

INDIE AUTHORS AND PROFESSIONAL WRITING

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Rhetoric and Writing – Doctor of Philosophy

2017

## **ABSTRACT**

### **INDIE AUTHORS AND PROFESSIONAL WRITING**

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The exploration of the practices and processes of the business of Indie Authors alongside the landscape of professional writing. As with any other profession there are varying levels of competency and need for help in the Indie Author community. Looking at how the Indie Author community differs from other methods of publishing works and where a program in academia could and should intersect is paramount. There is a demonstrated need from the community to engage with professional writers trained not only in editing and publishing, but a more whole coverage approach to the ever changing landscape that is professional writing. There is a huge gig economy being missed by professional writers that are being taken up by both freelancers, as well as a growing mass of people who think because they enjoy reading, they have skills enough. This only alludes to a larger issue in the field of Professional Writing and the practices of observing current trends and practices both inside and outside the field. Data collection from engaging in surveys, roundtables and analysis of these conversations shows there is a need and that despite having a bad reputation, Indie Authors are professionals, who should be taken seriously and want trained professionals to help them create the best product possible. The field also must begin to have the necessary and often times uncomfortable conversations about current dynamics, hot items and challenges that surround all writers.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

My tribe of amazing support: Don, Alexander, Grayson, you had to live through this with me. Not only have you come through relatively unscathed, but never doubted for a moment I would be successful. My sisters – just knowing I was making your proud kept me going. Parents of all varieties, you made it possible for me to be a mom and a student. This was never a solo adventure. Arthur, as always, you are the best partner ever. Your support means everything. My committee; Dr. Bill Hart-Davidson, Dr. Ben Lauren, Dr. Malea Powell and Dr. Julie Lindquist, the critiques, advice and guidance helped shape this to be what it has become. I am fortunate to have worked with each of you. Indie Author Community- I know the hard work you do, I know the crap you take and yet you still continue to put out amazing stories. In addition, you have never forgotten the community part; I will always be inspired and lucky to be part of this amazing group

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## **Chapter One: Indie Authors and Professional Writing**

I'm often asked what I do for a living. People have long used this as an ice breaker when meeting new people. For a long time, it was easy to say "I teach English." It's a profession people understand, or at least they think they understand. It leads to an easy conversation with people who liked English or a great deterrent for those who preferred the maths. Yes, I am American, however, it was explained to me that maths is short for mathematics and I've called it maths since I was four. What I did for a living expanded in 2013. People still asked, but my answer changed to "I write for a living." People ask for clarification and very proudly I let people know I teach college writing as well as I wrote a novel.

"Who published it?"

"I self-published."

"So you're not a real author then."

What? 90,085 words about the intersections of race and culture through a lens of societal impact on coming in adulthood doesn't make me an author? First I thought it was because I write Urban Fantasy. No, I learned people love Urban Fantasy. They just don't see self-published authors as real. As I talked with other self-published authors in the Indie Author community, I got very similar stories. The stories written by Indie authors weren't valid. Part of that is because people consider Indie Authors a new fad. It's anything but. My sense of the need for this study grows from my having dual stance/viewpoint and noting the lack of expected coherence between these points where writing should intersect. I thought about getting feedback from Indie Authors about their

writing and entrepreneurial processes. However, I realized I also needed to take a look at Professional Writing as a field, not just through the lens of there being more interactions with Indie Authors, but instead looking at the gig economy that Indie Authors represent, and how such gigs have been overlooked as an indication of some stagnation in the field. Thus I started making a plan to find out how my intersections could help explore this seemingly missed connection.

The world and works of Independent authors —otherwise known as Indie Authors— is on the rise. The advocacy group that runs the author's earning website (<http://authorearnings.com>) uses open data sources from such companies as Amazon, iTunes, Nook and Kobo and quarterly compiles data. Their report from February 2017 shows that 34% of ebook sales were by Indie Authors- compared to the 26% by traditionally published authors (2017). This group is made up of authors both in industry and not, with the mission of sharing information so authors can make informed decisions and to call for change in the publishing community to offer authors better benefits (2017). For many, admitting to being an Indie Author was said quietly and to friends because of the immense skepticism. This may be because the term is often flexible: Indie Author, self-published author, vanity writer— there are many names. Here, the title, Indie Author is used to represent a person or groups of people who write a work and then have chosen to publish through the means of a print on demand service.

The hard work of an Indie Author isn't often recognized, because everyone can write, or at least that is a generalized thought. Even today, there are those who think Indie Authors are talentless hacks who aren't good enough to get a publishing

contract—the elusive thing that validates a writer’s ability. The reality is that Indie Authors have begun to dominate the publishing world with works that are read and loved by millions. Advances in technology has made the it both easier and cheaper to self-publish books, but quite frankly going down the independent road to publication is nothing new. In 1931 Irma S. Rombauer, the author of *The Joy of Cooking*, paid a local printing company to print 3000 copies, which sold out completely. In 1936 she was offered a publishing contract with the Bobbs-Merrill Company and the books- which are still published to this day have sold over 18 million companies (Balson, 2013). She wrote a prologue to this first, self-published edition:

Whenever I leave home and begin to move about, I am appalled to find how many people with a desire to write feel impelled to share their emotions with the general public. Time and again I have been told with modesty and pride, or with both, that I was entertaining a literary angel unawares, until one day, recognizing the glint of authorship in a man's eye and anticipating his imminent confidence, I forestalled him by saying rapturously, "Oh, do you know, I am a reader!" And now, after all, I am a writer--of a kind.

Professional writing has been engaged with traditional publishing houses and methods. A shortcoming by not engaging with Indie Authors, in the education of professional writers is indicative of stagnation in professional writing. This is more often seen in the technical writing and communications side when the field does not stay flexible enough to work with rapidly changing technology. Blakeslee (2002), points out that while the academy and industry share the goal of “affecting a world that is rapidly

changing as it is shaped by new information technologies,” and that “[o]ne point on which members of both the academy and industry agree is that this claim falls rightfully and predominantly to technical communication more than to other fields”. In professional writing it signals being unaware of new gig economies and preparing students with applicable skill sets. Gig economies are nothing new, but it has been an industry not everyone understands. Here, a gig describes a single project or task for which a professional is hired in a short-term contract or for freelance work. This is not to posit that Indie Authors hold the majority of gig economy prospects for professional writers, but instead this is to highlight an oversight by the field in preparing job based skills instead career set mindfulness. The number of jobs created by establishments less than 1 year old has decreased from 4.1 million in 1994 to 3 million in 2015. This trend combined with that of fewer new establishments overall indicates that the number of new jobs in each new establishment is declining. Small businesses are typically the entry point for entrepreneurs as they build a customer base before deciding whether to expand. (bls.gov) This is due to a postindustrial shift in how hiring practices have changed to more work being outsourced for a savings. What is being suggested is a new approach as a potential solution— create a curriculum that not only better connect industry and academic roles, but ones that also create new engagements with emerging opportunities.

As a member of both communities, I had a lot of curiosity these gigs were being over looked. Perhaps professional writers may have the perceptions that Indie Authors are just not considered as true authors? Maybe professional writers didn't even know that working with Indie Authors was even a valid job source. From the Indie side, I also

know that finances are a huge barrier for many authors and paying for a professional writer's service could be too much. What's closer to the truth is a mixture of both.

Professional writing has a lot offer Indie Authors and vice versa, the amount of freedom that could be taken by both in collaboration has the potential to shift perceptions, but people need to know more before starting this journey.

There have been many reasons for authors to choose independent publishing as a means to get their works out, over seeking a contract or a representing agent. I will explore the information gathered from Indie Authors about their process, review the pedagogical practices as well as give an overall summative snapshot of how the publishing industry works. In addition, I will explore how and why Professional Writing field should consider this gig economy as a viable option for study. Not just as a means of income, but also to highlight how ignoring this particular gig is indicative to the field stagnating, instead of moving with the flexible and changing nature of professional writing. Not to say that professional writers are all Indie Authors or vice versa, but more that professional can support Indie Authors and their publishing efforts, just as they would any other contracted position within the professional/ technical writing field.

There are many ways for authors to publish their works, and the choices vary greatly. Of course there is often perceived coveted traditional publishing houses, known as "The Big Five", who are considered the most distinguished old publishing houses. They are Simon and Schuster, HarperCollins, The Penguin Group/Random House, Macmillan, and Hachette. Only two of The Big Five are US companies: Simon and Schuster, and HarperCollins. All of these agencies only work exclusively with agented

authors, but Simon and Schuster (perhaps, too late), has also included a self-publishing option, which quietly speaks to the impact that Indie Authors are having on the industry.

After the traditional publishing houses there are more options than most think, to get publishing done. These include, but are not limited to Vanity press, Micro/Independent presses, small presses and print on demand services. While the last three are often used interchangeably, there are huge differences in the practices, processes, and responsibilities.

To help clarify the roles, look at the different styles, roles, commitment, and most importantly the exchange of money, when it comes to the publishing of literary works.

### **Traditional Publishing Houses**

Traditional publishing houses are at the top. Most people consider an author as valid if they are represented by a publishing house. The houses take serious investment in the books that they acquire. Only authors with literary agents have works considered, bid upon and published. Despite the guidelines, there are still many manuscripts sent in and most go to the slushpile. A slushpile is full of unsolicited manuscripts sent to a publishing house, because many editors and agents are busy working with their represented authors and have manuscripts to be taken care of (Book Doctors, 2017). And while many people think being in a slushpile means certain never to be read doom— remember that J.K Rowling's query and first three chapters of Harry Potter were found in a slushpile ("ALWAYS J.K. ROWLING ", 2015). It's often the job of interns and assistants to the agents to read through the slushpile with the hopes of finding a

piece worth reading. When they do, it can work out well for the author. Tales, such as Rowling's, are what keep authors sending in their manuscripts.

Traditional publishing houses take on the financial burden of book production from the beginning. They purchase manuscripts through advances, buy and assign International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN's) – which are required for books to be placed in libraries, bookstores and in book catalogues. Also they pay for copyright licenses, Library of Congress placement, and of course royalties. The houses assume risk in exchange for hoped-for profits. There are still even more important services they also provide the author – a traditional publisher can developmentally edit, copy edit, provide cover design, market, promote, arrange for wide distribution, and deal with foreign sales markets.

Because the traditional house covers much of the production cost, the financial split has always favored the house. The amount has fluctuated over the years between 15% and 35%, depending on selling power. According to Nicola Solomon, who runs the Society of Authors organization, said that publishers, retailers and agents are all now taking a larger slice of the profit when a book is sold. While authors' earnings are going down generally, those of publishers are increasing. Authors need fair compensation if they are to keep writing and producing quality work," she said. "Publisher profits are holding up and, broadly, so are total book sales if you include ebooks but authors are receiving less per book and less overall due mainly to the fact that they are only paid a small percentage of publishers' net receipts on ebooks and because large advances have disappeared except for a handful of celebrity authors (2014)." While finances are still contested, the advantage to being represented by a publishing house still is in favor.

Being represented by a publishing house lends credibility to the work because it has made it through the many steps of acquisition, therefore being vetted as a good work. Even still those works taken by publishing houses aren't guaranteed successes. Only one in six will make money for the publisher (Book Doctors). The print run is just enough to make enough to break even on the investment- and those works that do can get a second edition reprint.

As a means of publications, the houses do not have to produce, distribute or warehouse physical copies. The whole goal of working with a traditional publishing house is to turn out high end works that will in turn generate solid profits to cover the money already paid out. Traditional publishing houses have been at the top of their fiefdom for well over one hundred years and have enjoyed their status. But it's changing rapidly, Jana Bradley, University of Arizona's School of Information Resources and Library Science, SIRLS professor and her team has studied how the recent emergence of digital self-publishing has resulted in major shifts in the industry since 2007. Mainstream trade publishing still dominates print sales. But self-published, print-on-demand for private, local or niche audiences is faster in production. Close to a full one-third of top 100 paid titles on Kindle are by self-publishing authors. (2012).

### **Vanity Presses**

Vanity publishing companies also called vanity presses, also offer production services like editing, cover art and marketing packages that are very attractive to first time authors looking for help making sense of how to get their books out into the hands of the public and an easy way to publish their works. For a predetermined fee, the press ensures the manuscript will be turned into a book and made available through book

distribution channels. They make their money off the author, either through up front fee-based “packages” or by taking a huge chunk of the profits of each book sold, often pricing the book out of market range. Again, percentages vary and there does not seem to be an average amount. Vanity companies give an author a book with their name on it, are often disguised as cheap or a good deal, but cut off all marketability to brick and mortar stores, as well as other marketing options such as overseas sales. However, the flat fee for editing, formatting, and cover design do not make up the only charges given to the author. The bait and switch often happens when the book becomes part of the “publisher’s” catalog. Traditional publishers want authors with a following, a strong marketing plan and the drive to succeed beyond just uploading a manuscript (Applebaum, 1998). Vanity presses often offer getting authors into the publishing catalogues, but are not often able to deliver. Instead, authors are required to invest heavily, buy thousands of copies of their books and left to sell and market on their own.

Of course these are just scams created by little no-name companies looking to make a quick buck off people’s dreams, right? Not quite. In November 2009, Harlequin teamed up with infamous vanity press Author’s Solutions to create Harlequin Horizons. The business merger deal lasted about seventeen days. First authors published by Harlequin took the news poorly that potential new authors could pay for the right to be called a Harlequin author, versus the long and laborious amounts of writing and revisions the authors under the traditional publishing house, had to face. And then it got worse. Romance Writers of America (RWA) stepped in and got right down to business. “With the launch of Harlequin Horizons, Harlequin Enterprises no longer meets the requirements to be eligible for RWA-provided conference resources (Friedman, 2009).”

What this announcement meant is that Harlequin authors would not be eligible for the RITA award. In addition, Harlequin would not be eligible for RWA conference benefits such as signings, editor meetings, and publisher spotlights. The RITA is presented by Romance Writers of America (RWA) and the purpose of the award is to promote excellence in the romance genre by recognizing outstanding published novels and novellas. It is named for the RWA's first president, Rita Clay Estrada (Vinyard, 2004). Harlequin CEO, Donna Hayes responded saying the company was shocked at the amount of hatred over the announcement (Friedman, 2009). A few days later Mystery Writers of America had issued a statement, and then Russell Davis and the Science Fiction Writers of America joined in. While it may seem people and organizations were over reacting, Harlequin began to listen, because MWA and SFWA both removed Harlequin from their approved publisher lists. As technology made it easier for authors to get published, lists like SFWA's Writer Beware, became a guideline of what companies to avoid.

As an author you cannot just pay a due and join these writing organizations. Publishing qualifications state the manuscripts have to be in professional markets or through an approved publisher. The SFWA statement makes no bones about this. "Until such time as Harlequin changes course, and returns to a model of legitimately working with authors instead of charging authors for publishing services, SFWA has no choice but to be absolutely clear that NO titles from ANY Harlequin imprint will be counted as qualifying for membership in SFWA." The problem seen by authors and organizations is that Horizons was not a self-publishing venue— it was a vanity press (Andriani, 2009). Vanity presses assign the book an ISBN number that has been bought and is

owned by the press; they become the publisher of record which entitles them to receive an additional royalty whenever a book sells. In addition, they also set the price of the work, which must be honored in all venues. Sometimes it means the work is given a price so high it sells nothing. With vanity presses the author assumes all the risk and then pays the publisher. This opposite of how the traditional publishing house system has been designed and implemented.

### **Micro presses/ Independent Presses**

Micro/Independent press is defined as publishers that are not part of large conglomerates or multinational corporations. The phrase “small press” has been bandied about for more than a century now, but it’s only within the last decade that the tiniest of publishing projects have earned a new name: the “micro-press.” Many of these projects blur the line between traditional publishing, zines, DIY bookmaking, chapbook presses, and art experiments, but your typical micro-press is a one-or-two person operation, producing a few books a year, in runs regularly clocking below 100 copies (Herman, 2017). They tend to primarily rely on specialization in genre fiction, poetry, or limited-edition books or magazines, but there are also thousands that focus on niche non-fiction markets. For those who think Micro presses aren’t to be taken seriously, they may want to review the success of *50 Shades of Grey*. Originally conceived as fanfiction from the popular series *Twilight* and published first on a fanfiction site and then on a personal blog, E.L. James was convinced by her many fans to get it published. She did just that, and after The Writer’s Coffee Shop Publishing House micro press published the books, Vintage Books (later acquired by Random House UK) signed her to a contract. *Fifty Shades of Grey* has topped best-seller lists around the world, selling over

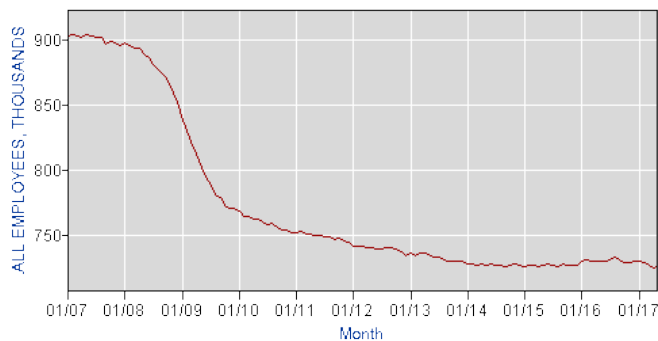
125 million copies worldwide by June 2015. It has been translated into 52 languages, and set a record in the United Kingdom as the fastest-selling paperback of all time. Even better, it broke onto the New York Times, coveted, best sellers list. (Balson, 2013)

### **Self-publishing**

Self-publishing is the publication of any book or other media by its author without the involvement of an established publisher. This covers both physical as well as electronic copies, though there are many more ebooks produced, due to significantly lower costs. True self-publishers own all their rights and receive 100% of the profit. They own their own ISBN numbers and have access to all the digital files associated with the production of their work. Their imprints are displayed on their books' spines and title pages. The work of being a self-published author is also incredibly difficult. The writer is tasked with finding qualified editing and design resources, handling administrative chores like ISBN and copyright registration, managing the production of the book, choosing print and distribution partners, and marketing the finished product. However, this path offers control over both creative aspects of the work and business strategy. Authors who wish to produce literary art that's unfettered by the demands of popular genres, and authors who have ready access to niche audiences may find opportunities in smaller-scale publishing that large publishers won't.

The publishing industry is simply contracting too tightly, and there is too much competition for a very limited number of spots on traditional presses. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the industry has gone from 902.8 thousand employees in January 2007 down to 726.0 thousand employees in May 2017. That means 176.8 thousand jobs gone. There are no details to support where these were people losing

their jobs or just walking away to do something else.



**Figure 1: Publishing industry employees**

In addition, there are authors who don't have any desire to deal with jumping through all of the hoops to get a traditional agent and a publishing contract. On the bright side, there are more amazing options for getting products published for readers than ever. Hybrid and self-publishing are on the rise, and the standards for the finished products are ever increasing. Self-published authors have taken on the whole package and are entrepreneurs. They understand that they need to create books/products, have visible marketing, and unique branding that compete with their traditional counterparts. Higher standards are good for readers, and good for the literary industry as a whole.

### **Independent Authors**

As the world of Independent Authors (Indie Authors) and self-publishing continue to grow and change, it is the perfect time to really look through a lens to figure out what pedagogical approaches, conscious, subconscious or any, are being utilized. It's also a great time to question why this vibrant and thriving economy is not necessarily being seen by academia as a gig economy to engage with. This was previously discussed in

the 2002 volume *Reshaping Technical Communication*, many of the contributors confront the split between technical communication academics and practitioners, a split they feel contributes to the problems of both camps. Blakeslee argues for increased joint academy/industry research (a fond wish of all organizational researchers) to more strongly establish our “common ground” (2002).

Indie authors are often dismissed because of the variety of the level of professionalism the products contain. Thus far there is very little gate keeping on who can publish, what can be published and the quality of what is published. On February 3, 2016 Amazon, who owns Create Space – the largest self-publishing company, sent out a memo to inform self-published authors that if their books contained grammatical and spelling errors either the book wouldn’t be available for sale or that if there were just a few errors (no specific number given) they would be listed for readers. This was done in attempt to release better products, but there hasn’t been much traction. There is no better time to gain access through social media and connecting with a variety of Indie authors of all levels of success. Self-publishing is the best kept secret gig that is rarely taken seriously. Almost everyone has been an author at some point of their life, and now more and more people are reaching for their dreams or authorship and succeeding.

People start with the basics of writing/ composition when they pick up a crayon and use colors to compose meaning. In early elementary years, people are encouraged to put words on paper and craft narratives and creative works. In later schooling years, new forms, format and rules are introduced. Writing becomes scary for some and disheartening for others, but some never give up the dream. Stories fill them and bubble to the surface and spill out into notebooks, computers, and sometimes even napkins

when there's nothing else to write on. And then, of course people want to share their stories. This is where dreams used to be made or shattered.

Those who were lucky enough to catch an agent's eye were offered contracts, advances and a chance to write for a living. Others were rejected — the stories weren't good enough, the agent could figure out how to market it, the market was already saturated with similar plot lines, and so on and so forth.

At least that's how it used to work. In 2000, a group of writers wanted an easier way to get their products made and retain control. Book Surge was born and did well enough that they were acquired by Amazon on April 4, 2005, who in turn launched Create Space that offered not only print on demand products but also offered ebooks for the newly launched kindle ([www.createspace.com](http://www.createspace.com) 2017).

All of a sudden, authors didn't have to wait to be told they were good enough to publish. They were able to create and produce stories under their own terms. And they were still ignored by the traditional publishing houses. But they were not ignored by readers, who were looking for something new to read. Stories created without the standard rules. Stories that approached subjects, cultures, and groups of people largely ignored by the traditional publishing houses were coming out in droves. Stories that pushed against boundaries of what publishing industry standard should be done.

