

## A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY OF FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To understand the entrepreneurial identity, through the lived experience of female entrepreneurs who are familiar with the phenomenon. This objective was premised on understanding that entrepreneurial identity is a product of context which shapes the social-cultural norms and environment within which individuals, operate and construct their identity. This is captured in entrepreneurship scholarship where the discipline is still struggling to build a reliable definition of female entrepreneurship applicable to both developed and developing countries and its effect on their respective economies. **Research Design & Methods:** This study used a qualitative research design that followed a phenomenological approach with thirty five female entrepreneurs, utilising semi structured in depth individual meetings. **Findings:** Female entrepreneurs build, balance, and manage a wide range of entrepreneurial ventures of varying sizes across sectors while maintain both role and social identities. Female entrepreneurs also express strong views on earning returns and income to not only grow their business but support their employees, communities, themselves, and their families. **Implications & Recommendations:** This study generated five themes that should be researched quantitatively to determine further understanding of entrepreneurship and developing other entrepreneurs in developing countries. **Contribution & Value Added:** The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on entrepreneurship in entrepreneurial identity, by exploring the female entrepreneur as both a role and identity. It examines this through the perspective of role identity and learn how female entrepreneurs consider their role as an entrepreneur.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurial identity; female entrepreneurs; phenomenology; South Africa.

**JEL codes:** L266, O30, O55, Z30

**Article type:** research paper

### INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is considered an essential determinant for economic performance and growth Urbano et al. (2019). Entrepreneurs' experiences are subject to multiple endogenous and exogenous environmental factors, different societal contexts influence their entrepreneurial identities. Identity is central to meaning and decision making, motivation, action and commitment, loyalty, stability, and change (Della Porta & Diani, 2020). In the traditional view of the entrepreneur, social dimensions of human life are not considered (Ahl, 2004). The entrepreneur is regarded as static and detached from the rest of social life and is perceived as a one-dimensional individual (Rydzik & Ellis-Vowles, 2019). Identity politics have become central to debates about access to power and communication. Identity is a philosophical question that asks: "who am I?" This question may be asked from a social position to address the group and individual roles within a community (Vamvaka et al., 2020). This study is situated in applied social theory and entrepreneurship with the primary objective of exploring the

concept of identity by investigating how it relates to the phenomenon of entrepreneurial identity, from the perspectives and experiences of female entrepreneurs in a developing economy context.

Many of the early female entrepreneur pioneers worldwide met the entrepreneurship criteria discussed above. According to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and MSMEs in 2015, a country like Indonesia had over 52 million Small, Medium sectors, with females running 60% of them (Hendratmi et al 2022). Asia has witnessed a rapid economic development, as female entrepreneurship is increasingly regarded as key drivers of economic growth and sustainable development (Franzke et al, 2022). This is evidence by the growing number of females who are reshaping the business landscape as they rise to the top, more than half of the 56 females who made to Forbes 2017 list of female self-made billionaires were from Asia: 21 were from mainland China and 5 including the world's richest, Zhou Quefei were from Hong Kong (Forbes, 2018). More than a dozen of those in Fortune Magazine 2019 list of the most powerful females outside the US were from Asia (Fortune, 2020). According to transaction services multinational Mastercard's index of Women Entrepreneurs (Solanki, 2019). South Africa is one of the 12 economies where Female entrepreneurial activity rates increased, with 11.1% of working age women engaged in early stage entrepreneurial activities. While South Africa moved up one place from 2020 to rank thirty seven in 2021, with a score of 54.9, female advancement still remains hampered and less supportive. Females who began small ventures like schools and grew them into world leading corporations, and entrepreneurship on small scales like shops, canteens or even those offering professional and personal services. Female independence, advanced education levels, and the need for financial freedom prompt the growth of female-owned businesses. Years ago, many females did not have these growth prompts couples with social acceptance to start a business. Entrepreneurship is now an accepted professional path for females (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2019), offering flexibility and independence that is lacking in traditional jobs.

