the Entrepreneurial Centre.

**Summation**

Interview data showed the indispensability of support systems for individuals in transition to entrepreneurship. The support for participants in this study was either from family or mentoring organization, or from both. The study did not however, seek to explore the differences in the impact or effect of either support system. Participants acknowledged they would not have achieved success without the support system.
Theme 4: Lived Experience of the End of the transition into entrepreneurship

The study was interested in exploring how participants described their experience of the end of the transition into entrepreneurship because their description would indicate whether they self identified as entrepreneurs with an entrepreneurial identity. The study found that some entrepreneurs knew when the transitioning period ended and others had a view that the transition is never over but is always ongoing. For example, Jim, perhaps due to his training as a soldier who constantly needs to look out for danger, believes his transition will be done when he had sold the business and the check is in the bank.

[00:23:16] Will arrive safe and sound when I have the check in my account. After having sold the company either that or if I have the same that same amount of money that is in my mind that I want to sell or if I make enough profit in a couple of years that I'm able to say that I now have that amount of money in my account and I'm going to set that aside I can retire off of that. That's what I know I arrived.

But Matty, asked to describe the point at which he began to feel comfortable that he had transitioned an entrepreneur, responded as follows:

I'd say about a year year and a half in running the Web site.

[00:05:03] I knew that it was it was working. I don't know if you ever become comfortable as an entrepreneur because there is always concern of will it stop working or B which you know I've been dealing with a bed. There's a lot more competition you know staying ahead of the competition and keeping it working so I don't know if you ever feel comfortable just because you just when you feel start feeling comfortable you know Google comes out with an algorithm and you get knocked down five steps in or
something else happened so I don't feel like you're ever really comfortable as an entrepreneur and if you are I kind of feel like you might be losing your business pretty shortly after that.

[00:05:57] I'm always kind of constantly trying to figure out ways to improve my service my site my business so I'm always kind of a go getter and never quite content.

Like Matty, Larry could also point to a time when the transition was ended. Asked when he knew he crossed over to being successful entrepreneur, Larry responded as follows:

[00:11:30] At the end of 2010 as we got closer to Christmas you know I noticed that until my wife we were getting more calls maybe we weren't getting a lot of parties but we were getting a significant amount of calls and let's just say out of every 10 calls that I got I picked up two parties. No. Yeah. Or maybe one party. But I was getting I was getting like Jesus take 20 calls a day. No and there was a lot of maybes and there was a lot of people. Social media was big. Yes. You know it was already established so people were like Do you have any references do you have any reviews anywhere.

[00:12:10] And I was fortunate enough. I can't remember. But it's on the yelp. My first review. A man put it on there and he said that my tacos were put it in three simple words. It's like one two I can remember what it is right now but if I go on Yelp I'll see it. He said the tacos are magnificent.
Abigail points to the period May-June-July 2018 as the end of her transitioning period because in this period business took off. Tim’s transition ended when he licensed his product to the largest manufacturer of law enforcement gear in the United States.

**Summation**

The study found that individuals were aware of a moment in the transition when they knew or felt the transition period was over. They had become entrepreneurs. Emotionality was a sense of relief. But all participants acknowledge the need to continue innovating and paying attention to the competition which was ever present.

**Conclusion**

This chapter described the themes that emerged from analysis of interview data of five entrepreneurs who described their lived experiences of becoming entrepreneurs. The second order coding produced four emergent themes, namely, the emergence of entrepreneur ideas, the transition into entrepreneurship, the end of the transition into entrepreneurship, and the support systems for the participants as they transitioned into entrepreneurship.

From the description of how their entrepreneurial ideas emerged, the interview data showed that even though participants told different stories about the emergence of their entrepreneurial ideas, the common thread through them was that the entrepreneurial ideas emerged out of information communicated to and absorbed and processed by the participant into an actionable business idea that was actually implemented into an actual business. The information so communicated came to participants through the connectivity of their networks of lived experiences with people, events, and organizations. The study also found that participants
prepared for their transition into entrepreneurship by reaching back into their prior experiences. The transition itself, as acknowledged by the participants, was challenging and required dealing with uncertainty, long hours of hard work, and great sacrifice. And in exploring the emotionality of the participants during this difficult transition into entrepreneurship, the study found that the fear of failure was evident in the interview data of all participants except for the participant who had military training as a special forces. He brought to his business the mentality to fight threats to his business as if he was in a combat zone were fear has no place, otherwise his comrades could get killed. He was however, worried about employee lawsuits and competition.

From the interview data, the study also found that some entrepreneurs could actually point to a time when their transition into entrepreneurship ended, while others, like the special forces participant, believed the transition is never over because one must always stand guard watching for surprises that may spring up. Thus the study showed that participants were aware of a time beyond which they had acquired an entrepreneurial identity.