But the scoffing was still there. If you were to name some of the most successful novelists today, who would you choose? Kim Harrison, James Patterson, perhaps, or J.K. Rowling— she seems to be doing quite well. And let's not forget about LJ Ross.

*Of course, LJ Ross, wait a second, who is that?* Ms. Ross had the distinction of removing Paula Hawkins's *The Girl on the Train* from the number one spot on the Kindle bestsellers chart list with her first novel, *Holy Island* in 2015. Since then she has sold more than 750,000 books (NY Times, 2016), making her one of the platform's bestselling authors — late last year she was selling more than 10,000 books every day. For anyone who doesn't read ebooks, her name won't mean a thing, because Louise (LJ) Ross, the “queen of Kindle”, is an Indie Author and with well-deserved pride, self-published.

For years self-published authors were discredited as amateurs who lacked the talent to land a traditional book deal. Increasingly, however, more and more novelists choose to publish their work themselves, not because they have to, but because it offers a better deal. As for the claim that these, also called, Indie Authors are talentless hacks? Most of them have more savvy and knowledge about a gig economy most people don't even know exist. Let alone having the fortitude and variable skill sets to not only write up to five thousand words a day, which is approximately twenty-five pages, but also market, brand and promote their products. And by the way, many are professionals in other careers.

Ross was a lawyer who wanted a career change and ended up writing a book. She writes romance suspense thrillers. Her background with the law makes her novels read like old style Agatha Christie novels. Like some other self-published authors, Ross did try to get traditionally published; sending out queries to agents did land her a contract, but something kept her from signing. So she took a different path. She

published her books through Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP), Amazon's ebook self-publishing platform. It gives authors control over the publishing process, from the content of the book to its design and price, and allows them to earn up to 70 per cent royalty on sales. The system also has the benefit of being easy to use and if an author chooses, they can hire professional services from KDP. On January 1, 2015, Ross hit "publish" on *Holy Island*. By May she had knocked *The Girl on the Train* off the number one place in the Kindle bestsellers chart and her books have stayed in the Top 20 of the kindle lists ever since. The question Ross had, what could be the worst-case scenario? Upload it and nobody likes it? Best case? Everybody loves it.

Publishers fighting to recruit top-selling authors have other reasons to be alarmed by the growth of self-publishing. As Indie Authors continue to make gains in the e-book market, digital sales by traditional publishers fell by 11 percent in the first nine months of 2015, according to data gathered from more than 1,200 publishers by the Association of American Publishers (2016). Every year more stories are coming to light where more and more self-published authors making a living writing.

Some people are still cautious, and maybe a bit overly condescending, when it comes to reading works by Indie Authors. But some of them have very valid points. Many reasons are given: lack of professional editing, varied writing quality, free book give aways inflate ratings on otherwise unremarkable books, not to mention a good book is not always necessarily the one with complex plots and beautifully crafted sentences. How are you meant to separate the good from the bad? Despite the cautions, no one can deny that the last few years have seen some stunning successes

from Indie Authors such as EL James with *Fifty Shades of Gray* and Andy Weir, whose novel *The Martian* became a major motion and award winning film.

Even still, people are cautious that self-publishing is a fad that yields more vanity pieces than works of art. But they are ignoring the fact that indie publishing has also allowed communities ignored by traditional publishers to flourish. Traditional publishers tend to focus on protagonists who are white and straight couples with story lines and plots that lead to a happy ever after when all conflicts are resolved. But that does not mean to say that there isn't a market for "other", and Indie Authors have tapped into it and started to provide readers the diversity they crave. Some people think that all one has to do is write a novel and self-publish and the book will just take off. The reality is perhaps only one – two percent of all Indie Authors fall into the 100k royalty making club. It is possible to make a lot of money from digital publishing, but it is a market of readers. What you see less of now, are self-published writers just suddenly breaking out becoming instantly famous.

Because there are so many Indie Authors who have produced many products, readers can be choosy. This leads to some cliques and pettiness amongst some authors. There have been those who have gathered together to trash another authors reputation, and leave scathing reviews— which hurts authors because readers rely on reviews to choose new authors to read. Aside from some negative aspects, there are many authors who chose to be self-published, even though the onus of work can be daunting. It is not as simple as writing some eighty thousand words and pushing the publishing button. There are efforts in marketing, branding, visibility and reachability

aspects to consider, along with financial decisions and time management. Some authors have shifted their title from Indie Author to Indie Entrepreneurs because it better represents all of the work that authors have to do. But for the purposes of this piece, we'll stick with Indie Authors, as not to confuse readers with continual title changes.

While a common misperception has all Indie Authors as jaded wanna-be's who couldn't get an agent, it is time to acknowledge that not only rejected authors that opt for self-publishing. Mark Dawson had been accepted by a traditional publisher, but was surprised that his early novels flopped. After receiving a five-figure advance from a major publisher for his first two books, he was surprised when neither were promoted heavily. So the former lawyer decided he would have more success if he did the work himself. In 2014, which he calls his breakthrough year, he published "about one million words, a bit more than the Harry Potter books", and by November of the same year, he left his job to write full time. But he notes that it was not just about writing. It's a gig economy he knows well, he pays an editor, proofreader and cover designer to help with his book production. And because of the close contact he has with his audience, built through newsletters and social media, he knows that many of his readers are experts in the subjects he writes about, and employs a fact checker, who checks the books for accuracy and realism. He spends about half his day writing and half marketing, all in order to deliver his products with professionalism, not unlike those of a traditional publishing house.

What Indie Authors have learned is that in order to be successful, you have to know how to write, do the research for facts and consistency, but also pay for cover art,

editors and proofreaders. Once that's all done, Indie Authors also have to know how to run a business. Being able to manage all of these roles, plus often times being visible on social media, are also why not everyone succeeds at self-publishing. The marketing and business side is a full time job, plus the full time job of writing, not to mention most authors have families and "day" jobs too. But for Indie Authors, the work is worth it to keep control over their product and their creative rights. Not to mention, by using social media to reach out and connect, many authors don't just have readers or fans, they make friends with the people who love to talk about their works as much as they do.

Using digital technology to their advantage, Indie Authors find that opportunities to make their lives easier keep coming along. First there formatting guides, which gave way to Scrivner, a software designed with digital writing as a platform. Next came Indie publishing houses, who took the hard work of marketing and branding out of the hands of people who only ever wanted to write. Next the gig-businesses: book trailers, book covers, editing, proofing, blog tours, book blasts, newsletters, and book signing tours followed.

Indie Authors are constantly searching out new opportunities to improve their craft. There is a lot of networking opportunities on social media and during meet ups. However, there are just as many work related opportunities as well. There are online courses, workshops, critique groups and professional groups to participate in. However, it seems that professional writing courses and curriculum seem to ignore any further understanding what it means to be a "non-traditional"/ Indie Author at this time. There is a huge need to determine the nature of Indie Authors as a potential client for

professional writers and how the digital age has allowed for the representation of a group of authors that is generally ignored.

In addition, there's a chance to explore what Indie Authors have to say about their identities as writers, authors, business people and as a brand, have been impacted by this new economy the gig offers them. There needs to be not just a discussion, but indeed a scholarly discussion about what this means for new professional writers and their own opportunities to interact with this group. And this dissertation will explore the possibilities as a chance to explore the rhetorical roots of where Indie Authors are positioned

Not everyone becomes a huge success, but there are so many Indie Authors now earning enough to help pay the bills or the mortgage, and take their partner and the kids on vacation. Not bad for living their dreams. But the reality is that this gig economy is still ignored as a viable business option in many professional writing programs. Although, quite frankly, it is not being ignored, it is not even on the radar because being an Indie Author is not only misunderstood, but not seen as a real way to make a living. The potential for owning a small business that caters to Indie Authors is an economic venture that should be better represented and again highlights where professional writing is missing this engagement with forward momentum.

The field of professional writing does evolving in its direction and focus. There are many internal factors and external pressures affecting professional writers and their ability to change with industry. This has led to a broadening of what these writers are responsible for. Not much research has been done into the realm of self-publishing, but

the results of the research collected sometimes conflict and academia does not fathom what is needed by industry, due to a different focus in methods and procedures which hampers its influence on industry. This also helps the field to continually evolve and listen to the needs of potential clients, which means less stagnation. Wicks suggests that we need “to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the technologies that serve knowledge management as well as business in general,” which will help continue to allow professional writing gain credibility as knowledge workers and will help keep professionals from arguments that situate professional writers as knowledge workers rather than productive workers out in the world (2002).

What I hope will happen upon reading this dissertation is to create a series of questions and new thought processes about how professional writing can see value in what Indie Authors are creating and open up the space for conversations and relationships framed by knowledge of what this gig economy has to offer. As I revisit my own interactions with the Indie Author community as well as my interactions as a Professional Writer as a means to theorize not only the subject of this project but also as a means to process pedagogical practices that can and should be put into place. It also will foster understanding between the two cultures that have knowledge that seemingly don't interact well, but should work in understanding rhetoric production as a practice.

### **Summary of chapters**

1. This first chapter establishes the publishing industry. It gives a clear overview of traditional publishing houses, vanity presses, micro presses,

independent, presses and self-publishing. It's necessary to give background and defining qualities in each method, so a basis of understand is clear on why being an Indie Author is different from every other kind.

2. My Intersections explores how and why I've come to this place. I come in with certain biases, but also certain insights. After having participated in both academic writing settings, creative writing groups and the Indie Author community, I am able to navigate between the different areas. Instead of seeing this through a compartmentalized lens, it allows for a critical analysis of how writing plays in these different sandboxes of learning.

3. Methods of research and receptivity to such a study will look at the study participants, data gathering – survey, and round table discussions. Why the set of time parameters were chosen, and the implications and importance of the questions in the survey and the follow up in the round table group. Even more it looks at the timing of the study and how kismet, in the form of a snarky blog helped with participation.

4. Findings will look at the results of the survey and analyze the information about process, procedure and real world applications.

5. Implications of all the data and experiences. Discussions look at where the data and conversations in the field, mix, match and misstep. Figuring out how to align findings with literature will highlight how best practices are being spoken around but not necessarily enacted.

6. Final Thoughts. What now? Implications and conclusions- There is where I discuss what I have found and analyzed in previous chapters that related

to the nature of writing, editing, publishing in relations to professional writing in the gig economy of being an Indie Author. I will discuss the areas of my own research that needs further exploration, where the research can go next and where continued study and discussion would benefit Professional Writing as whole, not just editing and publishing concentrations.

## **Chapter Two: The Intersection of being an author and a scholar**

Traditionally Chapter Two is the literature review portion of the project. However, Indie Authors rarely follow tradition, so this chapter will serve, instead, as a chapter that clarifies why the framework that will be proposed in future chapters will be situated as both experiential learning as well as formal classroom style learning. This chapter will also show, through experiences, why professional writing should pay attention to outliers in the field that seemingly may not fit. The argument is not being made that professional writing should embrace the Indie Author community as the next wave to take over publishing and editing. Instead, conceive of this oversight as an example of the field being not as flexible and fluid when it comes to preparing professional writers to be able to take gig opportunities that are not as established, but still are thriving and growing.

Instead of taking offense at the ignorance of others. I decided that being an Indie Author needed more exploring. I didn't think I was the only person who had questions about the process of being an Indie Author. Not just the writing process, even though I was interested in how others write. But the part of being an Indie Author that others don't see before they offer condescending comments about the product the community produces. I also realized that I had a unique viewpoint.

While looking at Indie Authors through the lens of study, I am looking at myself. I have been a published Indie Author since 2012, but the story of becoming an author and the intersections of being a scholar require a lot of storytelling. This level of transparency is necessary, as Creswell cautions that the perspective of reflexivity and

being accountable to standards for the groups studied (2007). Being part of the group studied automatically gives me a bias. Being an academic in the field of professional writing gives me another angled bias. However, I also find the dual angles and biases, gives me a unique viewpoint to mix experience and educational learning methods that serves as my framework.

The first time I wrote I was three years old. My parents had company and to get me out of their hair and conversation, they told me to go in the kitchen and write my name. I came back a few minutes later to resume my role as entertainment, my name scrawled on the paper in hand. Amidst the surprise and awe, at that young age I learned the power of writing. This study is personal because it meets the intersections of my writing life. As a member of the Indie Author community I am exposed to the struggle for validation of being a real author — despite having a master's degree in composition and published academic pieces. This leads to another issue: hyper criticism by some in the Indie community because of my education. When I first began my journey as an author I didn't mind the idea of my academic and independent writing lives being viewed together. However, it became clear that there had to be a separation on both sides to be accepted as any kind of author more readily. This study allows for less compartmentalization of fiction writing and academic writing, but merges the lens for a moment to see where, why and how my writing worlds intersect and how to move forward.

My first story was written and published when I was six. I read a story at school and didn't like the ending – so I wrote a new one. Which then lead me to writing my own story, because I knew I had stories to tell. My second grade teacher urged me to

continue writing and so I did. I had been identified as a talented writer and enjoyed writing production as a pass time. I was always encouraged in English classes to create, and I enjoyed seeing myself as a creative writer. I had multiple short stories and a novel under my belt by the time I graduated high school. In fact, writing short steamy stories was my gig, as I charged my friends ten dollars a short story to hook them up with their latest crush or celebrity crush in a custom tailored romance. I wrote creative stories all the way through college- despite having African American History Studies as a major. I have dozens of notebooks and computer full of stories, still waiting to be published. I've just now started the job of sending these works out for public reading consumption.

### **Creative Writing Training**

Why did I never study creative writing or get an MFA instead of MA in English Composition? Mostly because I never thought about it. Writing was just a thing I did in my spare time, but I had never thought about going to college to learn how to write creatively. Instead I pursued it with much drive, discipline, and training as books could give me. Despite always writing stories, the first time I entered a short story contest, I lost. It surprised me since I had been told how good I was at writing. I passed first year writing in college with an A, so losing a contest no sense to me. Fortunately, losing did not mean I did not gain anything. This contest promised each entry would receive feedback and thanks to great critique notes left by the reviewers from that first contest, I found out that writing groups existed. I wasted no time hopped on the internet and started looking around for these writing groups. There were hundreds of them, and after looking into many of them, I joined two and spent a good year writing and learning to

critique. Through these groups, I learned about the rules and best practices of creative writing in a myriad of writer groups, critique groups, workshops, and conferences that others had to share. Looking back, I realize that learning about creative writing was a task I took up willingly and with determination to figure out how it worked. One that I will forever be grateful for pursuing in this manner, instead of course work at college, not because I did not enjoy my courses in college, but instead because of the wealth of information coming from writers at all different stages of production. I stuck with the free workshops and groups, because it made the most sense at the time. Of course there are plenty of notable workshops for fiction writers- the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and Gotham Book: Writing Fiction being two of the bigger ones when I started in 2003. Both of these workshops were incredibly hard to get into, many potential applicants already had publications and works in progress in hand as they applied. But the good news was that there were plenty of free online writing conferences to attend. While some scoffed at the idea of getting any sort of quality from a free online conference, notable fantasy authors such as Jodie Lynn Nye, Josepha Sherman, and Mercedes Lackey led workshops about character development and world building. In 2017, there are writers' workshops all over the USA and online and they now boast meetings with agents to pitch books and get query critiques.

The amount of learning I gained about how to craft stories was immense. My preferred genre is urban fantasy. After being asked to explain just what urban fantasy was, I finally wrote a short description to put on my author's website to clarify my description. Urban Fantasy is a genre that combines common fantasy conventions with a modern setting. It is considered to be a sub-genre in Speculative Fiction and/or

fantasy. Sometime people think it means that the whole story takes place in a large city— but that is not always the case, sometimes writers represent their own home towns. But most of the time large cities are used, the ones most people can name in a given state, because it is easier for the fantastical elements to hide themselves amongst every day, ordinary people.

There is also a lot of cross-genre going on with Urban Fantasy so it becomes difficult to tell whether a work qualifies, but generally speaking Urban Fantasy is known for showing the impact of modern society on the fantasy elements included in it. For example, in my works, werewolves are alive and well in Central Park in Manhattan. There is also a lively debate of "when" Urban Fantasy is, so we do not run amok of Historical Fantasy, Alternate History and Future Fantasy. If it sound complex— it is. But it also means there is a never-ending playground of possibility for authors. It also requires a lot of explanation because the term “urban” is also used heavily in African American stories to represent “street life”. This term is used to represent the glorification of gangs and drugs as a high standard in urban communities. Urban Fantasy is where magic and the real world meet.

While this may seem like a small problem in terms of just being able to define something clearly, it reaches further than just a keyword or term. The reach also extends to what graphics can be places on a cover. For example – I have a paranormal romance series that gave me some insight. Two of the books have African American couples on the cover; the other two books are more abstract: one has a pair of hands and the other has a snowmobile and a wolf. All four books are labelled paranormal romance. However, at book signings 90% of the time, the books that do not show the

African American couples are picked up and examined first. I began asking soft questions about why, because all the books in the series are marketed with the same catch phrases, keywords and logo. I was told many times, by a variety of ethnicities that they assumed the books with the couples on the covers were about the inner city drug life. While this study is going to focus on Indie Authors, I do hold space that a next step and study should be about perceptions of readers about these keyword and genre listings.

Despite having the explain, often, about the genres I choose to write about, the learning about this industry took a lot of time. Granted I know, my approach was and was different than some, but the learning that I gained through experience gave me a frame that helps inform my own framework and understanding of some best practices. At the free online conferences, I learned what the best practices are when creating a realistic fantasy story, but also how to avoid newbie mistakes, such as over explaining everything and “head hopping” or constantly changing character points of view. In addition the conferences allowed authors to network and connect with others and form groups – and again it was all free. In current day, even though there are writing groups and conferences that are still free, it seems that more often authors find that these writing groups and critique groups cost anywhere from fifty to one hundred dollars a month. Back then, even though the writing groups were free from financial obligations, there were mandatory components that a writer agreed to in order to join.

Writing groups may seem like a given when talking to writers. However, many Indie Authors work in solitude. The attitude is not derived from a sense of secrecy, as much as a sense of personal processes not mingling well with others. I never saw

writing groups as anything more than an opportunity to learn from people who were already doing the things I wanted to do.

### **My Writing Group Experience**

I joined a group called My Writing Friends, in 2001 that changed how I wrote, critiqued and gave feedback, and even looked at writing. It was the third group I had joined. The first group didn't have enough guidelines and rules for me, and there was no guidance, just a jump in and do it mentality. What I found, was that I struggled with the advice- author's prerogative and all. People gave critiques which made no sense, and it never got explained enough to make sense. I wanted to know the how's, why's and why not's, so I kept searching for another group of people to work with. The second group had very little accountability and there was low participation. It ended up being an exercise in frustration to offer critiques and then get nothing in return. After a free conference session on writing groups, I found *My Writing Friend*. It was a writing and critique group with a few simple rules: everyone had to post their work on time—the works consisted of one poem of 17 lines and a 2000 word story, everyone had to offer a critique to each of the five other team members and post one revised draft one week later and one final copy at the end of the month, and each person was required to submit works for publication four times a year. The publication did not have to pay and did not have to be to a publishing house; even better a list of online magazines accepting works was provided monthly.

Looking at the rules in current day I cringe, not because it was unfair, but because of the massive time commitment. I had just gotten married, and worked full time for the government in education technology—which required a lot of travel, so

there was not a lot of room for extra. Still, I persisted and joined the group. The amount of work I put into my writing group easily took three hours a day on top of an already packed schedule. I wrote poems, even though they are by no means my favorite style of writing.

At the same time I can't offer enough appreciation. Having strict guidelines for everyone to follow, meant the group was dedicated to creating works and revising them. I learned to write 2000 words a week, which in the beginning took four or five days. Now when writing fiction I often turn out 2000 or more a day—of course they require revisions, but getting content down in a fixed form is an understood practice. I also learned some writing best practices such as structure, flow, pacing, plot development, story arcs; which helps in developmental editing practices. Most importantly, I learned to take a critique. Learning to accept, understand and use feedback is a necessary component for anyone— especially those who plan to publish works for public consumption. Working with a diverse group allowed me to get used to feedback, misunderstood characters and plots, as well as rejection, and prepared me for the hardest part of writing- other people hating a story I love.

The other important skill I learned was rejection. Both how to give it and how to accept it; although if asked to describe which one is harder, I cannot say either is easy. Rejecting a group member's work meant explaining why I did not think the piece worked— essentially teaching myself how to pick out elements of style and story that did not effectively function in that piece. Taking rejection is just as hard. After spending many hours of effort and creativity, being told it was not good enough, or that it did not resonate or make sense was hard. Then I got the best advice possible, from a group

member who'd been writing for decades longer than I'd been alive. Enter all the writing contests possible. The two best types of contests to enter are: the free contests that offer critique and feedback and the contests that are free. There was a clear method to all of it as well; to enter at least ten contests at a time. While it may seem that this would overwhelm a novice writer, I was over eager and it never crossed my mind it was an excessive amount of work. The reasons were simple, any contest offering feedback and critique helped a person to grow as a writer. Entering ten contests at a time gives a writer less time to obsess about whether or not they've won the contest. Simple, but true. The first time I won a short story contest, I had to ask for the details of which one it was — because I had forgotten all about the entries. Luckily I was taught to keep track of all entries. I kept a spread sheet of all contests entered and the results gained, and still do.

Periodic winning of contests, did not stop the sting of rejection from the others. Any rejection letter/email still gave me momentarily hurt feelings, but I learned it was just part of the process. I've had many more rejection letters from contests, than congratulations from those I've won. But I still learn each time and even better, it keeps me current in writing trends and what styles readers expect. I got better with story writing, and between 2003 – 2006 I made learning about my creative writing a third career— after being a new mom and leading an educational technology program in Detroit.