In this research, we intend to explore ideas related to entrepreneurial identity for female entrepreneurs and their ventures. This consideration is important, contemporary research has shown that there are some differences between men and women when it comes to entrepreneurship (Shmailan, 2016; Martínez-Rodríguez et al., 2022). The concept of entrepreneurship has historically been that of male, and in the essence the role and identity are masculine in image and expected behavior (Williams et al 2020, Arshed et al 2022). According to Jennings & Brush 2013, estimate that only 10 percent of all research in entrepreneurship includes females. This suggests that both practically and theoretically there is a reason to explore entrepreneurial identity for females and their ventures (Roy et al., 2022). The interest in female entrepreneurship is relatively recent. Up until the late 1970s, the role of females in entrepreneurship was rarely considered (Humbert et al., 2010). It was only then when researchers started to recognise that 'entrepreneurship' is a gendered phenomenon (Jennings & Brush, 2013), recently there is a consistent opinion among both policy makers and scholars that female entrepreneurship in the last decades has significantly grown all over the world (Ojong et al., 2021; Ogundana et al., 2021). Thus, research on female entrepreneurship has attracted attention (Jamali, 2009; Hattab, 2012; Foss et al., 2019). Female entrepreneurs saw an opportunity and successfully launched, developed, and grew a business. They have used innovative approaches to turn a business idea into a commercial reality (Hasan & Almubarak, 2016). Female entrepreneurship is similar to entrepreneurial activity and process (Solevik et al., 2019). It essentially refers to recognising opportunity and manipulating resources to create a new business, and the subsequent growth and development of these ventures. Female entrepreneurs are business owners whose ventures reflect the characteristics of entrepreneurship and who have initiated, taken over, and implemented entrepreneurial activities and processes. These women have identified opportunities and gaps. They were able to gather the resources required to capitalise on the opportunity. They also encouraged and guided a dynamic change process. They established a new pattern of activity that has resulted in the formation of a new wealth-creating company with significant long-term growth potential (Leitch et al., 2016). Nevertheless, female entrepreneurs continue to face multiple obstacles in their journey (Kogut, 2022). As such economic policies should support females so as to promote the development of total entrepreneurial activity, thereby generating economic growth (Neneh, 2022).

Female entrepreneurship is growing in developing countries. The majority of female entrepreneurs' businesses are in the small and medium enterprise sector (Shoma, 2019). Entrepreneurship provides tremendous opportunities for females all over the world by allowing them to achieve greater self-sufficiency, self-esteem, education, and growth for themselves, their families, and employees. Females are changing the face of global business ownership, in 2010, almost 42% of entrepreneurs in the work were, female entrepreneurs (GEM, 2010). According to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Gem (Gem report 21/22), females are very active globally in a wide variety of business and context. The highest start-up rate of females was found in the Dominican Republic, where 43.7% of females start up were reported. In 2017 there were 12, 5% male to 8.2% female entrepreneurs in South Africa (Bowmaker-Falcon & Herrington, 2020). When compared to Egypt 2017 rate 18.8% men to 7.5 % females, it can be seen that South Africa was doing comparatively well (Ismail et al., 2018). In 2020 there was also a significant increase 10,9 % male to 9,6 female entrepreneurs in South Africa this shows that the country has seen a significant result of the initiation of inclusive policies (Bowmaker – Falcon & Herrington 2020).

First and foremost, entrepreneurial ventures and businesses founded by female entrepreneurs contribute to the expansion of South Africa's economic base in a diverse and growing way. This is according to the South Africa results of the latest Mastercard index of Women Entrepreneurs index (MIWE), announced on the annual 2021 Forbes WOMAN Africa, South Africa moved up nine places' 7,1% increase from 2019 to rank 23<sup>rd</sup> globally and in Africa on the 2020 index, which tracks female entrepreneurs' ability to capitalise on opportunities granted through various supporting conditions with their local environments. Despite the difficulties, obstacles that female entrepreneurs have in establishing and growing their businesses, the outcomes of this study put light on the critical role that these females play in safeguarding their family's financial security and well-being. The socio-economic background can be a strong resource that allows females to act differently to deal with institutional challenges they face, entrepreneurship is not gender neutral and female entrepreneurs face specific contracts that hamper their business growth but also affect their growth aspirations.

The study further found the theoretical potential methodological position of phenomenological can be illustrated clearer by positioning it in relation to identity and discursive approaches to entrepreneurship. It emphasised that in the entrepreneurial discourse centre on (female) narratives, phenomenology could be instrumental. This study further indicates that entrepreneurial identity, which is composed of being participative, this was described as the involvement of others in their ventures, they spoke about being leading by example, being connected, empowering others as well as motivating others to step out of their boundaries and sharing ideas. While role female entrepreneurs described, themselves as mumpreneur, wife, entrepreneur, business owner, and relation focused, the female entrepreneurs saw themselves as understanding because they have employees from different backgrounds and attend meeting with different people, which also has shown empathy to nature employees, partners and customers , collaborative , fostering relations using care , resilient the female entrepreneurs describe themselves as challenging others in a constructive in a positive ways, being creative, being curios, having many ideas, being interested in solving problems through innovative solutions and above all having the ability to dream and to use their imagination, recognising, and supporting these females is necessary to realise their full potential to benefit South Africa and other emerging economies.