The study also found that even though the participants were running very different businesses, the biographical differences in the participant pool did not reflect differences in the way participants described their lived experience of the transition into entrepreneurship. The narrow band of the ages of the participants may have weakened the effect of the length of prior experience on how individuals describe their experience of becoming entrepreneurs. In addition, the differences in how individuals describe their experience on the basis of gender may have been weakened by the fact that there was only one female in the participant pool. Regardless of differences in biographical data, all participants had a heightened fear of failure due to the impact business failure would have on their families.
Finally, the data revealed the significant contribution of support systems, specifically, mentoring and family support, to the success of participants in the study. The support systems provided both financial and professional support to participants. Most participants acknowledged they would not have achieved success without the support system they have in place.
Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter discusses findings from an interpretive phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of the participants as they transitioned into becoming entrepreneurs. The chapter begins with a recap of the problem of practice, methodology, theoretical frame, and the emergent themes from data analysis. It then presents and discusses the major findings of the study. The discussion of the major findings has two sections. The first section discusses the findings in relation to literature. The second discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical framework. Before concluding, the chapter discusses implications for practice, proposes potential topics for future research, and finally discusses the limitations to the study. The conclusion closes out the chapter.

Problem of practice

The problem of practice for this study was the inadequacy of research data and information on entrepreneurship focused on subjective factors of entrepreneurship such as “individuals’ perceptions, attitudes, and motivations toward entrepreneurial activity (Hoang & Gimeno, 2005; p.4). In conducting an inquiry into these subjective factors, the study used the qualitative methodology because it provides for a detailed understanding of each lived entrepreneurial experience for different individuals in different contexts. The choice was supported by Butin (2010) who pointed out that the qualitative methodology is deployed in a research whose purpose is to explore a phenomenon by asking the “what, why, or how” (p.79) research questions. The study was constructivist and interpretivist because each lived experience of the entrepreneur had to be reconstructed and then re-interpreted by the researcher (double hermeneutics) in order to be understood. A logical choice for the approach of inquiry for this
particular study, then, was the interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with its constructs, namely, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography.

**Theoretical Framework**

As a transition study, Liminality Theory (van Gennep, 1908; 1992; Turner, 1967; 2008; Bettis & Mills, 2006) was appropriate as the theoretical framework. Van Gennep (1992) introduced the concept of liminality when analyzing rites of passage of groups or individuals from one state or social world to another. He broke down the rites of passage into three categories, namely, “rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation” (p.11). He called rites of separation pre-liminal rites, transition rites, liminal rites, and incorporation rites he called post liminal rites. Turner (1969) popularized the concept of liminality when he studied rites of passage among the Ndembu people of modern Zambia. He concurred with van Gennep that “all rites of transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation” (Turner, 1967; p.94).

The choice to use liminality theory as the theoretical framework was informed by two arguments. The first was by Garcia-Lorenzo et al. (2017) who argued in their research on entrepreneurship and liminality that “current research tends to focus on examining fixed qualities, thereby rendering invisible what goes on during ‘in-between’ entrepreneurial processes” (p.2), and that “it is in this ‘betwixt and between’ however, where we can better observe how creative organizing action, play, and improvisational entrepreneurial processes occur” (p.2). The second argument was by Daniel & Ellis-Chadwick (2016) who argued that “despite the parallels between entrepreneurship and liminality, only a relatively limited number of entrepreneurial studies have drawn substantially on the notion of liminality” (p.440).
Summary of Major Emergent Themes

The study observed four major emergent themes out of the lived experiences described by entrepreneurs as they transitioned into entrepreneurship. The first major emergent theme was that an entrepreneurial idea emerged, and the participant came in contact with it, identified it, and made the decision to develop it into a business. The second major emergent theme out of analysis of interview data was that each participant entered a transition from a non-entrepreneur to becoming an entrepreneur. Thirdly, participants, at a certain point after entering the transition, were able to point to a moment when they thought the transition was over and they had finally become entrepreneurs. The fourth major theme concerned support systems during the transition. All participants attributed their success to the financial and or professional support from family members and or mentors.

Major Findings of the Study

The study found that participants’ description of their lived experiences could be reconstructed into four major findings. The first finding was that participants had to deal with the emergence of entrepreneurial ideas and experience emergence of entrepreneurial identity during their transition into entrepreneurship. The second finding was the centrality of cognition in the entrepreneurial lived experiences of participant. Specifically, he study found that without sufficient cognition, participants could not have identified entrepreneurial opportunities, could not have internalized knowledge on needed for identity formation, and thus participants could not have successfully transitioned into entrepreneurs. The third finding was that fear of failure accompanied the participants across pre-transition, transition, and post-transition stages, but that
the generators were different. The fourth finding was the indispensability of support systems to participants in transition to entrepreneurship.