While the job focused on creating technologically inclusive environments in the public school system, I wrote in my job as well, but it was grant writing and report writing, not as satisfying as creative writing at all. Even though I had not had technical

writing training prior to my position, I quickly learned it was something I needed to have. Professional development was highly encouraged and I took all workshops and courses related to grant writing that I could. Report writing was highly formulaic, but still it meant I had to learn APA format from books, as I had never used anything other than MLA before. This style of writing seemed to be a counter balance to the creative writing that I still engaged through the different writing groups I had found.

It meant producing product every week—it also taught me to call it product. I consumed what I could find online and was an active participant/member in at least some official writing groups; including the Science Fiction Research Association, Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. I also participated as a member in online groups for black women writers, black speculative fiction writers and fantasy diversity writers. Since my fiction works favor fantasy and characters of color, these were groups that called to me. The best part about being in so many groups was the large amount of product I created. Slowly my time started to be consumed with more practical life matters, and I either left groups or become non-active in member status. This changed when I began to engage with the Indie Author community. Once again I found that working in a collaborative group helped to learn the process. Currently I am in four writing groups that each offer opportunities to interact with specific intentions. I view each group as a job, meaning I dedicate time in my weekly schedule to interact with them. The space held for each groups is designed to give and receive critiques, information, opportunities, networking and friendships.

## **Writing and Rhetoric**

I never stopped writing, even though I couldn't be as active as I wanted, I maintained a daily writing habit. I also learned that I really wanted to know more. Somewhere in my mind I had compartmentalized creative writing and composition as two different things. Working with writing groups had made me rethink those ideas. As I looked at graduate programs, I went after a Master's Degree in Public Administration (MPA) because it's what I knew based on my experience in working with the government in educational technology. I finished my degree in 2008, but was not sure what to do nor was I certain that I wanted to make any radical changes. I was working with the Youth Empowerment Programs at the University of Michigan-Flint campus, one of the benefits was I was allowed to take college courses. I decided that a Master's degree in English rhetoric and composition was another pursuit that made sense. Relearning about composition and academic writing was a new step forward. I had always enjoyed my English classes, but now sharpening the focus and really entering a conversation in the field allowed me to look at the intersections of writing in the different aspects of my life. I had great mentors in Jacob Blumner and Tom Foster, who challenged the way I thought about composition, and encouraged me in the undertaking and publishing of research as necessary steps towards progress in academic career goals.

It was also my first graduate assistant experience, one that expected me to use not just my writing skills, but the statistical skills I learned while studying for my MPA. I was helping the Institutional Analysis department create a document for the Higher Learning Commission report for accreditation. In this, I learned how to create

documents for Town Hall Meetings and talk about academia through numbers, of all things. Despite being forced to delve into statistics, I enjoyed the formal writing and how qualitative methods could be interwoven with quantitative to make a clear picture of the campus environment. Writing without contractions, not so much, although it became easier. Those were my first steps in research, the second being my thesis which focused on African American women science fiction writers published by the major publishing houses in the United States — spoiler alert -- there were seven traditionally published in the United States in 2008.

Finally in 2011 there was a huge change in what I thought about writing and what I should do with it. I decided to pursue a PhD because I wanted to look at African American women academics in digital writing spaces. I was dead certain this is what I wanted to research. I thought informing myself about these writing spaces and also women like me would keep me moving forward. But there was a change I did not anticipate, leading me in another direction. While doing my doctoral course work, I had also just finished editing and finalizing the first two books of a trilogy and was in the process of writing the third. After urging from amazing Beta readers and friends, I decided to publish it. Why not? The work had been done; I might as well shop it. And I got a contract offer by a traditional publishing house from my first round of query letters. I was so excited. I made it. Someone outside my family and friends thought I had a great story. Then I looked at the contract and started talking to the editor. There were just a few changes they wanted to see in the story and characters. I thanked them and said that I could not make the changes they asked for. I sent out queries again. And got

another call, where I was told that they enjoyed the story and really liked it, but they had no idea how they would market it.

### **Becoming an Indie Author**

After those two offers that clearly did not work for me, I decided to self-publish. I did not approach this decision lightly; I had spent plenty of time researching the to-do's that comes with putting a product out. Formatting and editing were the easiest portions to get through. Back matter, teasers, book trailers, covers artists, branding, and marketing not so much. While I felt I had a good product, all of the business/entrepreneurship aspects still had a lot of things to learn and employ and I had not considered. More than that—there was just still a lot of information I had not been exposed to yet. Fortunately, for me, social media was an amazing tool. There were (and are) numerous groups dedicated to just about every aspect of self-publishing. And there are millions of Indie Authors willing to engage in conversation. There was a lot of on-the-circuit learning, and quite frankly after having done this for six years, I'm still learning. There are plenty of Indie Authors who just jump in without preparation, something I cannot imagine doing, but speculate this kind of come hell or high water attitude is where all Indie Authors get a bad reputation. There are plenty of works out there for people to scoff at; however it's not limited to the self-publishing world. As an avid reader, I find plenty of errors in books published from major publishing houses.

Being a part of the Indie Author community has been a good experience, overall, for me. Sure there are stories of bullying, petty conflicts, and abusive attitudes between authors, but that has not been my experience so far. What I found, was a group of women and men from all walks of life who had networked and bonded over the love of

telling stories. I cannot think of another group of people who have been so willing and helpful in the process of putting out a product. Are we in competition – kind of. We are each selling a product, and sometimes to the same audience, but each person has a different story to tell and there are enough readers to fit each niche.

The idea of being able to tell the types of stories you want to read has been a common theme amongst authors. It is not just the queering of stories, but also normalizing the fact that many stories go outside that range outside of white, heteronormative, couples engaging in sanctioned sexual and religious practices, also should exist. Some of these stories have existed in traditional publishing, but were labelled as kink and talked about in hushed tones, as if anything not depicting: a white male and female couple in a monogamous relationship was derelict. Anyone reading or writing something more erotic was viewed as wrong. Indie Authors have opened storytelling up to a wider variety of normal, giving readers a wider choice and fewer stigmas.

Even though I was an Indie Author when I started my journey as a doctoral student, the idea of what I would research shifted many times. As I went through course work, I found the focus changing subtly, and thanks to my committee I reorganized my focus to explore what I wrote. I started to look at the natural intersections in my life. I taught English 232- genre exploration for two years, and I was able to mix my experiences with first year writing and creative writing in class. The students were exposed to lyrical essays, memoir, but also children's stories (because I had a huge number of education students) and a creative piece. I also made my students submit their works for publication. While it might sound cruel, the intention was

to help them take the step to send out their works. Submitting a piece for a contest is nerve wracking- even when sending out multiple pieces at a time. Having no choice about sending a piece out because a syllabus demanded it, gave students the ability to have no choice. Either send it out or fail the class, the piece might not have been published, but the class was passed. To the delight of me and my students, six of my education students got pieces picked up by online education websites. I also had the opportunity to have a teaching internship with Dr, Malea Powell for the WRA 460 course- advanced editing. Prior to the class had been taught as an advanced copy editing course. After a planning meeting with Malea, we decided it would be better run as a mock publishing house. The students were broken into genre groups and learned to examine the industry from the vantage point of a junior editor— coffee bringing services aside. In teaching students about developmental editing and manuscript appraisal, as well as author marketing and branding; my focus started to shift. We were teaching future professional writers how to get themselves jobs within traditional publishing houses, but the conversation about working Indie Authors never came up— even though we used a lot of Indie Author works to help skill development and as examples of worst and best practices of genre writing guidelines.

So I come to this study, conversation, and research from the position as scholarly researcher as well as Indie Author. This means when I began to conceptualize questions for the survey, I had a good idea of information that would be needed to be gathered when addressing the professional writing community. Another poignant question to be answered was: once Indie Authors have already have some success what purpose does having someone else working for them have? Professionalism is

one potential answer, because Indie Authors are under fire from traditional publishing houses downward, there is a lot of scrutiny about every aspect of their career. For example: despite being a good editor for others, I am terrible at editing my own work and hire an external editor to review my works. In talking with numerous other Indie authors the same statements has been said many times over “I would love to hire a professional to take care of the business side. I just want to write.” This study delves further into where professional writing and Indie Authors could potentially benefit each other.

As I progressed through exams, my area of focus kept shifting. The topic areas were still ones that meant a great deal- however I had the good advice to really look at my life and where academics and experiences were really intersecting. So I figured I had a good idea – maybe look at editing practices of scholarly works, which was not a bad idea; until working with a member of my committee, who challenged me to think more pedagogically about Indie Authors, my experiences and intersections, and what it could mean. Looking at Indie Authors in relationship to how the field of professional writing changes became a more clear focus.

I decided to use a survey of questions and a roundtable to gather data. Being an Indie Author gave me access as an insider with less hesitation from other authors. My experiences having conversations with this group has always had the same outcome: they just want to be heard and seen as real authors. When I began to gather and review my data from the survey, I was frustrated. With all of my insider knowledge, I had still forgotten to ask questions that clarified or expanded thoughts from the responders. Being an insider actually hindered me with assumptions that every Indie Author thought

the way I did and had access to my knowledge. Luckily, my round table discussion had been pushed back due to one of the participants moving. Instead of having the round table discussion just days after the survey launched, I had three weeks to review data and note where the questions had failed to clearly explore what I wanted to. I was able to ask the round table participants all the follow up questions for expansion and gathered further insight.

I also acknowledge the biases and critiques I bring to the conversation. I do come from multiple view points and they don't always mesh. In the Indie Community, having an advanced degree in writing brings out petty in some people. Whether intimidation or spite, people can and have made nasty comments. I also found I had to make a concentrated effort to stay out of the round table conversation with my peers-aside from question facilitation. I did not want to bring my own experiences as an author in as a guideline for their answers, but I was pleasantly surprised that most of my own experiences were echoed by the round table group. In fact, sometimes they had better descriptions and words for the experiences. How representative is my study knowing my bias? I find it to be inclusive. Even as part of the Indie Author community and interacting with my peers, being an author still means working alone and each pathway is paved with many different experiences. My research was a method of discovery; the survey results led to more in-depth round table discussion questions and through the narratives of experiences I started to look at key themes and ideas that would shape this product. The following summaries, detail how I approached this project and what ideas were important and what the outcome might be when academia meets industry in a new and more refined coupling.

### **Chapter Three: Researching Indie Authors- Methods**

Just because I am an Indie Author, I still have to go through the process of what questions to ask. Which meant, getting out of my own head and assumptiveness about everyone else's knowledge about the Indie community as I created the questions. So after writing down a few questions, I realized I would need to think about how best to create a method to gather the necessary information for my study, I was certain that a comprehensive survey, taken anonymously would be the best way to have a discussion about the changes in publishing and also discuss the processes and practices of non-traditionally published authors. Indie Authors have been around for decades, so I never considered this a new topic to be covered but I did want to explore the gig aspect more.

Part of the difficulty in creating a survey was to create questions that would engage the other Indie Authors, but still give me answers. I knew there would be push back about having a long survey- even though I was dealing with authors. Through casual conversations in years past, I knew plenty of authors wanted their stories told. People were proud of the work they had done and were tired of being told they weren't real authors. The reality was I could've written a survey with hundreds of questions. I also don't enjoy taking survey's so I kept the survey to a minimum. The questions were designed to help me explore Indie Authors through a specific lens. Not just as writers, but also as a brand and entrepreneurs. Because I do wear the dual hat of scholar and Indie Author, I figured there had to be more people who were interested in Indie Authors. I was also interested as a Professional Writer who experienced Indie Authors as a gig economy. Having taught a course in Publishing and Editing- with a specific

focus on Developmental Editing, I knew the intersections of curricular and experiential learning were something to be researched.

The survey was created to capture a snapshot from Indie Authors about their understanding of their processes of writing, branding, as well as entrepreneurial basics. It also sought to capture some of the practices of being an Indie Author, such as learning, networking and professionalism. Looking at where some separation between academia and industry it is necessary to review Stephen Bernhardt, who in “Active-Practice: Creating Production Tension Between Academia and Industry” cautions that having a full concord of goals between academia and industry may not be in each groups interest. He states that maybe the groups should be left to their own purposes. Academia, becoming more accommodating to industry may be challenged by academics that fear that curriculums will be too heavily influenced by the workplace. Because professional writing had occupied a support type of position in both areas, the model of learning has given a rather limited view on the aspect of a user’s skillset that require high end writing. “The role of industry is to lend the structure and services of the institution to a design and content shaped by industry” (Krestas, Fisher, and Hackos 1995). However we also have to look at where a shift began taking place and “gig” or outsourced economies became more common place. In addition, the support model frequently becomes articulated around the technology (and technical systems); with the user subordinated to an external part (Johnson-Eilola 2002). In short, as we moved away from an industrial business model, industry shifted to hiring out or outsourcing jobs, such as marketing, payroll, business writing, etc. Instead of keeping professional writers in house and paying salary and benefits, it became more cost effective to

outsource. Industry still gained an employee who understood document design functions to create a new document with text, spacing, font style, and branding that were asked for. Freelancers gained more work.

The history of outsourcing can be traced back several decades. Outsourcing has roots in the payroll processing, electronics' assembly, and testing that companies have traditionally farmed out to service providers and suppliers (Financial Times London 2003; Business World Philippines 2005), and Ross Perot has often been credited as "founding the outsourcing [service] industry when his company Electronic Data Systems began offering information technology services to other companies in the 1960s" (Stafford 2000). By business estimates business process outsourcing is a significant practice, likely to affect a greater number of occupational groups. According to the Outsourcing Institute's annual survey of their 40,000 plus members (2003), the eight areas most frequently outsourced are (in descending order): information technologies, administration, human resources, distribution, real estate/facilities management, finance, manufacturing, and call centers. Outsourcing providers typically claim they will save their customers money by providing remediation services. However because of failed business process outsourcing deals-- relating in part to cost overruns—providers are shifting their marketing tactics quite noticeably. They now stress that outsourcing will give clients "business transformation services"—providers are more likely to emphasize that their business process improvements can help build the customer's revenue streams (Chicago Tribune, 2004). However, as Scott explains, technical and professional writers are seen as "knowledge shapers" in work experiences but have no

organizational authority. Even more, over a third are working from one project based contract to another (2006).

Freelance and outsourcing aren't new ideas, but they have shaped how industry has allowed for gig economies to emerge or disappear. Working within industry but not for requires having a social awareness of factors that show how professionals interact with professional writers not as a grammar person but as someone with a skill that is relevant to writing for industrial production. However, it must be recognized that the professional value of an outsourced worker is a reminder that they are cost effective when running a business, but not necessarily critical for the business as values are being challenged and reshaped (Osnowitz 2000).

Since freelance work has been around for decades, it would make sense that professional writing students are given formal training on how to approach these gig opportunities. However, professional writing in industry moved from in house to agencies for tech writing.

In looking at my personal journey, it became clear the research methods I chose and how the data would be analyzed needed to appeal to two clear audiences. If the study were too academically rigid, the Indie Author community would be less likely to engage. However, accountability to academic standards also meant establishing research processes that are clear and transparent. Because I am an Indie Author, I still had to identify which research methods would be flexible enough to validate each group's different needs. I also had to ensure that the processes I hoped to capture clearly started from the beginning of the Indie Author process, which meant getting out of my

own head and assumptiveness about everyone else's knowledge about the Indie community as I created the questions. My research goal wasn't just to gather the process, but rather to analyze how experiential learning and traditional learning methods could conflate.

The analysis needed to explore both experience and classroom style learning because there is disconnect between academia and industry based on the willingness of each party to engage. Differing goals and the motivations discourages sometimes clear communication as well as forward momentum (Dicks, 2002). For professional writing to survive, benefit, and prosper, there needs to be a more clear understanding of how industry is changing and create opportunities for dialogue and growth.

I was certain that a comprehensive survey, taken anonymously would be the best way to have a discussion about the changes in publishing and also discuss the processes and practices of non-traditionally published authors. Indie Authors have been around for decades, so I never considered this a new topic to be covered but I did want to explore the gig aspect more. The problem then became what questions should be asked. It is not enough just to ask questions about the process; instead I had to think more systematically about asking questions that would lead to some guidance for with the idea that professional writing had stagnated in regards keeping potential career opportunities open to the students, even ones like gigs that fluctuate and change often. Yes, publishing houses still exist and probably always will. However the field should consider creating or adjusting professional writing to acknowledge that curricula must adapt and adjust to experiential learning as a valid process to interact with gig economies not always recognized by the field.

Ultimately I decided I approached this project by writing down a few questions, and hoping to find a theme that would carry through the process. I realized I would need to think about how best to create a method to gather the necessary information for my study. I knew I had access to a variety of Indie Authors because of my place in various social media groups. Based on general discussion in groups, it seemed that many authors would welcome the chance to talk about their experiences and their processes. I worked to make the questions comprehensive and keep the survey relatively short. While people were willing to participate, I wanted to make sure that the completion levels were as high as possible.

If, instead of, just focusing on how to train of working in a publishing house and instead focusing on how to understand the business of working with an Indie Author there has to be integrative and adaptive curriculum models incorporating business practices in addition to professional writing objectives, the questions would have to bridge personal experiences and entrepreneurship in a way that still worked with professional writing models. It is necessary to take into account the processes, practices and needs that are currently in the Indie Author community.

My study uses mixed methods to explore Indie Authors and their practices. As Cresswell best explains “A mixed method study is one in which the researcher incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis in a single study.” It is important to use both style of data collection and analysis because, while the narrative of the process is crucial, so are numbers in data showing trends, production and outcomes that narrative do not cover. There is a descriptive quantitative rhetorical analysis of survey data along with qualitative analysis from the round table

interview of four Indie Authors, chosen for their diversity in experience, success, genres and longevity. I engaged the roundtable group in questions that expanded on areas the survey had failed to specify. Meaning, while the survey questions asked much about writing, business and marketing skill sets, along with community participation; the roundtable also delved into networking, success standards and Authors as brand. While I had composed fifty-two questions I really wanted specific answers to a handful to reinforce the building blocks of a curriculum that would maintain flexibility to accommodate changes within the Indie Author, as well as, traditional publishing communities. While the survey allowed for broad oversight of the process, the roundtable gave a more comprehensive look at the journey and prospects.

1. What does it mean to be an Indie Author? Anyone can write something and hit publish on their computer. There is a lot more that goes into being an Indie Author and the question was left open ended to allow authors a space to give their story and insight.
2. What is the management process for the entrepreneurial side of being an Indie Author? Writing a book is the smallest part of being an Indie Author. The business side is probably the least thought about aspect of these authors. They are responsible for every decision and finances.
3. What is the management process for work/life balance in being an Indie Author? While there are some Indie Authors who make a living writing, many do not. The balance of all the responsibilities from Indie Authors was another area that needed some insight.

4. What marketing and branding practices are necessary as an Indie Author? What do Indie Authors know about visual rhetoric and how do they use this to sell their brand? When describing a practice there were questions about what, if anything had changed and what happened as a result.
5. What constitutes success as an indie author? Is it having a strong reader base, is it finances, is it rankings on Amazon? If success is a goal, is it dependent upon the products as a whole, or each individual product?

### **Methods of the Study**

In this section I discuss the methodology that frames the study and what insight was gathered from study, which I learned later on. I will detail how the questions were created, the methods of the survey delivery, discuss how I selected my round table participants, and how I conducted the roundtable session. I will also discuss the process of analyzing survey data as well as the round table data collected and a summary.

To assess the attitudes and practices of Indie Authors, I put together a survey of questions to provide valuable information to those who aren't not Indie Authors and to inform outsiders not only the processes of the authors, but also where Professional Writing programs (using Michigan State University's program as an example) were missing a viable gig option for the professional writing students in the editing and publishing tracks. The intent here is not to push curricula or an agenda of changing a publishing and editing track to include only Indie Authors, but again the emphasis is on the fact that while PW students are being trained for industry engagements, they are

failing to consider the broader, social purposes of their training. The common practice of instructing students in functional but not conceptual aspects of where their skillsets can be utilized contributes to how they think and acts outside of academia. These training approaches not only move us away from arguments insisting that we must develop more durable skills, be stronger, more proactive leaders, and situate ourselves as knowledge workers rather than production workers in our organizations (Faber and Johnson-Eilola, Wick, Hart-Davidson).

After deciding a survey was the best way to continue, I opened the survey up on Facebook, with the restraints that the authors had to have been published for three years and had to have at least three works published. I worked with four groups: SPF (Self-Publishing Formula community), Michigan Authors, Author and Readers connections, and Black Indie Authors. I chose these four groups because of high active membership and conversations. As a participating member of these groups I already had access, however, I asked and obtained permission to promote the survey in these groups and asked them to spread the word to other groups. The reason for those particular guidelines were based on my collections of experiences as an author, editor and professor. As an author, I knew no matter how much information and work went into a first publication. Many authors release their first work in a surreal weird panic, ecstatic haze. The thrill of being a published author, the excitement of doing a book launch, and stepping into the Indie Author community is heady. As an editor, I knew that the first published work is always the most rough. Even if an author has participated in contests or written other complete manuscripts, the first published work is always more personal. Later works are easily called products, but the first work holds a place that

most authors call sacred. Lastly as a professor; who has required students to submit creative works for publication, hitting publish becomes rote and less panic inducing and more just a means to an end.

Prior to launching the survey I worked with my committee member Dr. Ben Lauren to refine and regroup the questions to be able to focus not only on practices on Indie Authors, but also implications that could help inform professional writing practices. The questions were designed to discuss the journey from the thinking process of authors to producing the work and putting it out for public consumption. Then we looked at how this journey could be looked at in a classroom and how it could make sense to add it into an existing field of study. Questions asked about the story of becoming an author, to deciding to self-publish, experiences that contributed to the entrepreneurial aspect of being an Indie author, to life/author/work balance.