Female entrepreneurs are business owners whose ventures reflect the characteristics of entrepreneurship and who have initiated, taken over, and implemented entrepreneurial activities and processes. These women have identified opportunities and gaps. They were able to gather the resources required to capitalise on the opportunity. They also encouraged and guided a dynamic change process. They established a new pattern of activity that has resulted in the formation of a new wealth-creating company with significant long-term growth potential (Leitch et al., 2016).

The contention being forwarded in this research is that the practice of entrepreneurship derives from social institutions such as identifying, which is taken here to mean the context-specific expectation of how individuals conduct themselves, how others act and respond, and expect the other to act in such specific contexts. This study chooses entrepreneurship as its setting and argues that identity plays a

vital role in explaining an individual as an entrepreneur, with consequent effects on the economic future. The research demonstrate how our perceptions of who we are influence our financial decisions more than any other factor. This affects how hard we work, learn, spend, and save. Identity is a new way to understand people's decisions at work, school, and at home.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The debate on defining entrepreneurship remain bound within the classical and neoclassical economic theories (Campos & Gassier, 2017; Vossenbergh, 2016). The terms and language are masculine, mainly how concepts such as the propensity risk are applied in entrepreneurship research (Cardon et al., 2013). Entrepreneurial success has similarly been framed based on a rational man. By extension, female entrepreneurs could only be considered successful if they resemble the sound economic man.

### Phenomenology and Entrepreneurship

Phenomenology is concerned with lived experiences of life and the unit of analysis to understand human behaviour - phenomenology is concerned with lived experiences of life and the unit of analysis to understand human behaviour (Dieumegard et al., 2021). Phenomenological methods are orthodox in an applied field like nursing and pedagogy, where both researcher and practitioner interests are genuine by a deep interest in the subjective experience of their subjects (Van Manen, 2016). According to Benner (1994) entrepreneurship has become a fuller appreciation of the richness of lived experiences, studying entrepreneurship can be intense (Jedličková et al., 2021). In entrepreneurship there is ongoing disagreement about the subject, questions, and research techniques. Phenomenology can be a useful and accessible methodology for examining and changing the subjects of this discipline (Berglund, 2007).

### Entrepreneurial Identity

Entrepreneurial identity has emerged as a key concept for understanding entrepreneurship as a social and economic phenomenon (Mmbaga et al., 2020). Entrepreneurship identity has been proposed as a critical identity that inspires people to pursue entrepreneurial endeavours. When a new venture is established, entrepreneurial identity is vital for achieving legitimacy (Marlow & McAdam, 2015), belonging (Stead, 2017), and positively standing out from others (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). Entrepreneurial identity continues to inform entrepreneurs' decisions, actions and feelings (de la Cruz et al., 2018), as they build their organisation, including how they acquire resources (Kimjeon & Davidsson, 2021), the extent to which they commit time to their ventures (Murnieks et al., 2020) and even their passion (Murnieks et al., 2014).

Entrepreneurial identity is built on theoretical perspectives - identity theory (Stets & Serpe, 2013), role identity theory (Minor, 2020), and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Identity theory prominence on the ability to self as a place of diverse roles, in which there is an integration and expectation of our being (Bell et al., 2019). In this study identity refers to the origin of self, reflexively and broadly understood by self (Radu-lefebveree et al., 2021) Identity theory is concerned with questions such as who I am and the occupational choices to be an entrepreneur, what do I want to be (Wagenschwanz, 2021). Social identity theory focus on social categories, these categories could be based on racial differences as well as the gender and age. Furthermore looks at religious denominations or political parties and may be perceived positively or negatively in relation to another group (Ashforth & Mael, 2016). In this context of this study a person is identified as a female who is an entrepreneur in a social environment, the person identifies as less competent in the field of entrepreneurship. The words who am I, and what do I want to be very useful because identity or self-image guides us how we respond as entrepreneurs and where we believe that we have what it takes to be successful. These perspectives are rooted in different disciplinary traditions like sociology, social psychology, philosophy and management, respectively that reflect epistemologies ranging from positivism to social constructivism (Leitch & Harrison, 2016). An individual can establish the entrepreneurial role before their entrepreneurial identity. The formulation of an entrepreneurial identity is interlinked with the identity construction theory in which a person's integrates their current identity with the new role they are designing for themselves (Tomer & Mishra, 2016).