Discussion of Findings in relation to Literature

Finding 1: Emergence

The study found that the concept of emergence played a fundamental role, much more than anticipated, in the lived experiences of the participants. The broader role was to bring into existence a society of people and systems, both which provided the space and mechanics within and by which individual participants emerged and came into existence. While the emergent society provided the context of lived experiences for the participants, the systems such as economic, social, and political systems provided the mechanics of the entrepreneurial experiences by making it possible for economic ideas to emerge and granting social and political freedom for the participants to pursue the emergent opportunities they could exploit at a profit.

The empirical inquiry focused at this narrower end of emergence, and sought to explore how entrepreneurs describe their experience developing economic ideas into businesses. This section on the findings of the study discusses two particular experiences of participants. The first is their experience of the emergent entrepreneurial idea, and the second is their experience of the emergent entrepreneurial identity. The section begins by defining emergence and the process of emergence.

Defining emergence
In complexity science, emergence is defined as the auto-process of generating new phenomena of higher complexity out of the interaction and relationships of lower complexity phenomena (Capra & Luisi, 2014). Others like Lewis (2012) defined emergence as referring to “the possibility that, when certain elements or parts stand in particular relations to one another, the whole that is formed has properties (including causal powers) that are not possessed by its constituent elements taken in isolation. The properties that arise when the elements are arranged in the requisite way are known as emergent properties” (p.368). As observed in the research data of lived experiences of participants in the study, events lined up leading to the emergence of the entrepreneurial ideas.

**The process of emergence**

Capra & Luisi (2014) outline the process of emergence as follows:

*Disturbance*: There should be a trigger event to disturb the open system in order to set the process of emergence in motion. Being that an individual is an open system taking in information and materials, processing them, and outputting products and services, the thought and decision to become an entrepreneur is a product of some triggering experience. Participants in the study experienced triggering events. For example, the triggering event for Jim was the damage to his knees which forced him to leave the army as a member of the elite Special Forces. For Tim the triggering event was the shooting and paralyzing of his wife by a robbery suspects’ bullet. For Larry, his triggering event was the low revenue of his donut business triggered by changes in California law banning sale of sodas and donuts at public schools. For Matty, his triggering event was the impending shut down of the company where he worked. And finally, for Abigail, her trigger event was the divorce and the subsequent money she received from the settlement with her ex-husband.
Amplification of trigger event: The fall of Jim which broke his knees was amplified resulting into his honorable discharge from the army on medical grounds, and his discharge from the army lead him to developing his idea of supplying high quality tactical gear to the army and law enforcement. The shooting and paralyzing of Tim’s wife was amplified into required care, moving him from patrolling streets to detective and eventual early retirement to take care of his wife and kids. Jim developed the swivel clip for police radios when he was moved to the detective division and developed the phone flipper as a retired policeman taking care of his paralyzed wife. The changes in the California banning the sale of sugary drinks and foods on public schools was amplified with consequent diminished revenues for Larry, leading him to seek new sources of revenue. Similarly the events that occurred prior to the divorce were amplified into a divorce that made Abigail independent and supplied the money that allowed her to buy the business from an aging Korean couple. Finally, Matty’s impending joblessness was amplified when he saw companies like the one he worked for close down and go out of business.

Instability: In this stage the system experiences instability of chaos, tension, uncertainty, or crisis. “At this stage the system may either break down, or may break through to a new state or order, which is characterized by novelty and involves an experience of creativity that often feels like magic” (p.319). Participants in the study experienced uncertainty about the prospects of the business idea. They had to make the choice whether to move forward with the entrepreneurial idea, or to abandon it and pursue other opportunities. They all chose to move forward.

Emergence of the entrepreneurial idea

Network theory and idea emergence
The emergence of the entrepreneurial idea was a result of information communicated to and absorbed and processed by the participant into an actionable business idea that was actually implemented into an actual business. The information came to participants through the connectivity of their networks with people, events, and organizations. Abigail came across this particular information through a supplier of services to the business where she was employed. Jim’s idea of manufacturing high quality tactical gear for the army and law enforcement emerged out his experiences at work. Larry’s idea of running a taco catering business emerged from observing a network of taco suppliers and identifying that there was a gap in the network and therefore existence of opportunities that could be taken advantage of. The concept of emergence observed in the study data agrees with the broader concept of emergence in multiple disciplines including complexity science.