### **The Survey**

Indie Authors love to talk about their journey- and that is amplified when talking with other Indie Authors about the similarities and differences in the journey. There is a strong feeling of community and that love is shared through networking through social media and book signings, but outsiders are viewed warily. And for good reason. Indie Authors have been vilified by both publishing houses and the reading public as well. As I began discussing the idea of launching the survey in December, I informally asked around the Indie Author community to see what they thought about participating. Most were excited about having their voice heard; those not excited were generally in the middle of a book launch. December is a hot time to publish or run promotions because the holidays are a great time for sales. In retrospect, had I really thought about the

timing, I should have waited until January to launch the survey. But I didn't, and still had at least a few dozen authors willing to help out by taking the survey and being willing to spread the news to their groups to help get participation. And then a snarky blog post hit the community on December 29, 2016. "Self-publishing: An Insult to the written word?" written by travel author Lauren Gough (Gough, 2016). Ms. Gough wrote an article that belittled every Indie Author who had gone through the work to self-published.

Because of the article, the timing was perfect to launch a survey that asked Indie Authors not only about their process and procedures, but also about their own journeys. Even though the community is not without their own bad behavior, this was one circumstance that most authors rallied against in unity. Having ones character besmirched was not going to be tolerated. Conversations had run rampant through Facebook, in particular, where Indie Authors shared the article in outrage, but ultimately felt helpless to do anything about it. The collaborative reactions from the Indie Author community ranged from calm sentiments noting that readers had never head of Gough, but when looking through the comments, they had many of the responding indie authors on their bookshelves. Some questioned if travel writing was still a valid writing form. Many gave informational advice "Darling, people have been self-publishing for centuries; some of these self-publishers have become our greatest authors, who have given us work that stands the test of time. Your opinion is old, and as one who states it, it appears that you are living in the past. Even agents are signing self-publishers now strictly for international rights. Many readers prefer indie over traditional works. As someone who makes a career working with both self-published and traditional authors, I can immediately tell you that I've seen indie work that surpasses traditional in every

way. Your bias is irrational. Awards, accolades, and fancy contracts don't make a great author. I'm both self-published and traditionally published and I've seen the pros and cons of both. It's embarrassing that we still have this stigma against self-publishing going into 2017.” sadly this comment was posted as anonymous. My favorite comment challenged the author back on her own sense of professionalism “By the way, that's a dangling participle in your opening sentence. I'm available if you need help.” Again anonymous, because while indie authors can come together as a formidable group, many of them also understand how unforgiving social media and online comments can be because the records are kept forever.

Hundreds of comments were made by Indie Authors, a sizeable number I both know and interact with, or have just been introduced to. Indie Authors, bloggers, and traditionally published authors voiced outrage at the antiquated notion of who was good enough. Some speculated the author might just be happier being miserable and others suggested she might be jealous because she had no idea how to be an Indie Author, but the real message was much more subtle. Indie Authors are not only hard working professionals who tackle writing and entrepreneurship, the Indie Author Community comes together as a swift unit to tackle dissenters and those who would challenge that they are any less than traditionally published authors. Almost more telling was how many Indie Authors responded and then became friends on Facebook because of this blog piece, widening the community even more.

I reacted to the article, first as a highly irate and insulted Indie Author. Then I looked at it as a scholar, and noticed the absolute lack of any data. There were no statistics on sales of Indie travel authors versus traditionally published travel authors.

The article was a narrative by a traditionally published author who had no connection to the Indie Author community and her narrative was based on speculation and assumption.

This type of mentality is highlighted in Bryant's piece, where he defines texts as the "manifestations of a culture over time" (2002). A culture where traditional publishers have chosen to ignore the juggernaut that are Indie Authors until it was too late. A decision was made to continue publish as always had been done, elevating a few, denying the rest and resting on their laurels. However the culture had changed, Indie Authors stopped vying for attention and refocused on their craft and learning the business side that went along with it. By the time bigger publishing houses decided to get on board Indie Authors had already gone ahead and were living their dream. The notion of Indie Authors changing the culture of publishing is a sentiment not grabbed by most people, but one that I am interested in highlighting and giving insight to.

I launched the survey on December 31, 2016; promoting in my six groups and reaching out to fifty Indie Author friends. I queried six high traffic groups, where the moderators ran writing groups, had genre topic groups, marketing information, and some sold services to Indie authors ranging from editing to book cover design. Not a single person said no. Every single person not only allowed me to post in their groups, but also tagged authors and helped spread the word. Maybe this was because there was no profit to be gained, or competition, but every single time the answer was absolutely yes because it is high time Indie Authors were taken more seriously. Not only shown by the number of people who took the survey, but also feedback given in the roundtable, addressed this article and how mad the authors were about being belittled.

Forty-two people who had read the article indicated they wanted to take the survey because of the misinformation the article posited.

The goal for the survey was to reach one hundred Indie Authors in two weeks. I was going to leave the survey open for two weeks – only because this is the limit for the duration of a Facebook created event, else I would have left it open for three weeks, considering it launched on New Year’s Eve. Additionally, I encouraged participants to help spread the word to other authors. My goal was to get one hundred responses from authors who met the guidelines. The survey gained seventy-three responses the first day. The rest came in a bit more slowly, but before the end of two weeks there were one hundred and seven responses. Only fifty-five of the original responders were able to complete the survey because of the guidelines of three years published and at least three works. I did get messages from some authors who were disappointed that they could not participate because of the parameters of publications and experiences. When I asked for people to take my survey about their experience as Indie Authors, they were more than willing to help out.

During the two weeks the survey was active, there were twenty-two shares, and in the end double the amount of people I had wanted to respond had. Even more amazing is that there were only two complaints (that I was aware of, granted I wasn’t searching for them, so these were the two I found), not related to being able to participate; both who seemed to think there was a clickbait scam going on. Many Indie Authors who’d taken the survey set them straight. The survey— because of the timing— and the knowledge that it was for an academic purpose, was something people wanted to participate in. Not to highlight all Indie Authors as paragons of virtue, there are some

who were mad to not be included (due to the three year or three works published parameters), who weren't nice in expressing their being left out. But overall, I found that it was well received.

At the end of the survey run, I had one hundred and seven completed surveys; thirty not completed surveys and fifty-three participants who didn't meet the requirements. In two weeks, one hundred and ninety Indie Authors stepped up to help a fellow author out; almost double of the goal number. The survey sought to capture behaviors and attitudes of the authors as they practiced honing their writing craft as well as marketing and branding themselves. To examine these attitudes and practices, the survey focused on three key areas: their journey, economic factors, and hindsight / potential areas for learning. Before the questions there were some basic demographic questions, to help capture a snapshot of the authors: their backgrounds, their familiarity with being entrepreneurs, age range, gender and how long they had been an Indie Author.

The first round of questions focused on perceptions from the authors about their journey to get where they are. Many of the questions asked were about writing practices, but also prior knowledge about editing, publishing, marketing, and branding. The secondary area of questions asked the authors to think about the economic factors being an Indie Author. This included the money expenditures and the monies earned. It also asked about selling practices and how often authors engaged with their readers. The third round of questions asked them to ruminate on their journey: things they would have liked to have known, things they would have done differently, and best pieces of advice for others.

The experience around the survey and roundtable went well. Granted, the nasty article helped in ways, I am certain the author had not intended. While part of me would have been thrilled to have a larger response amount, the researcher in me is glad to have a manageable set of data to comb through.

## **Chapter Four – Findings**

Authors like to live in a bubble sometimes, where they are the only one who does what they do and tell stories in their own special way. I felt this way as I read through the survey answers, as a scholar. As an Indie Author reading them I thought there was a lot of insight into the Indie community but not as much as I had wanted. It seemed that people were actually afraid to commit answers to a fixed form, than they were to talk about it over social media. I was interested as a scholar with the answers, but also quickly recognized that huge parts of the conversation were missing. No small ideas about best swag practices, but ideas about professionalism, hiring professional services, and sustainability. While getting people to fill out the survey was easy enough, going through the data required time and care. Despite being the person who loves to write, I can appreciate numerical data as well. After a year's worth of statistic classes for my MPA, I had enough experience to put my data into themes, trends and also coded data to fit within groupings of my own creations. Working this way made trends show up much more clearly.

The survey responses included a good solid mix of genres, experiences and many Indie Authors were happy to share the story of their journey. It was stated many times, in open comment sections, that Indie Authors want the validation of being an author. While many hold the title "Indie" with pride, many also want to be considered professional. It was also indicated that the authors were happy to have their stories spread in a professional (here meaning academic) work.

The respondents surprisingly were rather short on words when responding to the survey. I had anticipated that the open ended questions would have yielded a lot more qualitative data; therefore, I was again glad that the round table had a delay in when it was performed. Still, over 80% of the surveys were complete and the answers helped to give me a clear idea based on the questions I asked.

While the participants that I surveyed did include people from all walks of life, most don't have formal writing training. 64% indicated they had at least a bachelor's degree, 57% have more than five years' experience as published authors and 87% have five or more works published. These are experienced Indie Authors who don't view writing as a hobby, but as a serious pursuit and a business. The table below captures a snapshot of data that I found to be most relevant. It gives a kind of cross section of the people who are Indie Authors on average. See the appendices for all questions.

Questions	Respondents	Percentages
Degree holders	107	68.48
5 or more years' experience	107	62.06
5 or more works published	107	93.09
Published in an anthology or box set with other Indie Authors	107	59.92
Female gender	107	66
Age range: 30 – 40	107	36

**Table 1: Survey Responses**

**Table 1 (cont'd)**

Age range 41- 55	107	43
Use a pen name – only	107	33
Author as full time job	107	24
Product brings in income after expenses	75	24.75
Attend book signings	107	83.24
Attend book signings 6+ hours away from home	107	34.24
Romance (all sub genres)	107	40
Young Adult (all sub genres)	107	22
Urban Fantasy (all sub genres)	107	09
New Adult (all sub genres)	107	18

66% of responding authors were female. In my own interactions, Indie Authors have been more evenly split. There are just as many men as women engaging in conversations in the social media groups. I do not think the survey is biased because more women responded, but I do think the survey shows that women tend to write in more saturated markets, and because of the groups the survey had been promoted to, more responded. Being savvy about the genre markets is absolutely necessary in being able to sell the product.

For example— one of the male responders related his journey as an author. He started out by writing survival technique books, which involved bow hunting, a very niche market. Because of his own interactions with bow hunting and being a member of many groups, his first three books sold remarkably well and allowed him to pay off a

new house in three years. However, he became bored with writing just that style and decided to try new genres. Being a father, he decided to write a children's night time story book. The new book flopped. At the launch it sold forty copies, and in the months after only two or three sales for the next year. In the survey he indicated that he was upset that people wouldn't allow him to be a versatile author.

The reality is that he did not understand his positioning as an author nor the market to which he wanted to become a part of. Being a niche author means a specific audience and that can be a huge advantage. The author had readers who wanted a book about survival, a lot of action and accurate hunting techniques. The readers, however, did not want to read a children's bedtime book. As this is being written, according to amazon there are 2,246,190 children's books for sale, instead of the 2273 suspense, survival thriller books that his first books are listed in.

The average age was approximately 43 from both high responding groups. Although 43% of responders were over the age of 41, many age ranges were covered. The demographic shows a well-educated, group of authors with a good amount of time spent on refining their works produced. Again this is backed up with stories from the survey. One woman related a story about how she came to create her fantasy series. Her degree is in mechanical engineering. She spends a lot of time writing specifications for manuals on ink jet printer nozzles. She said she began her book as a doodle or a dragon and a few words about it because she was feeling stuck in her process writing. The creative writing helped her keep focus and move forward with the technical writing. By the time she had finished the writing the manual, she'd also finished fifty-thousand

words of her book. It ended up taking her another year to create the last forty thousand words, but she did finish.

She related that writing for her graduate program did teach her how to create length, but it was working with the Indie Author community where she learned to hone the creative craft. She was surprised at the honest feedback she got as well as offers for help. She felt that her education had prepared her to write and that her career as an engineer prepared her for critiques in reviews. Instead she found that genre writing required rules that she had never given thought to. After working with a fantasy group on Facebook, she found a writers group to join. She relaunched her book a year later after having made significant revisions.

Fifty-six percent of Indie Author are also published in anthologies or novella box sets with a group of Indie Authors. The participants are not novices, but not yet quite mid-career either as most plan to continue to publish works. Box sets have become a faster way for Indie Authors to “get their letters”, meaning there are enough sales to earn either USA Today Best Selling Author or the New York Times Best Selling Author. Ranking is important for sales, the higher the rank a product lands on, the more visibility platforms such as Amazon and Barnes and Noble will give the work. What this means is that Indie Authors highly value these list rankings. One survey respondent broke down her reasoning for trying to hit these lists. Reviews used to be everything for Indie Authors to get more sales. The more reviews of your product the more visibility on platforms such as Amazon and Goodreads (whom Amazon bought out). However that changed as two things began happening. First was the bullying and down voting. Groups of people could and did start hate campaigns for certain Indie Authors, as either

a result of a slight on social media. Sometimes the hate campaigns were because an Indie Author thought another had plagiarized their work.

While the respondent didn't explicitly explain what hate campaigns are or down voting, I have knowledge from being in the community. This is how reviews on Amazon work: how many reviews have user written, and how many helpful votes has been received on those reviews. Getting at least 80% helpful votes helps keep your product visible.

A hate campaign is where a person recruits people they know to go and leave a one star (lowest rating) review stating the book was rubbish. Get enough people to do that and the book rating goes down and is less promoted by the platforms. Down voting is where people go the reviews and click the thumbs down icon to show that the review wasn't helpful to them. While this does not affect the rating, it does cause the review to be moved lower on the review section. In addition, people also up vote the negative reviews. The result is when a new person views the book page; the negative results show up first because of the usefulness of the rating. Amazon did step in by creating the "verified purchase" step (Amazon.com 2017). However, having a verified process hurt authors too. "When a product review is marked "Amazon Verified Purchase," it means that the customer who wrote the review purchased the item at Amazon.com. Customers can add this label to their review only if we can verify the item being reviewed was purchased at Amazon.com. (2017). While there is also language that says purchases might have come from somewhere else, but Amazon couldn't verify that, more action was happening. Considering that many Indie Authors go to book signing events, many consign with books stores and some sell signed copies from websites; many books are

purchased not from Amazon. When the verified purchase stamp came out, many Indie Authors had reviews removed from their book page on Amazon. The practice has slowed, but some authors lost as many as 50 reviews. If this seems like a small number or not a big deal, Amazon only starts to make a book/product more visible after 45 reviews that average 4.2 stars.

Another survey taker also indicated the lists as a reason for joining box groups, but had another opinion. She stated that box groups were a scam and inflated false ratings. She talked about a particular promoter on Facebook, who figured out the system early in 2012. The promoter stopped writing books, but started offering to put together boxsets for other authors with the goal of making the USAT and NYT best-selling lists. Buying into the program ranges from \$500 to \$1,000 and then twenty carefully chosen authors wrote a novella and then promoted it. The respondent was very clear in her opinion it was a scam, but did not offer much in the way of support.

As a member of the community, but also as a researcher, I had been following this scheme/scam/promotion for years now. Do the authors make the lists? Sometimes, yes they do. It is worth noting that making the list can be as short as 24 hours and still considered valid. What this has done, however, is inflate the number of authors on those lists. It is not a valid representation of Indie Authors making the list because many times books are not actually being sold. Amazon counts gifted books and free promotion downloaded books as “sales”. To make the USAT bestseller list, one has to sell 5,000 books over a single week, for the NYT best seller the number is 9,000. Simple math will clarify the picture. \$500 buys you into the program; the boxset is sold for pre-order at 99 cents. Each author is asked to gift at least 300 copies of the book to

their readers – methods are left up to each author. If everyone meets their goal that results in 6000 sales- enough for the USAT list, if even just for one week. This type of list making scheme also nets the promoter \$4,000 from that set to coordinate the process. This is one area where the roundtable filled in the follow up questions I wished I would have put in the survey- what does the community think about it? Of the three authors, one who had been through the process thought it was fine because getting the letters was getting the letters. The other two authors did not agree and felt it was a scam that hurt Indie Authors because the perception was the authors had to pay people to make the list instead of authentic sales. It is a very hotly debated topic, but until the rules change for bestseller lists, these types of deals will continue to happen.

The overall resounding message from the survey showed that 93% of Indie Authors reported the reason they chose to self-publish was because they knew their stories weren't a good fit for traditional publishers. One of the repliers to the survey related that she could only ever self-publish because of what she wrote. Her story was being a minister in a small town in the Bible belt of America. Everyone knows everyone and having the title of minister was important to her. So was writing male on male fantasy romance. Something she was certain members of her church and community would object to. She also did not see where it would meet demands in the traditional publishing houses. Instead, using a pen name, she opted to self-publish and found a solid group of readers and even better a group of like-minded writers. She was able to write her "kink stories" without fear of prosecution. It was just as important for her to be able to write as it was for her to keep her job. She also made it a point to note that she

did not feel like her story telling was neither a violation of her position nor the tenants of the Bible.

Indie Authors are movers and shakers and work hard to get their stories into new hands. 83% indicated they attend yearly book signings, with 32% traveling to book signings more than six hours away in the last year. One of the women responding noted that book signings were the events she looked forward to each year. Not only to meet new readers, but she also viewed them as family reunions. “Every year I travel to five different events and get to meet up with my Facebook family in person. It renews our relationships and we have a great time.” Book signings are the best way to meet avid reader fans and make news ones. In personal experience, I have been amazed at how many people are star struck to meet their favorite Indie Authors. Some of the most mentioned book signings were: YA-topia, London Bookseller Event, Books and Bourbon and Once Upon a Book.

Over the last three years 44% have been to four or more book signings. Book signing attendance is impacted by the popularity and frequency of book signings, which have seen an upswing from 2013. (Most are independently run, often times by Indie Authors, but that is for another study).

Many of the authors represented urban fantasy, romance, paranormal romance and young adult genres. I do recognize some of the demographic is skewed because of which groups the survey was presented to. As an author who is active and present in these top four contributing genres, I’m not surprised to see higher numbers from those groups, versus others (new adult, thriller, mystery, horror, etc.). While this might point to

having strong sub-groups who responded the genre question, it's only fair to say it wasn't pushed as hard in other groups that I was not associated with, by me. It was shared by others who had taken the survey- and then let me know they shared it. This is not indicative of there being cliques of Indie Authors, more acknowledging that a bias is present for representation because I worked harder to promote with groups that I already had an affiliation with. The fact that other genres did answer is probably from the shared announcement for the survey. There is definitely potential for doing further research that is expanded to and marketed to the other genres in the Indie Author community as well. Some key take aways from the process and practices- is that the majority is experiential and only a small percentage had formal training. Part of the parameters was three years into the gig and at least 3 works published- these specific guidelines were based on my own experience and also working with other Indie Authors. Nothing short of time and work helps prepare authors for the role of being an Indie Entrepreneur. Motivation was clear- people wanted to tell their stories, but most weren't prepared for everything else that came with being an Indie Author, especially publishing and marketing. Support is an area where many Indie authors indicated they were surprised not to have it from family and friends while conversely they have support from their fan base, but also need professional support.

### **Indie Authors as professionals**

There is little mention in professional writing about Indie Authors when it comes to publishing and editing. Even though the effects were being felt in the publishing world, for example, in 2009 St. Martin's held a contest for a New Adult Romance (St. Martins, 2009). This new exciting category was introduced to reach out to readers in

their 20's; except Indie Authors had already been publishing New Adult works for years. "I credit the community of self-published authors with making this category so popular," says Harlequin/HQN's Lipschultz. "They wrote the stories they wanted to write, bypassed the issue of shelf space by publishing the books digitally at a low price point, and discovered that there was an audience hungry for this type of read. The book blogger community embraced this new genre and helped spread the word." "New adult really surged because of self-published writers," says Peter Senftleben, associate editor at Kensington Publishing. ("New Adult: A Book Category for Twentysomethings by Twentysomethings", 2014). In short, the publishing houses didn't think stories about twenty-somethings were a good market. It was assumed that readers were getting their stories from Young Adult and Contemporary Romance genres. They were wrong. Instead Indie Authors had already stepped into the gap and filled it. Cora Cormack, and Colleen Hoover hit best-selling lists as Indie Authors and then were offered contracts (Klems, 2013) and while both women accepted traditional publishing contracts, both admit they continue to self-publish. Why? Freedom and turn around. Not everything they write is wanted by the publishing houses, but they still want to put their stories out. In addition, timing is everything. If a self-published work relies on pop culture and current events, the author doesn't have a year or two to wait for a publication date. These are insights not foreign to Indie Authors, instead these are continual conversations had by indie Authors as they continue to research the business side of being an author. In a Facebook chat, Cormack said it was because she had done her research into the industry that she opted to self-publish.

“I was working in publishing in 2012 when I made a conscious decision to self-pub my first novel. BECAUSE I was knowledgeable about the industry, I knew my book didn't fit well into an established genre, and its best chance at success was self-publishing. “(Cormack, 2017)

Cormack's book *Losing It*, listed on the number one selling spot on Barnes and Noble (for both paperback and ebook) within 24 hours. The novel then was made an offer for and picked up by a traditional publisher within two weeks. It's since been translated into over fifteen languages and sold somewhere around a million copies worldwide.