The two theories of identity - social identity and role identity - influence entrepreneurial identities (Bell et al, 2019). For instance, the social identity of the founder impacts the formation of the venture, the required decision, and outcomes Stets and Burke (2000). Similarly, founder role identities impact behaviour and the venture outcome (Hoang & Gimeno, 2010). Werthes et al., (2018) contend that combining the role identity and social identity provides a more robust integration of the concepts of the group, role, and the self. The argument explains that the two theories of self and social identities are common, just offering a context of group versus the role. This argument is strengthened because people occupy roles while simultaneously belonging to social categories (Stets & Burke, 2000). For example, a female doctor, male student, female entrepreneur, while the salience diverge considering the circumstances (Brush & Gale, 2015). A female may simultaneously be a mother, a wife, a daughter and entrepreneur.

The entrepreneur role identity reflects the socially recognised group of entrepreneurs (Obrecht, 2011). Baker and Powell (2019) combined both theories to analyse founders' identities. In various research, attitudes and attributes such as creativity/innovation, comfort with risk and uncertainty, a proactive attitude, aggressive competitiveness, and self-efficacy have been found to underpin entrepreneurial behaviours (Ratten, 2016).

Understanding the role and social identity creates context to explore female entrepreneurs' identity, in entrepreneurial activities. It allows females to know about their social and individual self-identity Richards and Hemphill (2016). Being a female who is also an entrepreneur creates a conflict between social and economic values (Poggesi et al., 2016). If the self and social identities are uneven, it would have a negative effect on one's intention, aspirations, and subsequent participation in the entrepreneurial process.

## METHODS

A qualitative research approach was considered appropriate for the current study as the objective was to examine entrepreneurial identity, by asking participants to describe their experiences, it aligned with Husserl's descriptive phenomenology. This study focused on understanding female entrepreneurs of their entrepreneurial identities in South Africa. For this study the target population consisted of female entrepreneurs in South Africa. The sample size of this study is the thirty five female entrepreneurs in South Africa who participated in the qualitative study via semi structures interviews. The sampling method follows the ideas of purposive sampling and the respondents were the female entrepreneurs. The purpose of the sampling approach was to produce a diversity of views from the female entrepreneurs. The data was acquired through semi structured interviews to explore and provide deeper understanding of South African female entrepreneurs.

Forty-one female entrepreneurs agreed to the research, but thirty-five female entrepreneurs were able to commit to the research process due to various constraints like illness, death in the family, fumigation at the business site and entrepreneurs not being available. The thirty-five were purposeful selected and interviewed across different sectors the researcher conducted 18 interviews face to face at the female entrepreneur's business, 11 through team's platform and 6 through zoom platform. In line with the phenomenological research tradition, in depth interviews were conducted using an interview guide that considered of a single grand tour questions but navigated through several closely related questions an example of the question *how, if at all does being female influence your business practices*. This approach was chosen because of its inherent capacity to enable the researcher to gain entrance into participants world in order to have full access to their experience. Each participant was allowed time to describe themselves and their experiences as a female entrepreneur in full without the researcher leading and interrupting them needlessly. Multiple themes emerged. the females described themselves as action oriented, creative problem solvers, relationship focussed, how they get to understand themselves and understand other females and participative. However, whenever the need arose, probing and clarifying questions were used from the hints and cued noticed during the interview to explore aspects of the lived experience much deeper for example *who are you* -identity, *what do you know* - experience or human capital and *who do you know* social capital. This approach permitted participants to describe their experiences freely until they felt they had exhausted their experiences. A

qualitative analytical content analysis was used. Qualitative content analysis is a process that uses findings, themes to analyse qualitative text data for subjective interpretation (Assarroudi et al., 2018). Participants' descriptions and perspectives on the social world are generated using this method. Participants' verbatim expressions support the descriptions (Willis et al., 2016). Data analysis began with a search for specific words expressed by participants, using a summative analysis to count and contextualise them, the researcher transcribed the interviews from recorded to textual data, the researcher read and reread the transcripts took notes while reading then uploaded to ATLAS ti. ATLAS Ti was used to do the search that appear to be critical to understanding the phenomenon in focus, using ATLAS ti, the researcher named the initial codes through the transcripts and listed the codes. The researcher listed the codes categories and classified the codes into themes, the researcher generated codes into themes. The researcher provided diagrams and an account of findings as presented on Figure 1. The researcher addressed credibility through prolonged engagement and debriefing to ensure the trust worthiness of qualitative research. The researcher further addressed the transferability of the study by describing the study in detail so one can evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to settings, situations, quantitatively and people. Lastly, the researcher included the reasons for theoretical, methodological choices throughout the entire study so that others can understand how and why female entrepreneurs in South Africa to ensure dependability of the study.