**Idea emergence at the bifurcation point**

The theory of the bifurcation point is rooted in the behavior of dissipative structures. Prigogine & Kondepudi (2015) Prigogine’s theory of dissipative structures argued that not only do these structures maintain themselves in a stable state far from equilibrium, but that they also even evolve. “When the flow of energy and matter through them increases, they may go through new instabilities and transform themselves into new emergent structures of increased complexity. The system encounters a bifurcation point at the point it branches off into entirely new states, each characterized by a specific attractor, where new structures and new forms of order emerge” (Capra & Luisi, 2014; p.159).

Since the bifurcation point is the point at which new phenomena emerges out of old phenomena, it could be surmised that changes in other systems may lead to new opportunities in the society, in organizations, or individuals. It is not uncommon for a business to branch out into
many other businesses over a period of time even though these branched out businesses may have very little or no resemblance to the original business.

The participants in the study were introducing new product lines to the original business idea. For example, Abigail begun custom printing T-Shirts because they complimented the funeral and graduation buttons and photos. Larry began experimenting with franchising because the demand for his taco business was too high. Jim began to move his tactical gear concept into the commercial fashion business with clients that include Addidas, Nike, and others. The bifurcation of one idea into other ideas is common among entrepreneurs, and one identity characteristic of entrepreneurs is that they keep a register of these emergent ideas (McGrath & MacMillan, 2000) for future development into enterprises.

**Emergence of Entrepreneurial Identity**

Participants in the study became entrepreneurs because they identified and exploited business opportunities, and internalized specific entrepreneurial behaviors (Shane & Venkataraman; 2000). The internalized entrepreneurial behaviors resulted in the emergence of entrepreneurial identity in the participants. Participants internalized entrepreneurial behaviors through acculturation of assimilation (Duening & Metzger, 2014; p.10) through learning new knowledge and practicing new processes of business development. Since participants in the study had become entrepreneurs, they had successfully acculturated and assimilated knowledge and practices that define an entrepreneur. But it is difficult to see how participants would have acculturated and assimilated entrepreneurial knowledge and practices without having sufficient cognitive capacity to learn, internalize, and transform into entrepreneurs. The study saw the
Finding 2: Cognition

The second major finding was that cognitive capacity of participants played a critical role in the acquisition and processing of data and information (collectively knowledge) on emergent entrepreneurial ideas and entrepreneurial identity formation. Without sufficient cognitive capacity to acquire and process data and information, participants could not have identified emergent business ideas and opportunities, and could not have any data and information to internalize, and as such the entrepreneurial identity could not emerge. Without emergence of an entrepreneurial identity it could be difficult to conclude that participants had transitioned into entrepreneurs. In addition, and by extension of the above, cognition helps explain the mechanics of the transition by making possible the understanding of knowledge acquisition and processing capacities of individual participants.

The following section discusses the important role of cognition in participants transitioning into entrepreneurs. To begin, cognition is discussed as a structure, followed by a discussion of cognition as a process, before finally discussing some aspects of cognition, namely, self-efficacy, scripts, cognitive styles, and decision-making.

Cognitive structures

Cognitive structures refer to the knowledge structures that entrepreneurs use to make assessments, judgments, or decisions in evaluating opportunities, and the creation and growth of businesses (Sanchez, Caballo, & Gutierrez; 2011). In cases when participants did not have
knowledge about a business they were able to quickly acquire the necessary knowledge to enable them move the business forward. For example, Abigail (who did not have knowledge of or experience in running the type of business she bought) requested operating and financial reports from the seller so she could study and develop strong cognitive knowledge about the business. Others like Jim, Tim, and Matty utilized the mentoring services offered by the South Bay Entrepreneurial Center to fill the knowledge gaps.

**Cognitive processes**

Cognitive processes are processes through which an individual acquires, uses, and processes information (Sanchez, Caballo, & Gutierrez; 2011). The cognitive process influences whatever an individual thinks, says, or does. The fact that fear of failure was evident in narratives of lived experiences of participants, given the amount of work they put into developing their businesses, was signal that participants cognitively processed data and information during transition, and understood that despite their best efforts, something beyond their control could come about and fail their businesses. For example, when Matty knew that changes in his industry would eventually force his employer to close down and cease operations, he begun thinking through his options. After deciding that he would set up his own business, he decided, among all the options he had, to set up an online mix and mastering service, the first of its kind in the industry. Such cognitive processing of data and information was evident in all participants in the study.

**Aspects of cognition**

**Self-efficacy**
Sanchez, Caballo, & Gutierrez (2011) define self-efficacy as one’s belief in his or her abilities to perform a certain level of performance or desired outcomes that influence situations that affect their lives. They then extrapolate that entrepreneurial self-efficacy is belief in one’s ability to adopt the role and conduct the tasks of entrepreneurship successfully. Even though there was self doubt and emotion of fear of failure in the participants in the study, they all had the courage to move forward implementing their business ideas into operating businesses. It was not clear from the data that participants believed in their abilities to successfully develop the ideas into businesses. What is clear from data is that they continued to work on their businesses until they were eventually successful.