“Self-publishing is what you make of it. Just like a regular small business can crash and burn, so can books. But those who know their industry, work hard, and nurture their craft and talent can write a good book regardless of who is doing the publishing. Readers are perfectly capable of being their own gatekeepers. And let's all be honest, the business of publishing is woefully slow, perpetually behind the times, and unwilling to take risks. I self-published my book because for decades publishing seemed to be under the impression that books about twenty-something characters wouldn't sell (spoiler alert: they sell quite well). Publishers have also been known to shy away from books with any kind of diversity or characters outside the norm. So sure, give publishers complete control of the market... If you'd like to read books only about straight, white people with plots that are nice and safe and will sell well.” (Cormack, 2017)

After gathering the data, a lot of the information received was what had been anticipated. Many self-published authors that have at least three years' experience have gone through a steep learning curve. Only 12% of authors had someone — another Indie author— guide them through the process. Also extremely prevalent was that the authors had a deep love of reading was clear with most of the authors and this led to the need to story tell and share those stories. The term gig economy was mostly not understood, but following up with self-publishing as a means to make money more Indie Authors did not expect to get famous/ get rich right off— in fact most authors didn't see fame as a reasonable goal. The idea of making money as a staple wasn't expected until years four to six. No one expected much other than hard work to get their stories out and read. It's been highlighted as a labor of love.

### **Round Table Discussion Findings**

Using a roundtable seemed a necessary part of the research. While the survey could give numbers and percentages to the questions, it only made sense to gain a narrative from a group of story tellers. More importantly this group of authors would prove to give invaluable insight. I chose three women, from across the country that I had met at book signings and had become friendly with. They represented young adult genre, paranormal romance genre and contemporary romance. They each had at least five works out and had been published for five years. The reason I chose them was based on conversations I have had with them in person. They all had slightly different stories about their journey to be an Indie Author and I figured together they would give a comprehensive look at the process.

Author one is a full time Indie Author, military wife and stay at home mom. She has a high school diploma and worked in retail. She's been self-publishing for five years and has released nine young adult books. She has been to only one book signing and plans to release three new novels in 2017.

Author two was an administrative assistant at a law firm, before getting a break at writing for CBS.com. She's currently working on a bachelor's degree in marketing. She is a single mom and only recently became involved with the robust Indie Authors groups in Chicago. She has been self-publishing for three years and has a trilogy published.

Author three is a collections officer for a community college. She has a bachelor's degree in business management. She's married with two kids, who keep her actively moving from sports event to sports event. She has five works out and been self-publishing for four years. She wants to publish her new YA novel in 2017.

As a group they were very willing to be honest and candid about their journey of both success and failure. Gathering information was crucial for this document but as I researched, the information was sparing. While professional writing and technical communication have journals, and creative writing have journals, self-publishing doesn't have an academic journal- so the next best place to find about the quality of the work was to engage in a very candid conversation with these Indie Authors.

We met up using google hangouts, for an hour of conversation. I had a list of questions ready, and the hardest part was to let them answer the questions and not chime in. I used Camtasia to record the meeting, and there was only one two minute time frame that one of the authors had technical issues and had to drop and rejoin.

Choosing all women was not to exclude male Indie Authors deliberately, however, as a female author, I interact with female authors more. The meeting provided the space for a continuing conversation from the survey. These conversations about being an Indie Author helped me to later define agendas, practices, requirements for acceptance, branding, marketing and represented Indie Authors, as being an Indie Author constantly evolves with the changing interests in the practice.

In short, they all related that being an Indie Author is a unique experience. Each creative work is marketed because of its creativity, even when placed in a box collection or anthology. There is little benefit to not continuing to grow with the industry, because the continued rate of progress means that authors who don't continue to create new products become obsolete and will draw less attention from their readers.

"I wanted to write what I wish I could read," says Author One. "There is a huge lack of diversity and inclusion. When I was growing up all the girls were reading *Anne of Green Gables*. I wanted a book about a female girl that looked like me that wasn't about slavery. I started writing stories when I was a teen and now I make money for it."

"Agreed," says Author Two. "Not just in content, but also on cover art. My main character is a black man and I wanted that represented on the cover. I was warned that it wouldn't sell, but boy were people wrong. I get a ton of compliments on my cover art. Self-publishing was a small way I could make an impact, break through systemic racism and just represent."

Author Three decided to write her first series after reading *Twilight* and figuring she could write a better story. "My friend and I decided if a story like that could get

published, we couldn't do worse. We kept each other accountable over one summer, checking in after each chapter. When I was done I had written a trilogy, but only three people knew about it."

During the course of the conversation much of the talk about process returned to best practices. While there are Indie Authors who don't see a need for professional services, this group insisted on professionalism from all angles.

"I was lucky I had a reader fan who liked me enough to tell me to hire an editor," Author Two said. "I'd let a friend proofread it and thought it was enough. I was wrong. I cringe, now, to think that I allowed a work of mine to go out so rough."

"Yes," Author Three agreed. "When I first started, I thought everything was fine. I learned a lot over the first six months. While you have some people who think everything is great, you get reviews from people who don't mind pointing out every flaw."

The conversation the first time was a whirlwind of laughter, common stories and shared pain. The overall feel of the conversation was a group of professional women, who loved their craft and wanted to talk about it. They were chosen because of their varied back grounds, but the more I listened, the more I realized how similar conversations sounded. However, listening to the recording to transcribe it, other smaller but important points came out in the form of verbal ticks, hesitations, and sometimes information being repeated. Sometimes silence gives more weight than words.

“Some people believe that being an Indie Author means they can correct their work any time they choose instead of just putting out a superior product,” said Author One. “I just can’t do that with my work. It represents me.”

She’s referring to ability to update manuscript files. When Indie Authors use self-publishing platforms such as Create Space, iTunes or Draft2Digital there is not a team of editors going over the works. There is a general spell check run and a format check to make sure the manuscript fits on the page. The author verifies the work as their own original content and they click ‘publish’ and the book is ready to see in twenty-four hours. However, the manuscript can be updated at any point, by the author.

“The problem is that some Indie Authors don’t bother to use editing services and put out their product. They then sell their books and represent us all. Sometimes the authors take negative reviews to heart and hire an editor. The good news is that Kindle Direct will update your copy of the ebook when that happens. The bad news is that readers start to think all Indie Authors are hack writers,” Author One finishes.

When asked how the group felt about being an Indie Author the reactions were full of laughter and overlapping stories. In the end, each author would have done it again.

“All of the freakedoutness. Did I just say that for an academic article? Okay, well for all that I freaked out when I hit publish for the first time, it’s amazing. Readers have found me and love my stories. I get to talk about characters I breathed life into with people who love them as much as I do. I make money telling my stories. I don’t think I am less of an author because I self-publish. I have spent hours learning how to do this

business and I expect to spend more. The best part is meeting people like you all and doing this.”

The hardest part of the roundtable was sitting quietly by. As an Indie Author, I wanted desperately to join in and recount my own experiences. As a scholarly researcher, I didn’t want to lead the conversation into a side-bar the authors wouldn’t have created. I dutifully asked the questions on the list and then listened. The group discussed the importance of branding, the mutual hatred of marketing and the love of story creation. There was a consensus on Indie Authors learning more, but how to do so, had different results.

“You have self-published authors who hit the jackpot in 2011 and 2012 when the market was less saturated. Now in 2016 – 2017 instead of putting out new works, they sell courses to new Indie Authors and make their money with outdated information,” Author One said. “New authors are eager to break into money making fast. They are willing to spend hundreds of dollars to learn the easy trick. The reality is it takes years of hard work to make money from your work. All the courses do is make money for those who run them.”

“And of course there are boxed sets,” Author Three chimes in. “There are people who charge hundreds of dollars to buy into a box set of twenty or so authors. They make thousands and then inflate sales reports because part of the buy in money goes to gifting the set to readers. Since gifted books count as sales, it looks like the boxed set is selling thousands of copies. It pushes the numbers up to reach the top for a few days. It gives authors the *Best Amazon Seller* or *USA Today* or even *New York Times*

listing. It becomes all about having the titles. Meanwhile, the box set coordinator makes thousands of dollars and floods the system to the point the best seller's title becomes pointless. There's been talk that USA Today and the New York Times won't honor Indie Author boxed sets because of these practices."

The major take aways centered around involvement in the Indie Author community. Networking to learn about the business end of being an Indie Author was more prevalent than talking about the writing process. In fact most the authors chose to become an Indie Author because it gave them ultimate control of their writing style and choices on how to present their stories. The biggest talking point here was how solitary writing can be. By taking advantage of social media to form a network, the work becomes less isolating. It also offers accountability and writing tips. While the authors agreed that a trained professional would be great- talk came up about pricing. Because Indie Author's don't see profit- on average- until the 3rd year, they were hesitant about hiring professionals without having some kind of notion about what kind of money they could make using their service. The authors did agree having someone to be a manager would allow for more writing time; however it is a daunting task and the question if formal training would count more than experiential learning.

However, wanting something doesn't always make it possible or even seen as viable, and sometimes these cutting edge, and sometimes too edgy new ideas for adjustment in a field are often ignored. Introducing the idea of professional writing intersecting with Indie Authors might seem like a match that should be ignored. But again, this talks about the lack of engagement in a field that should be more flexible. If

Indie Authors seem like risk- take note, it's not just people in general who are on the self-publishing wagon.

Scholars are starting to see the benefit in self-publishing as well. An article from Inside Higher ED in 2014, introduces the idea that scholars have started to turn to self-publishing as an alternative to working with journals and university presses. While the article itself needs a lot more facts about the self-publishing industry, it does note that active scholars, such as Roger Whitson, an assistant professor of English at Washington State University are looking at self-publishing because of the ultimate control it can offer – especially when books require revisions or updates due to new material that can be a request that might be rejected by a university press. Whitson does say that self-publishing is a move from tenured professors who've already made their publishing credits as a specialist in their field (2014). While these scholars don't count as Indie Authors – because of previous publishing contracts – it does bring out some validity to Indie Authors' framework of self-publishing due to more lax restrictions.

Still there has to be a connection between the education and fulfilling the roles of professional writers in a career that isn't not seen nor taken seriously. This is more than difficult because the lack of research that has a critical focus on Indie Authors. There are theoretical concepts that can be borrowed from technical and professional writing, as well as information management and project management, but nothing that directly looks at this particular gig economy of being an Indie Author and the potentials of incorporating the practices into editing and publishing minors of professional writing.

Indie Authors as a gig economy and not being acknowledged is one way to address whether or not professional writing is falling behind with educating students to be prepared at a variety of levels and career opportunities and not just jobs. Why not fill potential jobs by fostering skills sets already being learned, but teaching how to utilize them outside traditional industry? It seems productive to assess any project with its economical sustainability factors and apply education to train students as analytic managers who can step into the job with experience. Such situations provide students, educator, and professionals with the opportunity to work together to break into an already thriving market, that is looking for high quality and highly trained professionals. The benefits of such a networked system can include benefits that align education and career goals that offer more than traditional opportunities with positive effects.

Editing and publishing tracks of professional writing programs have to make an argument for continued progress, by the nature of the track. Editing and publishing are distinguished for continually changing as they seek to build knowledge. Intensive summer programs inundate their learners with not just the mechanics of copy editing and formatting, but also address marketing, branding, digital spaces and digital presence as methods to be learned. Because how people read has changed with the digital environment, so too do the methods, formats and marketing methods of published products have to change. Even still in programs that focus on editing and publishing, Indie authors are not considered valid and there is little to no discussion to do research on these authors, nor no developing a way to interact with these authors.

Indie authors tend to see their own projects not just as creative writing, but as sustainable entrepreneurial products that do deserve to be taken seriously by the public

and educators of professional writing alike. Bishop's work clearly shows she believed that creative writing and composition both contribute to a more thorough understanding of writing, but often leaves the authors confused about that relationship (1994). When looking to incorporate Indie Authors into professional writing, there are many processes that are unknown and will have to be gathered from a myriad of sources. While professional writing tackles the writing portion succinctly, the publishing aspect is nebulous—being left for internships with traditional publishing houses to take care of.

If we understand the known components found in professional writing programs, finding out what the important components for a pedagogical process of having a working relationship with an Indie Author, or as a potential editor/project manager for an Indie Author can be examined using some of Lindeman's works to view teaching through writing. Most importantly the idea of discovering what the text reveals about the decisions the author has made. Author autonomy becomes a pedagogical point for new authors as they learn the processes of self-publishing. Further building this concept is self-evaluation which leads to strategies to stream line the process as well as finding solutions for inefficient methods.

While professional writing programs do focus on key items such as publish, editing, and branding, the Indie Author community has a particularly single goal. Many Indie Authors want to have writing as a full time career. This not only incorporates the previously mentioned items but also requires an understanding of marketing, networking and community opportunities, personal appearances and social media visibility as well as keeping up to date with ebook platforms and rules. Too many times Indie authors are so busy trying to keep abreast with everything that their writing suffers- much to their

frustration. One of the other problems is that it is necessary to understand established creative writing conventions before deciding where, how and why to break such conventions. While some Indie Authors point out that being an Indie Author gives the freedom to break practices, there is a fairly large group (72% of the Indie Authors surveyed) that believe the rules are guidelines, but flexible ones. Hotly contested rules include word counts/ book lengths. 82% of surveyed Indie Authors believe that industry standards created by traditional publishing houses should still be adhered to. During the round table discussion this topic was brought up. Author One noted “The thing to remember is that there are always exceptions to rules and there always will be. However, you should plan to follow the rule; anyone trying to be exception means they’re okay with failure. Most people are not okay with failure.” For everyone who wants to point out commercially popular books- such as the Harry Potter series didn’t follow the standards should review the first book again. It came in at 76,944 words which fits for a middle grade fantasy book—fantasy allows for a longer word count because of complex world building, otherwise it’s from 30 – 50k (Writer’s Digest, 2017).

While the field of Creative Writing looks at the process of writing, Professional Writing looks at editing and publishing. However, they have also missed a huge opportunity to keep the field up to date by ignoring Indie Authors as a viable and sustainable gig economy. The field should envision professional writers would welcome to the opportunity to turn their passion for editing and publishing into an option to create their own business and not just work for established publishing houses.

As the New London Group states, “This means that, as educators, we have a greater responsibility to consider the implications of what we do in relations to a

productive working life” (2002). There is no better example than exploring the idea of creating one’s own business and curating customers with guided and instruction with regard to a student’s future working life. Because there are already minors in professional writing that address editing and publishing, there is clear scaffolding and framework to move forward and address the potential of self-sufficient business practices.

However, Bishop finds another process problem. Writers have been inadvertently taught that composition writing is all work while creative writing is all fun (1994). Thus causing a disconnect when authors have to learn that creative writing not only requires a process but also is a difficult art to perfect in itself, especially if one is not aware of the five canons of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery). Indie Authors have long figured out that creative writing is work that requires dedication, a highly regimented schedule and self-imposed deadlines. Because of the professional attitudes many Indie Authors employ, they expect the same from the professionals they employ and thus the editing and publishing tracks of Professional Writing needs to continue to grow and change if it wants to keep competitive in the writing fields.

Understanding how Indie Authors and their process can benefit the field by investigating how people are managing to learning this very flexible, but highly demanding set of practices on their own and turn it into something that not can help Indie Authors do, but also provide teachable moments and practices in professional writing pedagogy. The insights gained from understanding how this pedagogical process can be explored and reviewed means looking at how being able to self-publish is influencing authors are emerging their own nascent publishing traditions.

Because Indie authors have greater autonomy, this means they have declared a certain independence from composition and traditional creative writing. This doesn't mean sloppy work, 58% of Indie Authors engaged in professional development workshops through the year. This includes: writing workshops, genre specific conventions, as well as, marketing and branding courses. Working through this new group, is going to require some more work from professional writers because the pedagogical moves that would be require are not yet clearly defined. It almost demands a mix between professional writer and business adviser, which interestingly enough is covered in professional writing programs that train PW students to work with NPO/NGO. Overall it means, the structure is present- just not defined into this new sub-group or minor. What's first necessary to understand is most Indie Authors do understand their process— as they have had to learn to survive under the dominance of the publishing industry. Creative writing by Indie authors doesn't just stop with the authors being creative, but also focuses clearly on text production and helps to define what being an Indie author is all about.

Looking back at data from the survey and the roundtable helps establish what Indie Authors want and don't want. Only 12% of Indie Authors had someone guide them through their first publication process. The rest learned while doing, which is harrying. Author Two stated "Three things I learned immediately: grow a thick skin fast, building a platform is absolutely necessary- build your audience, get reviewers lined up and do the promotion footwork before you publish your work and stick to your deadlines." The conversation between the three participating authors got much more animated as each author chimed in with experiences of their first publication. They all

vigorously agreed that having Indie support is also necessary- networking with others helps not only keep authors on track with their works in progress but help with promotion and support.

Author One related “I’m a full time Indie Author. It’s just me and my computer while my family is out all day. Without the Indie community I’d be a mess. At any time I can boot up my laptop and have a conversation with another author who gets it.”

Author Three agreed “So true, I work full time and have to write at night. It’s great to talk with other authors who do the same thing. I’m part of a group that does *Midnight Sprints*, which is where we write for twenty minutes and then we all post what we’ve done and critique.”

“Putting out quality products benefit all of us,” says Author Two. “The thing I like best about the Indie community is that people are honest. They tell me ‘Hey, I love your work, but wow you need a professional editor. Here are a few names.’ It was surprising to hear that my product needed more work.”

Author One jumped right in to offer first timer advice, one that I also give to genre writing students. “Your work is a product. I spent the first year, while promoting my first book thinking that is was art. Learn to distance yourself from your work, this is something that is being commoditized and sold.”

The authors covered topics from marketing to branding, to releases, promotion and working with readers and fan bases. New Indie Authors- no matter how well prepared don’t feel like they know what they are doing. Most do not have any professional guidance and use the learn as you go method While the consensus that

being an Indie Author is stressful, both good and bad stress, all three authors also agreed on a surprising point: they all thought that starting out with a struggle makes for a faster learning curve- while they would've liked professional help- the struggle is appreciated because it taught them the business. Two of the three interview authors work a full time job, while Author One makes her living writing but has a secondary income from her spouse to help make ends meet.

As Professional Writing Studies continue to grow and be in demand from academic students, there is more of a need to understand how the pedagogy of self-publishing works to suit the needs of students who want to break away from the trend of a major publishing house (or many even wish to create their own small or micro press). While it may not be possible to completely sell the idea of self-publishing or perhaps evening project managing an Indie Author, it is necessary to consider that if composition studies stay absorbed in their own traditions only, it will continue to enforce the disconnect between the fields, even though there is much to be learned from each other. Instead of being sanctioned by more tradition processes and methods of study it will be clear this emerging process by deserve more open inquiry in to their pedagogical approaches.

While some of the bad reputation surrounding Indie Authors is handed out from traditional publishers, another are that has harmed them is vanity presses. Timothy Laquintano has explored this in his work "The Legacy of the Vanity Press and Digital Transitions" and gives a rich look at an emerged writing practice the field of Writing and Rhetoric has paid little attention to. He begins with a history of self-publishing which includes the cautionary tale of Carlo Flumiani, who created a lucrative vanity publishing

house, and was also convicted of fraud in 1941. “The discourse that emerged from commentary on major vanity press scams suggests the stigma has at least five important dimensions: a perceived lack of gatekeeping that generates anxieties about too many books and their quality, publisher fraud, the impropriety of buying authorship and the commercialization of books that comes with it, anxieties from established authors about issues of amateurism, and exploitation of the dream of authorship.”

It’s these tales that act as warning to some authors about the perils of self-publishing and allows publishing houses to continue to flaunt their validity and debunk Indie Authors and their writing practices as unprofessional. It makes newer authors question if being labeled and Indie Author is a point of hard work and pride, or if they will suffer embarrassment or financial ruin. Laquintano also makes it clear that self-publishing today is frequently more profitable for authors than publishing with a traditional house, since they can sell digitally or through print-on-demand, and earn a significantly higher portion of total sales (2013).

It should be understood that Indie Authors don’t all count monetary sales as a signal of success. For PW students who might fear that Indie Authors would replace a project manager that didn’t get them to yield high sales, it should be comforting to hear that’s not quite the case. Author Two brings up “Making money as an Indie Author is a full time (plus) job because there is so much to do. Having a professional who can take over the entrepreneurial aspect means I can get back to what I want to do, which is connect with readers and write. Success isn’t all about money—putting out a quality product that connects with readers is the real success.”

One of the major themes in Laquintano's talk was the shift from "vanity publishing", which has been reputed to be less credible than mainstream commercial or academic presses to "indie publishing", in which Indie Authors have a newfound legitimacy. "Even a small following validates authors and increases their confidence. Most Indie Authors tend to ignore poor reviews because there are plenty of trolls. The Indie community has an openness to help other Indies' success – for the most part. The community is very supportive- but honestly- to help fix mistakes. Being in the community makes indie's feel less isolated."

Laquintano focuses on the benefits of epublising for Indie Authors, who aside from writing also take on finding editors, cover designers, brand developers and media creators. In addition, Indie Authors are also exploring the benefits of creating enhanced ebooks that take wider advantage of mobile, social and touchscreen technologies, something a traditional writer working alone have probably not had to think about. Indie Authors often have to stay up to date with creative business models to keep their works appealing and just as sophisticated as traditional publishing houses can offer. In addition they also pocket the costs of developing enhanced ebooks which carries both the risks and rewards of Indie Authorship. The professionalism is out there, and the economy is out there, even pedagogical practices are out there and clear. Indie Authors and professional writing are a match; it just hasn't been introduced yet.

R. Stanley Dicks in "Cultural Impediments to Understanding: Are They Surmountable?" (2002), notes there are significant differences exist concerning what is valued and desire to disseminate information between academia and industry. Academics are promoted, granted tenure, and given desirable teaching assignments

based on individual effort. Industry tends to value collaboration, workloads and maintain customer bases. Author Three notes “While having help, it needs to be clear that is a job, but unlike most jobs flexibility is the top skills to have. PA’s (Personal Assistants) should have a marketing or business or editing background. They must have a clear understanding of how the Indie Author world. Having a PA can be great, but they must be well connected in the Indie Industry. This means they know where to find vetted contests, bloggers to promote work and do blog tours, understand the law of raffles, and they must have a lot of connections.” Anticipating needs and sudden change in plans can make it sometimes difficult for professional writers to go off script, as it were, and entertain using their skills in a gig industry instead of something more established. According to Author One “A PA has to be able to look outside of social media events to promote the product. They need to work for the author – they will have real responsibilities so the author can write.”