Scripts

Sanchez, Caballo, & Gutierrez (2011) describe entrepreneurship scripts as cognitive or knowledge structures of beliefs and standards that entrepreneurs use to make assessments, judgments, or decisions regarding opportunities, enterprise creation, and business growth. The study observed that participants brought prior knowledge structures to their new ventures, even it may not seem so, as in the case of Abigail who bought an existing business. Abigail brought her store management experience from the vaping stores she and former husband had set up and applied that knowledge and experience to her new business. Jim brought his prior military knowledge and combined it with sewing he had learned in junior high school. Larry brought his cooking skills he learned in Santa Maria and combined it with the grilling and management knowledge he acquired at El Pollo Loco restaurants. Matty took his academic knowledge on music recording and production from Berkley School of Music and combined it with the practical knowledge and experience from his employer to set up his business. Tim’s products were designed out of prior experiences in the police department. Yet it is also evident that the
participants learnt and added to or developed additional knowledge structures as they lived through the transition process into entrepreneurship. They all had to learn management and leadership, marketing and sales, product design, negotiation, as well as finance and accounting.

Cognitive styles

Sanchez, Caballo, & Gutierrez (2011) define cognitive style as the way people perceive environmental stimuli, and how they organize and use information from their environment to guide their action (Sanchez, Caballo, & Gutierrez; 2011; p.435). They argue that “research has shown that entrepreneurs collect, process, and evaluate information in a more intuitive manner than managers, middle managers, and initiates” (p.435). The study did not find evidence of complex economic, financial, or production analyses before participants made their decisions to pursue the development of their entrepreneurial ideas into businesses. They simply decided to move on and start developing their businesses. It is probably one reason the fear of failure was expressive in the participants.

Decision making

Sanchez, Caballo, & Gutierrez (2011) argue that research shows that entrepreneurs are able to make sense of complex and ambiguous situations more quickly and take more orthodox approaches in making decisions (p.435). This particular aspect of cognition was more evident in Jim, the former special forces soldier. He dealt with the emotional complexity of being discharged from the army on medical grounds by simply moving to design and manufacture accessories that his army buddies could use. Larry, when changes in the law banning sales of sugary drink drinks in public schools took effect and his business revenue declined, he simply fell back on what he had learned about grilling and welding in his father’s shop. The difficult,
complex, and ambiguous situations were dealt with by making simple decisions based on what made sense to the participants, without elaborate analyses.

**Finding 3: The Emotionality Fear of Failure**

Fear of failure is the disposition to avoid failure, or the disposition to become anxious about failure under achievement stress (Cacciotti, et al., 2016). The study found that all participants identified the fear of failure as the emotion that was generated by the transition process. For example, Abigail used her money from her divorce settlement and agonized whether it was prudent for her to spend it on buying a business with all the uncertainty surrounding it. Matty confessed it was scary because he “had put all eggs in one basket” and doubted whether his idea would even work since no one had ever tried to do what he was doing. Similarly, Larry had invested a lot of time marketing his new business pressured by the fact that he needed to find a source of money to support his family. Similarly, Matty experienced the fear of failure generated by the fact that this was the first time he was moving into entrepreneurship, and running a mix and mastering service as an online option had never been done before. Jim, a former Special Forces, responded that he was not afraid but worried about competition, congress shutting down (government actually shut down two months after the interview), being sued by an employee, or anything happening to his business over which he had no control.

The fear of failure emotion experienced by participants in the study is rooted in the argument that “individuals are risk averse and the presence of risk involved in starting a business in terms of potential business failure and the associated financial, social, and emotion costs reduces the probability of an individual starting a business” (Ng & Jenkins, 2018; p.152). Although the intensity of fear of failure in participants was not investigated, the distribution of
the fear of failure was not limited to the pre-liminal stage of the transition, just affecting the intention of starting a business, but that it reached across the entire transition and into the post-liminal stage, the stage in which participants normally would feel comfortable. For example, Jim argued that it is not over until he sells his business and money is in the bank. Matty argued that the marketplace changes all the time and anything can come up that can negatively affect his business. Larry argued that even though he was comfortable, he was afraid the new taco businesses could undercut his pricing and cause trouble for his business.

Although the reason why the participants’ businesses had remained small businesses for many years was not investigated, the fear of failure may have been a contributing factor because it negatively affects the motivation to seek new opportunities that would grow the business (Cacciotti & Hayton, 2015). Having struggled to develop their businesses, the participants would not want to risk losing their hard earned money invested in new opportunities to grow their business. The fear of failure, as an individual participant’s characteristic to avoid failure due to perceived risk in an activity (Cacciotti & Hayton, 2015), is grounded in McClellands (1953) achievement motivation theory that an individual has the tendency to seek success and prevent himself or herself from failing. The tendency to seek success for their businesses, and the uncertainty of success for their businesses, could be one of the generators of the emotion of fear of failure.

Finally, the study found that the fear of failure during the transition was a motivating factor as failure avoidance pushed the participants to work harder and harder until they were successful. This observation agrees with the argument by Morgan & Sisak (2015) that “when an individual’s threshold for success is sufficiently high, fear of failure motivates additional investment” (p.1).
Finding 4: Support systems during transition

Three of the five participants were members of a mentoring program while the other two were not. The study found that even though the transition process was difficult for participants, each of the participating entrepreneurs had a support system during their transition into entrepreneurship. The support systems included either a mentor or a family member or both. In describing their experiences of the family and mentor support systems, participants indicated they wouldn’t have achieved what they achieved without the mentors or family support.

Those participants with mentors tremendously appreciated the space and support provided the mentoring center. Mentoring is important because general training for entrepreneurs is not tailored to the needs of the entrepreneurs who, in many cases, need a more personalized learning process (St-Jean & Audet, 2012). By attaching a mentor to each entrepreneur, mentoring becomes personalized enough that the linkage between mentor and mentee facilitates a quick and efficient transfer of experience into learning (St-Jean & Audet, 2012). The experience that transfers from mentor to mentee includes business management and strategic skills in finance, sales, and marketing. All the mentors for the participants in the study were either current or former executives in some of the top organizations in the nation. The practical experience passed from them to their mentees was appreciated by and was attributed to being the reason the businesses had survived and thrived.

The study also found that the support of the family was important to the entrepreneurs. For example Larry, the Taco entrepreneur, called his wife the partner and friend and reflects that in the name of his business. Jim the former special forces, in addition to his appreciation for the mentoring at the Entrepreneurship Centre, also acknowledged his employees as a support system,
a sort of symbiotic support between him and them. Jim also differentiated the support between his family and the support from the mentor program. The family provided economic support, specifically financial support. The mentor program provides the professional support he needs to manage and grow the business. Tim also had great appreciation for the mentoring program at the Entrepreneurship Centre and provided a detailed description of how the program has worked for him. For Abigail, the elderly Koreans from whom she bought the business stayed on as advisors and mentors for two months, and agreed to be available to answer any questions about the business beyond the two months. Matty, with his music business, continues to be mentored by the Entrepreneurial Centre.

It is thus clear from interview data support that systems are indispensable for individuals in transition to entrepreneurship. The support for participants in this study was either from family or mentoring organization, or from both. The study did not however, seek to explore the differences in the impact or effect of either support system. It is worth noting that the participants with mentors discussed their businesses at a higher level, and had a clearer vision for their businesses than the participants who did not.

**Discussion of Findings relative to the Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for the study was Liminality Theory (van Gennep, 1908; 1992; Turner, 1967; 2008; Bettis & Mills, 2006). The theory is used to study transitions across three constructs, pre-liminal, liminal, post liminal constructs. Turner (1969), studying the rites of passage among the Ndembu people of modern Zambia, concurred with van Gennep that “all rites of transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation” (Turner, 1967; p.94). He further proposed that the first phase of separation “comprises symbolic
behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group from an earlier fixed point in the social structure. During the second phase (liminal period), “the state of the ritual subject (the passenger) is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the past or coming state” (p.94). In the third phase “the passage is consummated” and the ritual subject is in a stable state once more with all the rights, privileges, and obligations of that new state, and is expected to behave according to the customs and ethical standards of the new state.

This sections discusses the findings of the study across the three constructs of liminal theory.

**Liminality theory versus idea and identity emergence**

**Entrepreneurial idea emergence**

In the studies conducted by Van Gennep (1908) and Turner (1969) that generated and popularized liminality theory respectively, the individuals did not choose to enter the transition process from child to adulthood, but that society, through its expectations, made that choice for them. The idea of transitioning did not emerge out of the individual but had been predetermined by society. Anyone born in that particular society and coming of age entered the process of transitioning from a child into an adult. Similarly, for the participants in this study, the entrepreneurial ideas emerged outside the participants and participants, like the boys and girls about to enter initiation processes in Van Gennep and Turner’s studies, had no control on how the ideas emerged. What the participants did was to identify the emergent ideas and be determined to develop those ideas into business enterprises. It is possible that two or more people can identify the same emergent idea and develop it into similar businesses or others can innovate and differentiate the idea into other product (yet rooted in the same emergent idea) in order to be more competitive. Others, for various reasons, even though they identified the same emergent
entrepreneurial idea, do not develop the idea into a business enterprise. In summation, the study found that the participants gravitated to the emergent entrepreneurial ideas, leaving all the other things they were engaged in. The movement to the emergent entrepreneurial idea was either voluntary or forced by circumstances both in and outside the participants.