As the products to be marketed in a flexible and often shifting gig productions show how fast the learning and hands-on aspects need to be employed. The required skill set and work is only temporary. For example, having a PA is relatively new for Indie Authors. Within the round table group, they figure the first PA was announced in 2014 – but even then they’re estimating. “All of a sudden, authors in groups started talking about their PA and others started to ask how to get one,” says Author Three. PA’s started off as over excited readers who wanted to do anything to help out their favorite Indie Authors, by promoting their works. It has grown more professional. Author Two related how a friend hired a PA and the woman took it extremely seriously. The PA made being on various social media platforms and creating swag her full time job

(2017). The other part of a PA is to move with the times and maintain flexibility. Once the task of product development and marketing is accomplished, the professional writer has to be able to switch modes. They move from completion to starting over and focus on a new product that requires their particular skill set and expertise. Ebook platforms and delivery system often change rules, sometimes emailing authors the day the change will take place.

All of this change leads us to question why introduce this industry to professional writing, when there seems to be a system in place? Drawing lines through Heidegger and his thoughts about technology starts with the simple question “What is technology?” The word “technology” stems from the Greek word *techné*, which designates “skill,” “art,” and “craft,” a mode of doing or making. It then becomes a question of critical theory to discuss where looking at the gig economy of literary works by Indie Authors is a clear system of unlocking, transforming, storing, distributing, and switching their art (product) is never ending (1977). Professional writers are expected to use their prior experiences, insight, and industry knowledge to continue to be competitive for future work possibilities, storing them up until possible employment can be found, distributing their knowledge and skills to the task at hand, and then switching modes for the next project. For example, CreateSpace has clear guidelines on cover design and art, which is vastly different from iTunes. It’s not just the dimensions and bleed lines, it also regulates the content. While this seems like it’s not a big deal, overlooking details can destroy a release day. Indie Authors have learned to create sales, ads, and promotions weeks before the product is launched. Having one mistake means the book will be placed under review and not available on the date that all of the

marketing work has been set for. Heidegger postulates that modern technology challenges that technology is a different kind of truth that what doesn't change is viewed with suspicion (1977), and while his notions of modern technology and being an Indie Author seem to be at polar ends of a critical conversation, they both lead to a question of an authentic sense of being in the face of changing modernity.

## **Chapter Five- Implications**

By having an investment on both side of the research, I realized the question and implications were bigger than I had originally thought. It wasn't just an exploration about Indie Authors or Professional Writing. But instead I also started to recognize that using Indie Authors as a lens, I could also examine the professional writing field and the relationships and opportunities to gig economies. Not to make broad sweeping changes, but to better explore the adaptability to change within the field. Looking at how in postindustrial industry where professional writing has had some stagnation. In addition, looking at whether the field writes for consumers or academia as a lens for continued exploration and conversation.

Part of this conversation will be difficult, and even still it must be done. There ultimately must be a call for a more flexible understanding of professional writing for both academics and gig economies as an ever changing field. To do this one suggestion is: Academics should continue to build the kinds of connections that actively seek progressive industry collaborations, and create long-term sustainable experiential training projects for students. Industry should best understand how to articulate their outcomes and needs, but also provide guidance to gain the opportunity to demonstrate the needed abilities for both careers and gigs. In the end it looks at sustaining the field, and continues to evolve as a profession that depends on our abilities to change how we train ourselves as professional writers to embrace opportunities as they change.

With new methods in publication, marketing and branding there is less need to learn in traditional or curricular ways. This is where push back comes from between

experiential and formal learning- the product is still valid, despite a perception of a lack of formal experience. So, what happens when we integrate both styles of learning? Is there a reason to for the field to continue to keep emerging gig economies in mind? What was explored is that when you pair the two styles of learning- is that this combination would appeal to wider masses while keeping up with current needs in industry and how academia can contribute. Once this conversation is started, it allows for conversations about diversity and the extreme lack of, in the publishing world, to be talked about more and more.

While the findings allowed elaboration on experiences in the Indie community, there are even more discussions to be had because some of the same conversations have been and are being had in the professional writing field. Because professional writing does already support internships and on the job learning, there should be a space created for this special interest in working with gig economies and method of figuring how to best prepare students with both formal and experiential learning to gain future support and development. The opportunity to create more knowledge production in the field can be argued as more scholarship for the writers. There isn't a need to change established methods and priorities but instead introduce students to a new gig that utilizes the skill sets already being taught, but also that give potential jobs a scholarly expectation of experience.

The genre of professional writing there can be an argument created for giving a scholarly focus to Indie Authors' and their works as well as their as long as there is a negotiation of disciplinary expectations. Even though there is uncertainty in how this production of knowledge can contribute towards scholarship in professional writing.

Learning how to publish independent creative works can be a conscious choice to connect with trained professional writers. Perhaps there is some room for some learning outcomes that focus on what can be done in a program where the ultimate goal is give some institutional flexibility to work with various gig economies, present and future. As professional writing continues to train more proactive leaders and gain more durable skills, those will the flexible skill sets become the kinds of leaders and knowledge workers who have the business savvy needed to break down the walls separating organization technology goals and practices, as well as the larger goals and practices of industry and the professional writing in training. Our focus on training students to be rhetorical experts has been far too narrow, as we have not attempted to integrate “business” as even a topic in our courses or train students on the rhetoric of the applying such skills in broader contexts.

### **Why this could work**

While integration of experiential learning with formal learning sounds like a great idea, there might be some concern that students cherry pick learning experiences to fit particular gigs instead of broadening embracing industry contexts. There should be a caution not to keep too narrow a focus when looking at potential workspaces. Instead of seeing indie authors as one set gig, it would be remiss to look at published as a potential audience as well. Faber and Johnson-Eilola state “unlike knowledge workers, who bring specific solutions to specific problems, we are teaching students to build products for an unidentified and often unknown audience” (2002). While teaching professional writing students to frame communication and r rhetorical contexts; there is the need to make sure students understand how to take on influential roles in their

perceptions of what workspaces they can engage with, because some scholars have also decided to self-publish.

Scholars are starting to see the benefit in self-publishing as well. An article from Inside Higher ED in 2014, introduces the idea that scholars have started to turn to self-publishing as an alternative to working with journals and university presses. While the article itself needs a lot more facts about the self-publishing industry, it does note that active scholars, such as Roger Whitson, an assistant professor of English at Washington State University are looking at self-publishing because of the ultimate control it can offer – especially when books require revisions or updates due to new material that can be a request that might be rejected by a university press. Whitson does say that self-publishing is a move from tenured professors who've already made their publishing credits as a specialist in their field (2014). This is clearly a good option for scholars who have a good reader base. With a guaranteed audience you can make more money, and through self-publishing there aren't as many steps to go through to have editions updated and changed. Using ebooks or print on demand services there are even methods for distribution. A good option for some people because if you have a guaranteed audience- you can make more money. While these scholars won't count as Indie Authors – because previous publishing contracts make them hybrid authors – it does bring out some validity to Indie Authors' grounding that self-publishing is more forgiving and easier to work with due to more lax restrictions. This shows reasons to self-publish as long as scholars understand the advantages and drawbacks. Because at the end of the day self-publishing as an indie author is a profession just like any other profession.

In order to move upward in academia, many scholars have write articles and books to get published. The research may be based on expertise within the discipline or to be trail blazers and move the discipline forward in ways that may make some edgy. This research is often the foundation for promotion and tenure. Academics view employment as a solid career choice and derive prestige as much from the work they produce as the institutions where they work. If scholars begin to self-publish, but maintain their audience and produce professional works, this may change and redefine boundaries to rethink the implications of rhetorical training that steps in new directions for professional writing.

There are different criteria for maintaining employment, however, when looking at professional writing outside of the disciplines, but this will look at where the two have similar goals, despite different outcomes. There are differences in learning to be a professional writer in an academic setting and the utilization of skills out in the world. So to begin thinking about implications, there should be a new approach on what core skills to more incorporate industry into discourse.

There cultural differences cultivated in academia that foster understanding in a space that is designed for learning. Munger notes that the focus of professional writing and technical communication has moved from one of writing to one of collaboration and project management. The difference in terminology that is used in academia doesn't always reflection what is current in industry and communications can break down (2006). Although both groups collaborate within their own groups, this is an area where academia and industry differ. Academics are promoted, granted tenure, and given desirable teaching assignments based on individual effort. With these divergent goals,

industry and academic collaboration results in complications. Work and employment cultural differences exist between the two groups.

There is a difference in methods as well as space to accomplish goals and procedures because there is a difference in criteria between academia and making sure to keep employment. There are also inherent cultural differences that might make it hard to collaborate. Bernhardt notes that the goals may not be mutual in interest between the differencing groups and perhaps it best to leave them to their own accords (2002). But if the goals are to incorporate more experiential training to augment formal training, course goals may need to shift to revise goals and offer courses that include both sides.

The ever flexible self-publishing market requires not only Indie Authors to adapt, but for those working on their project management to be flexible, to adjust the entrepreneurial parameters the next endeavor requires them to be, and replicate methods that continue to show innovation and success within the self-publishing system. This current gig economy is structured to force people to identify and represent themselves as highly adaptable skill sets, diverse experiences, and savvy with changing trends. This is an investment into a career that is always going to be change oriented and will need curated skills that can easily help Indie Authors adapt and change according the market. Laquintano discusses how being published gives an author an established identity (2013), and also points out that the traditionally published authors are quick to demean anything that is not from an established house. But the new pushback is Micropresses, university presses and independent houses are gaining ground. This means the diversity in experiences and skill sets become highly desirable

to help both author and project assistants stay flexible, but still able to use prior experiences and knowledge for the next product launch. The gig economy of Indie Authors is all about versatility on the market and being able to call upon a cache of experiences to get and stay ahead of the trends.

The same is true of the knowledge sector as it is forcing students of professional writing to become more adaptable and flexible than ever before. Students are finding the definition of success in industry is being defined by looking at time to completion of tasks and advancement. While learning about being a professional writer in an academic environment, students are allowed to take their time, note how choices can affect or contribute to outcomes and think about what alternate views and stances they can appropriate. In the industry of professional writing, however, there is much more value on getting products completed within narrow timelines so costs are kept to a minimum and more products can be moved forward.

In an ideal environment, both institutions of education and industry would work together toward producing high functioning members who've been trained by the best practices that carry over from their academic background. Instead, there seems to be a prevalent fear that is industry is allowed to call too many shots that curriculums might be influenced by workplace demands and some academic integrity will be lost. Part of using the roundtable discussion in this area is to merge the ideas of industry with the idea of Indie Authors being an industry unto themselves. The conversation captured was not just a group of authors postulating the possibilities and looking at what professionalism might look like. Instead it should be noted that the authors are professional- creative writers who own their brands and have financial gains because

of their writing. The diversity of the authors was in educational backgrounds, earned income from books, targeted audience and how long they'd been a published Indie Author. Asking them about the developing skill sets, dealing with consumers, and even the methodology of learning is the reason their information is pertinent here.

Representing Indie Authors through such a small sampling may seem not inclusive enough to warrant looking at it as an industry, but combined with the survey, it's clear that many Indie Authors have taken the same path predictably enough that pedagogical scaffolding can be accomplished.

David and Kienzler in "Toward and Emancipatory Pedagogy in Service Courses and User Departments" (1999) note that industry has had an effect on academia to produce students with critical thinking abilities, not just dealing with base concepts of right and wrong solutions, but also the ability to incorporate interpretative problems that recognize ambiguity and require human judgment. This new pedagogy frees students from antiquated in practice problem solving techniques that are much more useful in industry. Experience, as mentioned before, co-teaching WRA 460 ended up leading to a course change. The PW students who took the course that was taught as a pseudo-publishing house were impressed with the experience. Now it's a new course WRA 480, based on publication management. "Throughout the semester, students work in teams to write, revise, copyedit, and design a full-length publication. These courses expose students to the trials and tribulations of working as a group to manage production processes and experience all the roles associated with editing and publishing. In addition to all the production tasks involved in producing each magazine, students will delve deeper into issues in publishing, with attention to developmental editing, theories

and practices of editing in various contexts, marketing, the histories of publishing technologies, and current trends.” (“Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures”, 2017). This real world examples shows how classroom projects that are based on real client needs or expectations, and engage in the practice of submitting clear documentation of practices, to a rhetorical analysis covering audience, context, purpose, material, etc. introduces the student to work scheduling, delays and frustrations that may be found in the workplace, but also introduces an emancipatory pedagogy. Overall, the introduction of critical thinking has drawn disparate disciplines together and enables students to translate their academic learning into their professions and translate conflicting contexts into doable tasks.

It only stand to reason that any professional that will be working with an Indie Author needs to bring, not just talent, but understand and methods about the business practices as well as how to interact with the client. The biggest hurdle is trying to prepare the professional writing student for a constantly changing job. Indie Authors of 2017 work very differently than the Indie Authors of 2010. In seven years standards and practices have shifted radically. For example, in 2010 it was perfectly acceptable to use a free stock standard cover for an ebook. In fact Createspace offered up a handful of covers for use. They also offered up a \$400 package for cover creation by one of their professionals (<https://www.createspace.com/Services/CustomCover.jsp>). In 2017, custom ebook covers start around \$50 and range up to \$200 depending on the professional selling it. Because of the ever growing Indie Author community, the Indie Designer and Indie Editor markets have grown as well. And just as with Indie Authors – the quality of service varies greatly, from those who are trained to those who feel they

have enough experience. By making professional writing students aware of these gigs opens up the possible job opportunities immensely.

One way to look at working with this flexible concept is to look at what's been done with design. "In the context of these changes we must conceptualize the 'what' of pedagogy. The key concept we developed to do this is that of Design, in which we are both inheritors of patterns and conventions of meaning while at the same time active designers of meaning" (Cope and Kalantzis 2000). They allow for active meaning, which is essential for fields that always change. It also gives flexibility to work with clients who know what they like but can't describe it clearly.

As a consequence, when implementing alternative pedagogical practices in a classroom—such as a Multiliteracies perspective—working with Indie Authors as a means of hands-on training might not prepare the professional writer enough to deal with the nature of the client. The variables are too complex; the student project manager can offer plenty of insight and knowledge based decisions that the author chooses to ignore or alter. Indie Authors have complex and shifting identities as they move between and participate in different groups; there are multiple ways of knowing and learning. Not to mention author's prerogative which may, but often times doesn't follow editing and publishing rules. Many Indie Authors opt to break rules they don't like, however even more pervasive are the authors who have no idea what the rules are, and don't care. There isn't a defined set of best practices, yet. Pedagogy evolves through ongoing research and reflection at all levels, including service and educator level. This ensures continuous improvement in educators' practice with the aim of supporting the best possible outcomes for all. Indie Authors project managers/ professional writing students

must develop a range of teaching techniques including modelling, facilitating, questioning, telling and instruction, scaffolding and co-construction in a field that is fluid and changes often. To look at how this particular gig could be addressed, consider the following concepts to explore:

- Having an effective formal pedagogy taught with the skill sets of editing and publishing involving both the kind of interaction traditionally associated with micro-presses and the provision of instructive/ interactive learning environments. Indie Authors want to learn the business, even if they are hiring out the non-writing aspects. Understanding how marketing, branding, advertising and public interactions are huge components of being an Indie Author. However, they are also areas most Indie Authors loathe.
- There must be a primary emphasis on problem solving and independent thinking rather than particular skill sets. The market changes constantly because new and exciting social media platforms, book signing events and advertising means are always being developed. Being able to stay ahead—or even better—predict where trends are heading is essential. Some Indie Authors capitalize off this handsomely. There is a growing number of successful Indie Authors, especially those who are adept at marketing, advertising and branding, who have shifted their focus. They produce fewer creative works each year, but have started teaching courses on how best to promote books. Mark Dawson and The Book Doctors have made teaching others how to publish well, into extremely lucrative careers.

- Figuring out what an appropriate balance between proactive planning for marketing and respecting the Indie Author's autonomy to promote without interference, entails. Being a project manager can be a daunting task. There are deliverables that are being paid for, but the client also needs to have final say.
- Building relationships formed on both styles of learning, experiential and formal. The more collaborative opportunities that pair with information studies can potentially lead to development models that can work across a variety of different gigs.

One example of how to successfully create a working approach is to use Multiliteracies pedagogy. According to Cope and Kalantzis, there are four key areas that make this methodology: which are both practical and useful when teaching for a situation that must remain fluid and adaptable to change. 1. Situated Practice, which means learning from hands on training and practice, which draws on the experience and knowledge that will be useful in workplaces and in working with clients. 2. Overt Instruction, where students are taught to develop a clear metalanguage of Design 3. Critical Framing, which interprets the social context and purpose of Designs of meaning 4. Transformed Practice, which is absolutely critical. Students grow from understanding lessons and teachings and move forward to enact these design practices for client consumption. An example of a pedagogy that is situated and focused on the social nature of learning, Multiliteracies uses these four components simultaneously to better give alternatives through practice than from learning itself (2000).

Because there are often times differences in industry and academia, being able to collaborate is sometimes seen as an unsurmountable issue. Although there is collaboration and conversations, divergent goals cause complications and missed opportunities. Academia see professional writers as a member of a discipline and industry views them being in a work position that they can leave. This is where we can see both sides where isolation of the Indie Author means that more hard work would have to be done on the academic side to make the jobs in this particular economy more visible. To rethink how this might become more efficient, there must be a better connection with professional writing practices to gig opportunities and better connections for engagement. These have the potential to establish credibility as knowledge workers in professional writing and grow a larger framework that offers sustainability in a changing market.

## **Chapter Six- Moving Forward**

Through this journey, I've been able to situate myself as a scholar and an author- though that title has changed from Indie Author to Hybrid (meaning I just had a book picked up by a traditional publishing house). This dissertation isn't just a document that showcases this exploration, but instead has led to many more questions to be explored; diversity, intersectionality, and culture are still huge areas. Overall I have learned that this step was a necessary piece of the conversation. And continuing the conversation as long as Indie Authors exist seems to be only fair, as we have fought for validation from day one.

Through exploring gigs, not just to address only one in particular, but as an opportunity in general, the conversation has clearly pointed to learning in various ways to best suit both academia and industry as both move forward. Pedagogy is about learning, teaching and development influenced by the cultural, social and political values about certain practices. Pedagogy develops from a range of factors including theories and research evidence, political drivers, evidence from practice, individual and group reflection, experiences and expertise, and community expectations and requirements. There is just as much learning done experientially as well as formally, however. Looking at practices of Indie Authors, as the potential to further explore the teaching of self-publishing practices in professional writing could be achieved. The following concepts support the strong belief that pedagogy encompasses a spirit of enquiry and professional dialogue about Indie authors and the self-publishing world. Effective pedagogy not only produces outcome results in relation to input, but also

represents a common core of values and objectives to which all those involved can subscribe (Moyles, Adams & Musgrove, 2002).

In “Writing for a Living: Literacy and the Knowledge Economy,” Brandt states that the profession of being a professional writer is strenuous because “People who write for a living must function under these conditions often as intense mediators of powerful ideological processes, mingling self and system as they transform abstract need into transactional texts” (2001). As a professional, an Indie Author needs the skills, not just for writing a compelling story, but has to be able to write effectively for various multiple audiences, to stay current with market trends as well. This is not to say an author who simply works by themselves toward publication goals, economic values, and reader base perceptions cannot be successful. Indeed, they have shown to be successful in an economic sense, just like traditionally published authors.

Continuing to move the field of professional writing towards recognizing industrial trends allows for learning that follows the creation of work that is functional outside academia. This will allow for collaboration that allows use of formal learning to critique work, provide feedback and brainstorm ideas, but also experiential learning to form relationships, quick solutions, interact with other freelanced support (graphic designers, marketing, social media coordinators) and responding to a need for structures to be put into place. When the boundaries are lowered, there is a better understanding of these workspaces and students will learn how to negotiate and communicate their own value as professional writers.

Still there has to be a connection between the education and fulfilling the roles of professional writers in a career that isn't not seen nor taken seriously. This is more than difficult because the lack of research that has a critical focus on Indie Authors. There are theoretical concepts that can be borrowed from technical and professional writing, as well as information management and project management, but nothing that directly looks at this particular gig economy of working with Indie Authors, and the potentials of incorporating the practices into editing and publishing minors of professional writing. It would be easy to say this is just another job opportunity and if a professional writer wanted to take up the job they could easily. However, what this addresses is that professional writing, with an editing and publishing minor or specialization is falling behind in industry. Much like traditional publishing houses that ignored the growth of the Indie Author community/ industry, professional writing ignores this group as well

Addressing whether or not professional writing is falling behind with educating students to be prepared at a variety of levels and career opportunities means examining what has been done and what can be done. Why not fill potential jobs by fostering skills sets already being learned, but teaching how to utilize them outside traditional industry? It seems productive to assess any project with its economical sustainability factors and apply education to train students as analytic managers who can step into the job with experience. Such situations provide students, educator, and professionals with the opportunity to work together to break into an already thriving market, that is looking for high quality and highly trained professionals. The benefits of such a networked system can include benefits that align education and career goals that offer more than traditional opportunities with positive effects.