Identity Emergence

In liminality theory, initiation in boys commences before the onset of puberty, and in girls at the onset of puberty. In both cases, initiation occurs in a period of time in which, on one hand, boys inculcated with tribal values, hunting skills, and sexual instruction, and on the other hand, girls are taught sex and reproduction, and prepared for marriage. At the end of the initiation period, boys who entered the initiation period come out at the other end as men, ready to live and survive on their own, and girls come out as women, ready to be wives and mothers, and to take care of matters of the home. The transition the boys and girls passing through initiation is “as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them cope with their new station in life” (Turner, 1969: p.95). The teaching and experience inculcated into the boys and girls transforms their childhood identity into the identity of men and women.

Similarly, the study found that when participants began building their businesses, they essentially entered a liminal period, a period of transition from non-entrepreneurs to entrepreneurs. The learning gathered from teachers, experience, mentors, and others transformed the identity of the participants into entrepreneurial identity, much as the teaching inculcated into boys and girls during initiation formed the identity of men and identity of women in the boys and girls, respectively. Much as the new men and women could not unlearn their new identity and return to the old identity of being boys and girls, the study found no evidence in the interview
data that the new entrepreneurs had regretted the new identity, but took it for granted they are entrepreneurs and looked forward to continuing as entrepreneurs.

**Cognition and Learning during transition**

The boys and girls in the initiation rites needed to learn and internalize the lessons on tribal values, hunting, sex, reproduction, and homemaking if they were to be transformed into men and women within the Ndembu society. The internalization of lessons and experiences lead to the emergence of the new identities as men and women. Learning and internalization may not be possible without an individual having a certain level of cognitive capacity. Similarly, participants in the study had a level of cognitive capacity that allowed them to learn and internalize lessons and experiences that eventually resulted in the emergence of the entrepreneurial identity in them.

**Liminality theory versus fear of failure**

In the Ndembu society, circumcision of boys is performed during initiation. It is difficult to imagine the absence of fear in the boys as the moment draws near, and then the pain that follows after the circumcision. The emotionality of fear failure individuals/participants transitioning into entrepreneurship may not have been exactly the same as that felt by the boys, but nevertheless in both cases fear accompanied the transition.

**Liminality theory versus support systems**

The boys and girls in the transition are supported by matriarchs and other women seasoned in conducting and managing initiation programs and ceremony. Much in the same way,
mentors, families, and employees formed part of the overall support system for the participants in the study. In both cases, the support systems are indispensable to the success of the initiands in the initiation period and the participants in the liminal period transitioning into entrepreneurs.

Summary

Using the double hermeneutic approach to re-interpret participants’ lived experiences of becoming entrepreneurs, four major findings were identified. The first finding was the role of emergence, and specifically the emergence of entrepreneurial ideas and emergence of entrepreneurial identity. The ideas emerged outside the participants and they had to identify the ideas, develop knowledge about the ideas, internalize the ideas, and decide to develop the ideas into businesses. The internalization of the entrepreneurial ideas and experiences of developing the ideas into businesses contributed to the emergence of the entrepreneurial identity in participants. The second finding was the important role of cognitive capacity to cognitively acquire and process data and information. Participants had a sufficient level of cognitive capacity that made it possible for them to capture and internalize data and information on the entrepreneurial ideas that had emerged in the marketplace. The third finding was that participants experienced the emotionality of fear of failure as they transitioned into entrepreneurs. Although the fear of failure was distributed across the three liminal stages of transition, it was nevertheless generated by different reasons. The fourth finding involved the important role played by support systems such as mentoring and family support systems. All participants in the study benefited from mentoring and family support systems.

Implications for Practice
The study found that fear of failure was distributed across the three constructs of transition. There is need for the development of practical mechanisms or strategies to help in the management of fear of failure in pre-liminal individuals intending to start businesses, in liminal individuals transition into entrepreneurs and engaged in the process of developing business, and in post liminal entrepreneurs scared to make additional investments to grow their businesses. Even though fear of failure is found in each of the three stages of transition, the causes are different. As such the mechanisms and strategies for mitigating the emotional impacts of the fear of failure must take these generative differences into account.

The interview data showed that three participants with mentors praised the mentor program in glowing terms and confessed they would not have achieved success without the mentors paired with them. The study believes support systems such as mentor programs for entrepreneurs at all stages of development should be available to more individuals and entrepreneurs. As shown in the interview data, participants in the mentor program were more knowledgeable about their business and could describe the future of their businesses in more detail that the participants who had not mentors.