Editing and publishing tracks of professional writing programs have to make an argument for continued progress, by the nature of the track. Editing and publishing are distinguished for continually changing as they seek to build knowledge. Intensive summer programs inundate their learners with not just the mechanics of copy editing and formatting, but also address marketing, branding, digital spaces and digital presence as methods to be learned. Because how people read has changed with the digital environment, so too do the methods, formats and marketing methods of published products have to change. Even still in programs that focus on editing and publishing, Indie authors are not considered valid and there is little to no discussion to do research on these authors, nor no developing a way to interact with these authors.

Because professional writing does encompass editing and publishing there should be a space created for this special interest and method of working with Indie Authors and gain future support and development. The opportunity to create more knowledge production in the field can be argued as more scholarship for the writers. There isn't a need to change established methods and priorities but instead augment them with a new gig that utilizes the skill sets already being taught but also that give potential jobs a scholarly expectation of experience. The genre of professional writing there can be an argument created for giving a scholarly focus to Indie Authors' and their works as well as their as long as there is a negotiation of disciplinary expectations. Even though there is uncertainty in how this production of knowledge can contribute towards scholarship in professional writing. Learning how to publish independent creative works can be a conscious choice to connect with trained professional writers. Perhaps there is some room for some learning outcomes that focus on what can be done in a program

where the ultimate goal is give some institutional clout to professionals work with Indie Authors.

### **Academia and Work Practices**

Academia curates students in various methods to prepare them to enter the workplace with experiences that cover: working individually, working with others either in collaborative projects or group projects and often requires the sharing of knowledge and information. While not strictly competitive, per se, Academia thrives when individuals move forward with their own ideas of research and experimental methods. Grades and highlighting examples of premium work elicits the feeling of competition, even though each student is working to better their own practices. This potentially seems to be an area that can foster a great fit for academic practices and work practices to combine to produce marketable students in professional endeavors. But what happens when Academia isn't preparing students for all the potential career goals possible?

Decision making processes in professional writing follows a more client centered approach to learning how to work with a flexible market. Language and discourse in the academic realm centers on abstract terms and concepts that may have little to do with practice or industry application. Industry, however, uses collaboration as a way to obtain results because products and marketing have a monetary value. Professional writer are selling themselves into the industrial world.

Carter (2005) creates a compelling argument noting that it is time for technical communication theorists to recognize that economic productivity and efficiency

(including market appeal) should not be seen as something the humanities should eschew nor refuse to view as a sound pedagogy, but instead should be seen as a counter point as industry continues to recognize the value of highly adaptable professional writing. In academia there has been a shift to make sure that students are being taught to write well within their fields, leading to an upsurge of writing coaches being employed to work with programs.

For example, the Charles S. Drew Scholars program at Michigan State University started off in the 1970's as an experimental lab designed to help minority students succeed in STEM subject courses. The focus became more broad in 2007, when Dr. Jerry Caldwell became director of the program. The first change was to name- students saw the title "experimental lab" as either an actual lab for experiments or as a remedial course. He changed the name to scholars, and recruited coaches for the sciences and math courses mandatory for pre-medical and pre-dental program students. Dr. Caldwell also made one more important change— he hired the first writing coach. At first the writing coach was employed to help with resumes, personal statements and cover letters for internships. Within a year, however, the coaching job expanded out to working the program scholars on their first year writing courses and also to work the capstone courses. The writing coach had to have a strong ability to write across the curriculum, but also to stay up to date trends in resume writing, student branding through personal statements.

Of course the idea isn't new. David R. Russell Creating gave a brief history of the attitudes in academia about writing and the teaching of writing. Russell posits two myths: the myth of transparency (the idea that writing is natural and not doing so well

means not conceptualizing the rhetoric within a given field) and the myth of transience (the idea that bad writing is just temporary and can be fixed by an expert in the field). The result of both these myths is that the teaching of writing is marginalized. And is further reinforced because "good students already know how to write well because they think well." (2002)

Those who refuse to explore the gig economies because it may seem fleeting and unstable, have also explore the potential of the economic possibilities and they are destined to be victims of the every changing market. Examining the larger educational ecosystem of distance education, Carter argues for an awareness of the overall market for education so that educators can make better-informed decisions and, thereby "play a good game. . . [that] does not involve hiding behind esoteric theories that somehow do not need to justify their existence to parents, students, and legislators" (2005). Each component works in harmony with the other components to empower students to be designers of change, not just passive learners. Working with Indie Authors, a project manager has to not only rely on prior knowledge, but also has to have the presence of mind to further examine new knowledge as the market and gig shift and move forward with changing trends.

Even though these ideals have been listed in previous chapters, it is important to mention that these basic elements are not just stages that an instructor tries to impart to their students. They are not true pedagogical scaffolding in an academic sense, but rather work to inform the flexible, adaptive and fast forming nature of this work. Munger states in "Participating in a Technical Communication Internship" that employers today seek individuals who can make an immediate contribution. Not only should new hires

have a solid academic background, but they should also have workplace experience (Munger 2006). Professional writing scholars may circumscribe what these professional careers can look like into an outside expectation of what the discipline looks like. Because long-established disciplines appear to be always striving towards better methods of career readiness, they set the benchmarks of how a discipline evolves and readies students for their work. Emerging new sub-sets of established disciplines try to show through practice and process that they are integral components of change that match with academic goals, but the newness of concepts and ideas end up becoming more noticeable to academics in better established and accepted discipline ideas.

We can be similarly convinced self-publishing as a professional writing career choice, by the seemingly intuitive assumptions of long established disciplines, isn't valid because those established disciplines fool even themselves by denying the rhetorical construction of the practice of Indie Authors. It can be easy to take for granted that being a professional writer is a thing a field can describe and there is natural scaffolding for career paths that have been founded based on need and industry demand, however ignoring a gig because of lack of understanding adds real constraints. But what those constraints are is nebulous. Most classroom practices already employ various forms of overt instruction. In fact, current-traditionalist pedagogues (Berlin) would argue that it is the most effective method; however, Multiliteracy practices also recognize other components necessary to empower students to recognize ideologies. This recognition comes in the form of critical framing, or the "ways of coming to know where in the overall system you stand. Transformed practice argues that students should "master the standard 'genres' of many school-based, specialist, academic, and public-sphere forms

of language and social practices, but they should also know how to transform them, break them, and innovate new ones for their own social, cultural, and political purposes” (Gee 2000).

Also poignant is Berlin’s that understanding some writers are naturally better at solving problems than others, but not necessarily because they are actually more cognitively developed. He states that “the cognitive skills leading to success may be the product of the experiences of a particular social class rather than the perfecting of inherent mental structures, skills encouraged because they serve the interests of a ruling economic elite, is never considered in the ‘scientific’ investigation of the mind” (2002). There have been many assumptions about Indie Authors and the community based on rumor and bad reputation, however, the perception is changing. It’s not a matter of just cognitive development, but instead understanding that traditional publishing houses have ruled the literary economy with an iron fist and they’re reluctant to let anyone else step in. Indie Authors have side stepped the rule and in doing so, have created a new space for success, that for good or bad, has few rules.

Ignoring the rules of the elite, in this case, has also left an opening where help is needed. One that is already clearly recognized and acted upon. The requirements for breaking into this gig come with some parameters that come working in an industry. More importantly, these are already part of the professional writing curriculum. Building secure and respectful relationships within social media groups are mandatory because Indie Authors are primarily housed in digital spaces and communities. Being able to understand multiple platforms and how to engage successfully is digital rhetoric at its best. Creating partnerships with expectations around equity, while this seems to be

understood clearly in industry, the Indie Author community is slightly different. There are plenty of professional/ virtual assistants who work for free. Most of them are just starting out on their venture, which means they are untrained and learning on the job. This doesn't mean Indie Authors won't pay for services, but introducing professional writing graduates as means to an end will have to be proven as the better option.

The most important concept is respect for diversity with an ongoing learning and reflective practice. Diversity, in this case, isn't just working with other cultures; it's working in an uncertain practice. When working for a non-profit company, a professional writer can expect to write grants, create a website, and create professional documents – such as brochures, fliers, and reports. All things that the curriculum has prepared them for. When working for an Indie Author, a professional writer can expect to create a website, become a social media manager—knowing multiple platforms and which are still relevant, keep up to date with terms of service with Amazon/Nook publishing, as well interior format and cover design trends. The need is being able to quickly adapt knowledge and industry standards, and apply them in various platforms while staying on top of change.

“These interactions and moments are social constructions and are hence, ideological. []. Self-understanding is an individual act, but that individual never has complete freedom in that understanding. “In other words, the ways in which the subject understands and is affected by the material conditions is circumscribed by socially-devised definitions, by the community in which the subject lives” (Berlin 2002). Each component of the conversation has its own influences and shapes the conversation. More importantly than just realizing there is untapped potential, is understanding that

there is already space made and this knowledge is being used. The learning done allows for professional writing students to get a job in industry and excel, so helping them to create an opportunity to get a job in a thriving economy only makes sense. This is clearly show we need to redefine professional writing in broader terms and expand the opportunities where teaching and training work in conjunction with learning outcomes and outputs.

While it may seem like incorporating this gig economy into an already thriving pedagogical practice, there will be a struggle with in disciplinary boundaries. Too often the impetus for change is dismissed out of hand and when it's broached, it has fallen so far behind the trends that successful results are hard to prove. We are left ignorant of the formative stages—and often end up replicating practices that have been done and refined years prior. It is crucial that we encourage, even require, our students to become adaptable to the fundamentals of multiple fields. Furthermore, there should be a push to have courses that excel in teaching meaningful and flexible hands on learning that can help students develop strategies and tactics for working with new ideas and information quickly so that they can enter into the formative stages of those conversations.

In this dissertation, I've argued that Professional Writing scholars should recognize the disciplinary standards of could-be gig opportunities in approaching the Indie Author industry as a career opportunity. It should be approached seriously as the self-publishing market has grown greatly over the last ten years. In addition this is not a new concept or pedagogical practice in the field. There are already practices in place in Professional and technical writing as well as writing across the curriculum methods that have examined the viability of such gig economy work. The resistance or reluctance to

incorporate the particular gig of working with Indie Authors can come from ignorance of the market as well as a bias because of the reputation of Indie Authors.

This has been a discussion about perception, prestige, and power, about how gigs can and, perhaps should, for argue their significance, but this is also about how those viewing Indie gigs in serious fashion may encounter apathy, resistance or malingering. Indie Authors may have good reasons for being reluctant to rush into dealing with professional writers. In a sense, this whole gig economy is trapped between Foucault and Bourdieu's theories of power. On the one hand, as Foucault argues, power leads to power. Material security stems from disciplinary recognition and recognition of a valid career choice can lead to more material security. In other words, power and prestige feed into one another, cyclically. As a gig becomes recognized, the accruelements of recognition build up.

As Foucault says in *Archeology of Knowledge*, the "will to truth, like other systems of exclusion, relies on institutional support: it is both reinforced and accompanied by whole strata of practices such as pedagogy—naturally—the book-system [sic], publishing libraries, such as the learned societies in the past and laboratories today" (1969).

Scholarship cannot proceed without institutional sanction to fund it. On the other hand, these material benefits can chafe against the artistic priorities of creativity in a group of authors who are used to bucking tradition and doing things their own ways. Professional writing is more settled in programs with carefully created formal material

and institutional outcome goals that some might assume won't be flexible enough to work in various gigs, not matter how broad a spectrum of training that has been given.

Pierre Bourdieu has noted creative success is sometimes perceived as antithetical to commercial success. It is, in fact, “an economic world inverted: the artist cannot triumph on the symbolic terrain except by losing on the economic terrain (at least in the short run), and vice versa (at least in the long run)” (Bourdieu, 1992). This is exemplified by the push of publicity that Indie Authors aren't good enough for traditional publishing houses, and also the reputation that Indie Authors produce subpar products.

The Foucauldian argument for increased prestige through increased material power is found in many disciplines, and it is this argument can show where there might be a new relation to new gigs. The predicted responses typically fall into two categories: either they include and ignore or they exclude and engage. The different responses often divide along material lines. Those that can afford to include and ignore potential gigs have resources available to accommodate, while those who do not have those resources can be called to account for their decision, but only in cases of great failure or great exclusionary success. By allowing newcomers to interact their own space, no one is challenged— even if it means ignoring potential venues for independent success.

There has been increased interest in technical writing, and professional writing—and creative writing. This notion of power and prestige can be looked at as a career for professional writers who haven't yet defined just what they would like to do; working the gig with Indie Authors has the potential of being a cash cow.

One of the things to emerge from a study of Indie Authors is a troublesome question: is there actually true success in the Indie Author community? As assessment has become such an essential element of programmatic research, as demonstrable learning outcomes have become more important and sought after in every humanities class, we have often been called upon to defend the value of the liberal arts (in general) and the university (in specific) in terms of generalizable, reproducible results. What has been found is that Indie Authors can and do making a living selling their product. More so, the majority of them hire outside services to help ensure the business needs are being met, so they can do the things they love, which is write.

### **A Call for Transformation**

Overall this dissertation has explored the differing pedagogical approaches that exist in professional writing studies and the potential that interaction with the Indie Author community that could potentially foster as study for process and pedagogical moves. I posit that Professional writing programs need to recognize and rethink the gig economy of working with Indie Authors as terms of the pedagogical practices that are viable career options for students. If an institution or program is using a process-oriented and internship approach, then working with Indie Authors in project management that should be ignored and can potentially be recognized as an approach to industry and client based assessment? It seems short sighted for programs to be as unyielding and rigid as traditional publishing houses, just because the business of being an Indie Author has taken in an extremely long time to be considered a viable, serious, career path.

In this dissertation, I have examined the economy of Indie Authors and the lack of opportunity in the current structure of professional writing. As educators in these writing fields, it seems foolhardy to ignore the implications of new pedagogical practices as well as career path potential, both on the students as dedicated learners and entrepreneurial professional writers of a larger society. I argue that a better understanding of the pedagogical implications for better understand the fluid nature of this gig economy is imperative before implementing them in the classroom, and that a social-epistemic approach provides a valuable rethinking of preparing editing and publishing students to take on non-traditional roles. Also important and included within this idea of change is the understanding that students are ideologically positioned in the educational system to take risks in a safe learning environment that asks them to be innovative. For them to begin recognizing their situatedness is necessary to become a potential implementer of change. Working with Indie Authors can possibly be an avenue for that change, and for a way for them to document their own learning and ways of making meaning over a lifetime while being self-employed with success. After all, “The role of industry” in academic/industry collaboration, argue three technical communicators, “is to lend the structure and services of the institution to a design and content shaped by industry” (Krestas, Fisher, and Hackos).

Professional writing seems to work well within industry with an accepted emphasis on the “professional” portion of the disciplinary title. In doing so, industry and businesses that are not considered to be professional ventures are being ignored. As many creators of creative works, whether it be creative writing, photography or music already know, there is a misperception that it’s easy and anyone can do it. Indie Authors

have been fighting against a poor reputation instead of being embraced for being bold enough to bring creative works that explore the diversity that traditional publishing houses have chosen not to embrace.

The other real situation is that with an ever changing landscape of self-publishing, social media, and popular trends, being an Indie Author will never look one particular way. Five years ago (2012), Facebook was *the* social media platform to use, Kindle was the only ebook format worth using, and connecting with readers via reading groups were the best way for Indie Authors to get noticed. In 2017, social media has exploded into not just bulletin board style posting areas, but also pictures and videos. Along with Kindle, the ebook platforms are: nook, iTunes, kobo, Apple, Scribd, 24 symbols, Thalia and Inktera. Connecting with readers is still a best practice but hosting celebrity style book signings are becoming more prevalent. In the end, all things must change and evolve in order to survive. It is reasonable to expect the varying aspects and approaches to writing to do the same.

At last, I argue for more understanding of what opportunities are available in gig economy endeavors. I focused on Indie Authors because I am intimately aware of the experiential learning that takes places with that group. I come also as a scholar that recognizes these first ideas at building new collaborations for sustainable freelances jobs because they know understand how to articulate their skill sets and connections to business.

As industry continues to grow, a cycle of restructuring and reorganization will to be common place and it makes a potentially unstable workplace for professional and

technical writers who can be hired out for lower cost rather than quality. Outsourced professionals appear to recognize the increasingly fragile nature of social relations and employment, as they emphasize the value of collegiality and networking and the need to maintain skill sets on the cutting-edge of occupational fields.

Professional writing should continue to evolve as a profession rather than stay the course in training for what is already known. This study has helped establish values that Indie Authors as professionals look for in aspects of their works and brands, but also as they look for new information and applying it to the work they are already doing. The overarching idea in my study has clearly shown that gig economies are not only new, but they are sustainable.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 Survey Data\Observations

- Despite many authors/ writers taking the survey- there were a lot of short answers. The take away is that multiple choice might've been a better avenue to promote thought and conversation. A lot of speculation can be gathered throughout all of the answers working together, but unprompted- most answers were short and not complete thoughts.
- A lot of the information received was what I had anticipated. Many self-published authors that have at least 3 years' experience have gone through a steep learning curve. Only 12% of authors had someone another Indie author guide them through the process.
- 86% of Indie authors indicate that editing is what they 1) worry most about 2) hire out and 3) spend the most money on. In addition Indie Authors this is also the area what Indie authors want to have more knowledge about.
- The love of reading was clear with most of the authors and the need to story tell was another.
- Many indie authors stated they've always enjoyed writing and self-publishing was an outlet to make their dream happen.
- In response to whether an event or person helped an author decide to publish was surprisingly at 50%, I would've expected that more people needed a push. Of the people that did have people encourage them, 80% indicated other Indie

authors. Of the people that had no encouragement only 35% indicated it was because of rejection letters from standard publishers.

- Another surprise was that social media as a reason for encouraging people to become published Indie Authors. 55% said that social media played no role. I expected that social media would have encouraged more people

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- I think that the question should have been multiple choice: it was too open of a question, more prompting about how social media could've promote those interactions the question needed to give some ideas to show where interactions made a difference ( this is something I will follow through with in the live chat,
- The motivation was pretty straightforward and aligned a lot with the why people wanted to self-publish. People just want to write and tell their stories.
- As for previous writing experience again this was a question that needed more prompting or at least a follow up. Most people have writing experience but professional training or professional courses or workshops are a different level. People have been exposed to writing since kindergarten, but interestingly most people seemed to have ignored writing in school as exposure to writing experience.
- Not surprising most Indie Authors (87%) did not have any publishing experience prior.
- Again 3 years makes a huge difference in perspectives.
- The term gig economy was mostly not understood, but following up with self-publishing as a means to make money more Indie Authors did not expect to get

famous/ get rich right off. The idea of making money as a staple wasn't expected until years 4 -6.

- Marketing is another clear area that Indie Authors want experience and help. Most understand the need for strong marketing but don't have the avenues/ experience for strong and beneficial marketing skills. Most Authors indicated that building their newsletter and outreach are the top two areas that they feel they don't know enough nor have enough skill
- 80% of Indie Authors have another job that is their primary source of income.
- Most consider being an Indie Author as a secondary career. The authors also indicate that they wish being an author was their primary career. Most would like to make enough money as an author to keep their lifestyle- being all out famous was not indicated.
- 80% of Indie authors had at least one fully completed manuscript before embarking on their publishing journey.
- 90% of Indie Authors have a degree- most of them not in
- English or Composition
- Over all having a degree didn't influence the author to pursue self-publishing. The correlation found was in the number of books published in 3 years - where degree holders on average published 5- 7 books in 3 years versus 3- 4 books.
- Product output and networking with other authors were the top 2 fields in what Indie Authors think they do well. Marketing and publishing were the bottom two. Authors also show that book signings are the biggest outreach they focus on

- Support is an area where many Indie authors indicated they were surprised not to have it from family and friends while conversely they have support from their fan base.
- 90% of authors were surprised at the backlash Indie Authors receive all around.
- Improved visibility is a big plan but most are sticking with the same venues: social media, newsletters, branding, book signings and paid promotions.
- Newsletters were a surprise to most Indie Authors as a means for increasing visibility- but most still indicate they have no clear idea how to increase their numbers- short of paying for them
- Most authors indicate that they have seen improvements in reader base and financials within two years. Aside from being surprised that they have a fan base- authors were surprised at how rapidly a fan base can grow
- Authors think they manage social media interaction, business cards and web sites well. As for more marketing ideas. Based on comments- the authors understand the need for more marketing- but they have no idea how to accomplish more marketing. 4% mentioned price being a deterrent for improved marketing, but overall it appears to be a lack of knowledge and no how. Some have suggested personal branding that is clear from book covers to websites to show a cohesive design for the author and their product. Reaching out to bloggers is also another huge suggestion- giving out ARC (advanced release copies) and Books in exchange for review are the top 2 recommended methods for more visibility

- The biggest cost- outside of travel for book signings is editing and the cost of buying books (although it also needed a follow up of recouping book costs through sales)
- 82% of Indie Authors have to balance their writing with a full time job and family. From the comments the authors get in writing whenever they can, they are used to getting up early or staying up late is the most common ways to fit in writing. Most report wanting to write daily but do not because life gets in the way even still all authors taking the survey manage to put out a book a year- and 42% put out 2 -3.
- All authors hire out some particular service- editing is the top expense
- 67% of authors get help at home to allow them writing time
- 67% of authors do NOT have a personal assistant but 80% would like to have one.
- PA's are equally paid and volunteer
- The PA's are responsible for social media marketing, finding interviews, book take overs, bloggers- exposure mostly.
- 83% of authors devote the most time each week- outside of
- career work to writing, next are interviews, marketing/branding, interviews, social media interaction, promotion and then self-care
- 80% of authors do get physical exercise on a regular basis
- Things learned:

- Do not constantly push the sale of books. People want to hear about the books, but not daily. Announce book signings and other events where you will be appearing.
- Don't be an a\*\*hole online - that stuff will spread like wild fire. Once you get a bad reputation no one will want to work with you.
- That the Indie author community is tightknit. However this is good and bad- the indie community can help spread and promote your product well. However, there are also groups of indie authors who do gang up and have bullied other indie authors.
- FB likes to hide a lot of things from readers. Posting regularly helps to keep you visible.
- To respond and to be available to those reader, bloggers and fans, who contact me
- Networking with the Indie community gives a lot of good advice
- 50 % of authors saw an increase of sales each year for at least 3 years
- 100% of authors responding attend book signings
  - For those signings 100% of authors noted the importance of clear branding on the table.
  - Giving out swag is 50% split.
  - Authors use signings to connect with readers as well as engage with new readers
  - Authors use it also to meet other authors and some use it to set up cross promotions

- 100% say signings increased interactions with other authors
- 100% say networking helped authors understand key issues related to being an Indie Author
- What do you wish you had known prior to publishing your first book?
  - I wish I had a better editor for my first publication.
  - How time consuming it would be to promote and advertise and connect with readers
  - I'd wished I'd had better knowledge of branding
  - To have a better cover and editing; that it wouldn't happen overnight; how much marketing work it would take

## Key Themes

A need to better understanding marketing and how to do it efficiently.

A need to understanding what branding actually means and what it entails.

Networking and community opportunities both on social media and at event spaces.

Many authors aren't even sure where to find out information about events.

Learning about better practices for writing and production.

Personal appearances and visibility

Making a writing career possible full time.

## INDIE AUTHORS LEARNING EXPERIENCE SURVEY

### Overall Experience

**1. Rate your overall level of satisfaction with your own selling experience**

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Neutral (you may choose to remove this option)
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Very dissatisfied

**2. Overall, how many sales did you have this year over last?**

- ☐ Better than last year
- ☐ Just as good as last year
- ☐ Not as good as last year
- ☐ I did not attend last year

**3. Do you attend book signing events?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**4. If you attend book signings please describe how you apply what marketing/ branding skills you have learned (if applicable).**

**5. Please tell us how you apply marketing/ branding to selling your books.**

**Please check all that apply.**

- ☐ I revised my outreach activities ( take overs, book signings)
- ☐ I used a new approach to engage with new readers (newsletters, website)
- ☐ I interact with other local Indie Authors in my area
- ☐ I helped organize a book signing
- ☐ I work with other small businesses and cross promote within my community
- ☐ I made connections with new Indie Authors on social media
- ☐ Other, please explain

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**6. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Book signings helped build my capacity to respond to the needs of [target population]					
Book signings increased my interaction with (potential) readers					
Networking at the signings helps my understanding about the key issues related to being an Indie Author					

**Social Media Outcomes**

**7. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Social Media networking has increased my knowledge of how to market / brand my products					
Social Media networking has increased my presentation skills					
Social Media Networking has helped me identify key strategies that I can use in my work					
<i>Etc.</i>					

**8. If applicable, please share two main take home messages that you learned through your participation in the Indie Author Community through Social Media**

Key Learning #1:	
Key Learning #2:	

**9. If applicable, please tell us how you plan to use what you learned in future endeavors on Social Media:**

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**One action I have taken since networking with other Indie Authors is:**

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**Please identify which of the following actions (if any) you intend to use.**

**Please check all that apply (if any).**

- ☐ I will use the presentation tips I learned from others in my next presentation
- ☐ I will use the online outreach tips that were suggested
- ☐ I will adapt my approach to reach a wider reading audience
- ☐ Other:

### **Hindsight / Suggestions for Improvement**

**10. What do you wish you had known prior to publishing your first book?**

**Please share your ideas about ideas that were unknown, tactics missing, additional items that you would have been provided guidance on.**

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**11. What types of support would help you carry out your role?**

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**12. Please share any additional comments**

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### 13. Open-ended comments

- a) What specifically do you think you do well?
- b) What ideas do you have on how to improve that you want to try?
- c) Name one thing you learned over the years that surprised you.
- d) How long would you estimate before the *average* Indie Authors begins to see progress?
- e) Please let us know at least one specific thing you learned from another Indie Author that you have been able to apply successfully

14. Estimate how much of your sales improvement is a direct result of networking with other Indie Authors? (0% to 100%)

15. What percentage of your total author work times requires the knowledge and skills mentioned above? (0% to 100%)

16. Networking with other Indie Authors was a worthwhile investment in my author development. (Likert scale)

17. I would recommend interacting with the Indie Community to others. (Likertscale)

Please select the rating for the each section based on the following criteria:

5=excellent 4=good 3=average 2=fair 1=poor

### 18. Please rate yourself on the following in regards to ebook entrepreneurship:

- |  |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Knowledge of the subject matter.            | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| 2. Ability to explain concepts of branding.    | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| 3. Ability to pitch your product and yourself. | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |

### Please rate the information you have received from other Indie Authors:

- |  |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| The usefulness of the information received | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| The access to willing peer groups          | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| The level of guidance given                | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| The convenience of having online mentors   | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |

The usefulness of Indie Author networks.

☐5 ☐4 ☐3 ☐2

☐1

Was the information appropriate for your level of experience?

☐Yes

☐No

If you said "No" please explain:

## Appendix 2 Round Table

**Instructions:** Please give your answers or comments, and as a group and discuss.

**Duration:** 1 hour 3 minutes

**Attendees:** 3 indie authors, 1 question asker – note I didn't really moderate. I asked questions, recorded notes and kept the time. I wanted an authentic conversation and interfered as little as possible.

1. Overall evaluation of assistance?	
	<p>What guidance impressed you as a new Indie Author</p> <p>A1- The Facebook communities were very open to helping out new people. There are tons of groups and people do share things they've learned along the way.</p> <p>A2 – There is just so much information. Many Indie Authors also blog about their journey for good and bad. One of the best things I did was read a ton about being an author. I was surprised there was so much to learn about business and not just writing.</p> <p>A3 – I was impressed at feedback. I actually had someone, who is now my editor, care enough to message me and tell me that she loved my story, but it needed more editing.</p> <p>JFF- There was also a lot of chat about the goods and bads of being in groups. The conversation did digress into bullying on social media groups for four minutes. However, this wasn't the biggest take away.</p>
1.2	<p>What facilitated the best learning about the Indie Author business for you</p> <p>A1 – Having to prepare taxes. I think I made about \$100 the first year and I</p>

	<p>was still required to fill out tax forms like a business.</p> <p>A2 – Setting book prices. In Indie land there is some bad information out there about setting prices. A lot of people are told to give their first book away for free- Instafreebie – to get people hooked. My free book got 11 thousand downloads in the opening weekend. I was expecting to get reviews, sales, and most importantly a high rank on Amazon. None of these things happened. I had to learn through trial and error what the best selling point was to get reviews and sales. Amazon ranking is a convoluted system.</p> <p>A3 – Forever asking questions from established authors. And then I threw away most of their advice, and learned that I should have listened better when I started out.</p> <p>JFF – In general the consensus was business learning is an ongoing process. Even with four years behind these authors, they agreed that there was still a lot to learn about how to manage their business. When I asked if business classes would have been useful they were dubious. They agreed that learning about business would be good, but it also had to be business learning for self-published authors, which would include: taxes, basic accounting, marketing, branding, advertising, budgeting and social media presence. Overall the women felt that even with business courses there wouldn't be enough preparation, that much learning is still experiential.</p>
1.3	<p>What topics or issues were not clear as you started</p> <p>A1 – How much time this would take. I figured I would hit “publish” and people would find my book. Marketing wasn't something I paid a lot of attention to in</p>

	<p>the beginning.</p> <p>A2 – How important ISBN numbers were to have. I thought free numbers were great and then I learned how restrictive they were.</p> <p>A3 – I also was not clear about the amount of time it would take getting people aware of my book. And then I learned that some people just didn't like it. I had to learn that once I put a story out, I couldn't control how other people would read it.</p> <p>JFF – The authors pretty much said "Everything" as a first answer, but as I prompted they narrowed it down. The gist of the conversation ended up being marketing. How important it was, but how little they understood. The learning curve is harsh and time intensive.</p>
1.4	<p>What topics/ suggestions would you have liked to have been made earlier</p> <p>A1 – How much money I was not going to make back.</p> <p>A2 – How advertising worked</p> <p>A3 – How to get a "street team" and beta readers set up.</p> <p>JFF – The authors were pretty quick with the answers. A1 talked the most about how much money was spent. She said printing was the cheapest part, and then came swag (gifts for readers), promotions, mail fees, and advertising. She estimated spending over \$300 in swag her first year. (Personal note- I hate swag and refuse to offer anything more than paper book marks.) The other two authors agreed with a lot of what she said and said they also took a hefty loss the first year.</p> <p>Street Teams were "created" by Facebook in social media. The teams are</p>

	<p>groups of readers that volunteer to spread the word about the author, and their new works. They also post reviews the day a new work is launched. In return they get ARC's (advanced reader copies), private contests and better access to the author.</p> <p>Beta readers are friends and trusted readers who receive ARC's and give critical feedback – this is a low level proofreading.</p>
1.5	<p>My recommendations for new authors are:</p> <p>A1- Find mentors and friends first. You are going to need a support system.</p> <p>A2 – Write at least one or two stories before you publish one. For two reasons really- first of all, the first story is going to be rough. Even after you have it edited, it's still going to only be a mediocre story. Second, and most important, if people love the story, they will want another quickly. For Indie Author's it is important to make your readers connect in the beginning. Not to say not later, but keep them hooked until you are really established.</p> <p>A3 – Read everything in your genre and read about publishing. I wanted to be different, but after looking around I realized I wasn't really different, just story details are different.</p> <p>JFF- The authors agreed on these 3 ideas and talked a lot through each one. For mentors and friends they had ideas about finding mentors both in and out of genre for help. There was also a lot of talk about how mentors and friends should differ. The idea of writing multiple stories sparked a small debate on whether or not it was necessary. 2/3 agreed it really was. The last debate was about genre, where the authors agreed was that being an Indie allowed for</p>

	some rules to be broken, bent and ignored- but they all agreed that knowing the rules about genres were important too.
<b>2. To what extent did you gain confidence about being an Indie Author and when?</b>	
2.1	<p>How did you learn about the business side versus the writing side</p> <p>A1 – About half way in. I learned a bit late to keep a spread sheet of expenses versus money made.</p> <p>A2 - I'm still learning</p> <p>A3 – I joined a Facebook group that was really dedicated to the business side in the beginning, so I got it from the start. However, it didn't really make sense for a few months.</p> <p>JFF- All the authors indicated they are still learning about the business end.</p>
2.2	<p>Do you think having a trained professional would have made this process easier?</p> <p>A1 – Yes, but I want to be the one to do the daily social media interactions. I don't want to give up that connection with my readers.</p> <p>A2 – Yes. Having someone who really knows about marketing would be great</p> <p>A3 - Yes. I want to learn from them too though.</p> <p>JFF – Here while the authors were talking, there were a lot of hesitations. It took some gentle prompting to get them to talk about the real issue. While the authors agreed that a trained professional would be great- talk came up about pricing. Because Indie Author's don't see profit- on average- until the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, they were hesitant about hiring professionals without having some kind of</p>

	<p>notion about what kind of money they could make using their service. All of the authors said that they used personal expenses to fund being an author for three years – while putting any profits made from their products in the bank. At the time of the round table- all the authors had paid back their personal debt and were steadily making monthly income.</p>
2.3	<p>What kind of training would such a person need?</p> <p>A1 – Everything</p> <p>A2- marketing and advertising</p> <p>A3 – Everything</p> <p>JFF- The authors referred back to earlier in the conversation about marketing, branding, advertising, and budgeting. They also had a laughter filled conversation about their Assistant needing to remind them to eat and drink. They all agreed they felt secure with how to write a good story, but the rest needed work. There also was a lot of conversation about how much time it took away from writing to have to do the rest.</p>
<b>3. Overall evaluation of your process</b>	
	<p>What was the process of creating your first work as an Indie Author</p> <p>A1 – I've always done creative writing. After my first two rejections, I started looking for a different way to put my book out.</p> <p>A2- My friend and I read the Twilight series together. When we were done, we figured we could write just as well. We decided to write a book, sending each other a chapter as we finished. I hit publish on the book before I even told my family that I had done it.</p> <p>A3 – I sat down and wrote it. My process didn't come until book three.</p>

JFF – Because of my background I was amazed. I forced myself to let them talk it through. Most of them sat and wrote. Pantsters not Plotters. Simply put, a plotter is someone who plans out their novel before they write it. A pantsier is someone who, “flies by the seat of their pants,” meaning they don’t plan out anything, or plan very little. I do a mix of both.

What was the best advice about creating your work did you receive, if any

A1 – Never promise a new book at a specific time unless you plan to deliver. Readers are petty when you push back publication dates.

A2- Write every day. Even if it’s garbage.

A3 - Don’t give Beta readers the book chapter by chapter- their advice can make you change the book in ways you don’t like in the end.

JFF – I had to cut this conversation short- for us to stay on time and get through the questions. Advice is huge topic for indie authors. I took the very first answer from each author. While advice can seem like a great thing, the discussion talked about how some advice is very situational and also sometimes it just doesn’t work well.

Did you participate in Indie Author communities prior to creating your work –why or why not

A1 – No, I didn’t think about it.

A2 – No – I thought I needed to have a book written first

A3 – No – not only did I not participate in indie communities, but I live in Chicago and there is a huge indie author community here that I just found out about, from a reader.

JFF- The authors all indicated that while they didn’t participate early, none of them would have done it differently. There is so much information going around they

<p>agreed that it would have been intimidating and they might not have ever finished a book.</p>
<p>What process about Indie Author marketing was the most beneficial for you</p> <p>A1 – Bloggers. I have a list of bloggers who send out cover reveals and notices when I publish works.</p> <p>A2 – My street team does an amazing job of passing around information. I don't think I would have the reader base I do without them.</p> <p>A3 – I learned how to talk about my books.</p> <p>JFF- The authors clearly said they don't really understand the process of marketing; they weren't actually sure what the process might even entail. There was a robust conversation about how to get started but no one had heard of any specific steps to take.</p>
<p>What topics or issues that were not clear as you started to market to the public</p> <p>- Skipped this one for time.</p>
<p>What topics/ suggestions do you have to new starting Indie Authors</p> <p>A1 – Learn very quickly you do not know enough and ask all the questions.</p> <p>A2 – Get involved sooner rather than later with community</p> <p>A3 – Make a group of friends who write in your genre and talk a lot.</p> <p>JFF – The biggest talking point here was how solitary writing can be. By taking advantage of social media to form a network, the work becomes less isolating. It also offers accountability and writing tips. The group talked about writing sprints (this is where people write for 15 minutes and then share what they've accomplished) to break writer's block, they also talked about getting feedback on covers, book blurbs</p>

and contest ideas. They all agreed that having a group was a great thing, but also talked about horror stories and warned about taking caution who to interact with, so no one would steal your work.

What do you think about the overall process of being an Indie Author

- Skipped, they felt they answered this many times.

#### **4. What else do you want said about being an Indie Author**

How do identify as an Indie Author?

A1 – Loud and proud

A2 – When I'm at book signings it's easy. But in everyday life I don't talk about it a lot.

A3 – I tell people when I can. I also have to learn to carry product cards. (JFF – Product cards are trading cards with book information on it- like a baseball style card but the front is the book picture and the back is the book blurb)

Do you think there is prejudice against Indie Authors

A1 – Yes, but I think there will always be biased. There are some authors out there who don't care enough about quality. However, the last book I read from a big publisher had quite a few mistakes in it. Not just spelling errors, but no one fact checked the year a particular gun came out.

A2 – Some people think we're just not good enough. Truth is, I like to tell my stories my way. I don't know that one person's idea on a given day is worth throwing a story away. I've found plenty of readers, but the few query letters I've sent out, I've heard back that they couldn't connect with my story.

A3 – Yes. There has been drama in the indie community about getting your letters. This means authors who get USA Today best seller or NY Times best seller. Some

indie authors don't agree that authors in a boxed set should count. No matter how someone gets on the lists doesn't matter.

JFF- I had to stay quiet- such a shame, I had so much to say about this. Another article maybe.

Is there more or less power in being an Indie Author

A1 – More. It's my business and I control every aspect of it

A2 – More. I have a friend who got picked up by a small house (JFF – it was a micro press) who loved her story- except they made her changed almost everything about it, except the idea of forbidden love. They seriously changed everything; it's not even the same story. I would never want that to happen.

A3 – More. For every person who talks crap about being an indie author, there are hundreds more who want to be us. I get to show the world my stories with the covers I want. I also take the nasty comments and trolls. But for the most part I love it.

JFF- No doubt about the power they feel.

**Make sure to discuss (I added these talking points after getting survey data back. I did ask the authors if they agreed to expanding more on questions and they said yes. These were not asked in this order. I've left the list in order, because that is how the paperwork was done.)**

### **Management**

A1 – I self-manage very well. As a stay home mom I have to account for my time. I have a writing schedule each day. Everything is regimented and runs well.

A2 – I'm terrible. I write when I can, but between my paying career, kid's sports schedules and home, I try to get it done when I can. I think I would work better with a schedule but I don't see how that is going to happen any time soon.

A3 – I work four hours every day on managing my author career. It's at night because I have a son and I work a traditional job during the day. I think it's going well, but I still feel like I have a lot to learn about the business side of this.

JFF- The authors all viewed management as their schedules, not much more. On second listen through the video, there were audible hesitations. To be fair, this was the last question of the night.

### **Working with others**

A1- I have co-written with my best friend for three books. I tried to co-write with others but it just didn't work. You have to really understand the other authors writing style to do this.

A2- I have never co-written with others. I have helped facilitate events, and it's a huge job. Many people think it's easy to put together an event. And some look at the money- because many times authors charge \$100- 300 per table. But it's all consuming for weeks up to the event. On top of that, there are some shady facilitators that have taken money and not given a decent show or even a show at all.

A3 – I really haven't done either. Right now I feel like I'm still trying to get my own career started. I'm not opposed to working with others, but it's a huge commitment and not one I'm sure I could do well.

JFF – This question brought a lot of stutters and silence. It seemed like it was almost an uncomfortable question, more so than money questions. Authors generally like to work alone, but the tension felt like the authors did not want to admit they didn't really want to work with other authors on a project.

### **Hiring Staff**

A1 – I don't have a PA but I am looking. I think having staff will help me create much more content to put out. Connecting with readers is my job. Doing all the maintenance stuff someone can have.

A2 – I share one. My best friend pays for one full time, but the PA also does some marketing for me. She does a great job but I'm not sure I want to pay for one.

A3 – I have an editor and cover designer, but I don't have a PA. I would love to have people to help market and move things forward; they could pay attention to the things I hate.

JFF- There also was a bit of chatter about how to find a PA one could trust, but that conversation died off quickly. There wasn't enough to capture for good data.

### **Economics**

This question was confused with budget so we just moved to budget.

### **Budget**

A1 – I wish I would have learned about this while I was writing my first book. There is so much to learn about how to keep a balance. It's not just about how much it costs to

publish the product, but instead I also had to learn about how to charge for my time. I had to learn that my time was valuable.

A2 – I agree, I spent so much on gifts and swag in the first two years that it took almost two more to balance out. There are so many take overs (JFF: Takeovers are events on Facebook that authors hold, usually to promote a new book. Other authors sign up and during their time, they talk about themselves, their products and often to do-aways to find new readers) in the first few years I did a lot of take overs and gave away a lot. I had to learn to watch my sales after takeovers, once I learned take overs rarely translated into active new readers and new sales, I started limiting how many I did each year.

A3 – Budgeting for book signing is necessary. I do pretty well with a lot of the other areas, but book signings are my weakness. Most of the time I don't make back my table costs. I tried to justify with networking, but the reality is that most book signings are get togethers and authors don't make much back. I had to start planning which ones I would attend.

JFF – There was frustration around this question- not because of the topic, but listening to verbal ticks, it seemed there was frustration that budgeting still seemed to be something they felt they should know, but still had to work with.

### **Taxes and licensing- is this hired out**

They asked to skip this one. They all said they had taxes done.

### **What do you know about marketing, branding and visibility?**

A1 – I know it's hard work. I work at it every day and still think I have a lot to learn.

A2 – Marketing is a lot of work to go a free route. If you have hundreds of dollars to spend in marketing, it is easy to get good results, otherwise, marketing is done every day- and often for future books. It's stressful. My brand is pretty simple; I didn't know I needed to do anything else with it other than have a banner and business cards.

A3- Being visible is hard. I've started a Pinterest page and Instagram but I'm not sure that I'm doing it right. I've heard from some people to use Hootsuite and then from others that each platform has to be different and tailored. There is just not enough time in a day.

JFF- In this conversation part again had verbal pauses, as if they felt that they should know more answers or have better descriptions.

### **How did you learn about royalty structures?**

A1 – from Amazon's page

A2- Amazon and Create space

A3- I don't really understand how it works but I get paid every month.

JFF- This was a short conversation. It seemed like they felt royalty structures were cut and dried with no room for negotiation. The authors only discussed Amazon/Create space's platform, there was no discussion about bookstores, or indie bookstores.

### **Do you understand copyright laws?**

A1- Yes I think so

A2- Yes

A3- Yes

JFF- This is an area where I do have a lot of experience/information. I did an independent study about copyright and have also taken a Coursera on copyright from Stanford. When I asked about literary laws the group did not have a lot of information. When I asked about ISBN and copyright they had a basic understanding. When I asked about filing with the Library of Congress, A1 and 2 had heard about it but not done it. Overall- they'd heard about copyright but the functional knowledge was low.

**Do you have a LLC for the business license?**

A1- Yes

A2 – No

A3 – I have a DBA but plan to switch over

JFF- While all three authors understood that being an indie author is a business, the last two didn't seem to think there was any reason necessary to have a business LLC. This is a question I really wish I would have known to dig much more deeply into.

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