The study would also advocate for the development of cognitive training for entrepreneurs to help them develop cognitive or knowledge structures and cognitive processes to aid them in capturing and developing business ideas into businesses. Well developed knowledge structures would ensure entrepreneurs have a solid bank of knowledge to draw upon when making business decisions. In drawing upon this solid bank of knowledge, entrepreneurs would need strong cognitive processes to manipulate and link pieces and sets of data and information into meaningful information that could be used in decision making. A well designed cognitive training program would result in the development of strong entrepreneurial identities.
Limitations to the Study

The study was not longitudinal and depended on the recollections of the participants who may have omitted some significant event that they may have deemed insignificant from their perspective, but significant to the study. Such events may have reshaped the study and its conclusions.

The distribution of the participant pool taking into consideration gender, race, and class distributions may have enriched the study and led to more meaningful and targeted recommendations management of fear of failure, support systems, and training.

Suggestions for Future Research

The study sees benefits in a longitudinal study that would follow individuals from entrepreneurial idea generation or identification, through the decision to begin the transition of becoming entrepreneurs, their experience of liminality, emotionality, and development/emergence of the entrepreneurial identity, and their post liminal experience as entrepreneurs. Such a study may correct the limitations of this study presented in the section immediately above. First, the researchers would capture the lived experiences of the participants themselves, aware of their own biases. Secondly, the participant pool may be deliberately designed along the social justices aspects of gender, race, and class.

It could also be supposed that such a study could use the mixed method methodology in order to deal with qualitative factors in detail while at the same time paying attention to quantitative factors. It is therefore, reasonable to that statistical software such as SSPS or Envivo could be used in portions of data analysis.
The study believes the fear of failure does not have the same magnitude and direction across all the three liminal periods. The fear of failure in pre-liminal individuals dissuades them from launching their business ideas. The fear of failure in liminal or in transition period is related to the anxiety of individuals that the business they are developing will fail. Post liminal fear of failure arises out of entrepreneurs concern that something unforeseen may come up and fail their business. A study investigating the content, intensity, and direction of fear of failure across the liminal constructs may lead to development of intervention mechanisms to ease the anxiety of individuals and entrepreneurs.

Cognition makes learning possible and therefore makes internalization of learned material possible. It follows from this that entrepreneurial identity formation from internalized entrepreneurial material is possible only if an individual has sufficient cognitive capacity. The study thus sees value in a practical inquiry on how cognitive capacity can be enhanced in individuals transitioning into entrepreneurship. Such a study may also establish, if any, the minimum or optimum cognitive capacity for anyone intending to become an entrepreneur. Finally, experience conducting the study suggests future research exploring lived experiences of entrepreneurs to be conducted using a conversation style because structure question interviews may bad difficult since entrepreneurs discuss their experiences not in order of questions but in order of their experiences and thoughts.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explore how entrepreneurs describe their experience of becoming entrepreneurs. The study was conducted in Los Angeles, California. Five practicing small business entrepreneurs participated in the study.
From analysis of interview data and reinterpretation of the lived experiences of participants of becoming entrepreneurs, one of the findings, cognitive capacity, seemed to hold centrality to the process and experience of becoming entrepreneurs. It is doubtful that without sufficient cognitive capacity participants would have been able to identify emergent entrepreneurial ideas for development into businesses. It is also doubtful participants would have developed the entrepreneurial identity without sufficient cognitive abilities to acquire and internalize data and information on the emergent entrepreneurial ideas and also to internalize knowledge and experiences from developing businesses.

The experience of the fear of failure, as another finding of the study, was seen to be distributed across the three stages of transition. The pre-transition fear of failure seem to originate from doubt that the emergent entrepreneurial idea will not work out once implemented. The fear of failure while the participants were in transition originated from thinking that participants had put all their time and money into development the emergent entrepreneurial idea, and what would happen if it fails. The post-transition fear of failure originates in the thinking that the participant has already past through the tough times of the transition, and that a surprise such as a new competitor, change in laws, and change in technology could spring up and endanger their businesses. The study advocates for the development of practical mechanisms and strategies, both psychological or cognitive and physical, to support nascent entrepreneurs launch new businesses, entrepreneurs in transition manage the emotional effects of transitioning into a new entrepreneurial identity, and also encourage post-transition entrepreneurs have the confidence to invest in growing their businesses.

Part of the solution to developing cognitive capacity and managing the effects of fear of failure could be found in the mentoring support systems. Mentors transferred managerial,
leadership, and technical skills to the mentee participants along direct personal connectivity in
the needed amounts and at the time they are needed. Mentored participants in the study
tremendously benefitted from the mentors as much as they did from group meetings of all
mentees at which progress was discussed and new benchmarks set for each entrepreneur.
References


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