## FINDINGS

### Background of the Interviewees

Table 1 provides the background information of the entrepreneurs who participated in-depth interviews. The female entrepreneurs fall mainly in the economically active age groups, 36 to 45 (57%). Followed by the 26 to 35 years of age (20%), then 46 to 55 years old (11%), 56 to 65 years of age were 9%, and 18 to 25 years represented 3%. These results showed that a significant percentage of these female entrepreneurs were married (51%), single or divorced (40%), and widowed (9%). The results also indicate that all racial groups in South Africa were presented. The diverse racial backgrounds of these females in South Africa, as noted in the results of this study support the findings in the literature that business ownership or entrepreneurship by females is not limited by race. This reflects the demographic profile of South African female entrepreneurs' where Black (63%) are the majority, followed by White (23%), Indians (8%), and the coloured (3%). All the female entrepreneurs have at least a basic level of education. Those with only matric were six and those with diploma were also 6. Persons with bachelor's degree were 15 and master's degree 8. The majority, 14 female entrepreneurs, were from Gauteng Province, Western Cape, 7, Limpopo 3, Mpumalanga 3, Free State 2, Eastern Cape 2, Northern Cape 2, Northwest 1 and KwaZulu Natal 1. Information regarding the size of the business, and the size by the number of employees. Most of the companies are micro - fewer employees, less than six employees. They were 15 which represented 43%. Small businesses with less than 50 employees were 14 and represented 40% of the population. The medium businesses with less than 200 employees were five and represented 14%. Only one participant had a large business with 200 or more employee, this represented 1% of the population.

### Entrepreneurial Identity

The five themes were identified from the thirty-five female entrepreneurs' participants' lived experiences related to the investigation of female entrepreneurial identity. The interwoven nature of the themes reflects the female entrepreneurial identity see Figure 1. Each female entrepreneur had a diverse identity that articulated even in their business activities. Their identities are not fixed. They are constantly recreated in response to changing circumstances. The identities of female entrepreneurs are shaped by a variety of dynamics arising from their historical context and current lives, including their professional, private, institutional, community lives, social expectations, conventional norms and beliefs, and childhood experiences. The themes reflect the entrepreneurial identities of female entrepreneurs that the females used to interpret themselves. These themes address how female entrepreneurs characterise their role identity and what do females give up in their self-identity to increase entrepreneurial identity.

Table 1. Background of Female Entrepreneurs in South Africa

Characteristic	Item	Frequency
Race	Black	22
	White	6
	Coloured	1
	Indian	6
Age	18-25	1
	26-35	7
	36-45	20
	46-55	4
	56-65	3
Marital	Single	14
	Married	18
	Widowed	3
Province	Gauteng	13
	Mpumalanga	3
	Northwest	1
	Limpopo	3
	Free State	2
	Eastern Cape	2
	Northern Cape	2
	Western Cape	7
	KwaZulu Natal	1
Size of business	Micro (< 6 employees)	15
	Small (< 50 employees)	14
	Medium (< 200 employees)	5
	Large (> 200 employees)	1
Education Level	Matric	6
	Diploma	6
	Bachelor's degree	15
	Master's Degree	8

Source: Compiled by the Author, 2022

### Theme 1: Participative

The females expressed themselves as participative. The participative entrepreneur is associated with the urge to enhance public awareness and influence through sustainable products and services. It is an entrepreneurial identity that closely matches female entrepreneurs' fundamental principles. To interpret this, female entrepreneurs provided feedback and echoed the words of being involved in their businesses, being fully connected, sharing, and leading by example. They spoke highly on empowering others, motivating others, and coaching other females. *Thandi explained that she is participative because in whatever she does she encourages her employees to further their studies "I encouraged one of the employees to study, and she is finishing her bachelor's degree at the end of this year."*

### Theme 2: Role identity

The role of female entrepreneurship make up the second theme role. The female entrepreneur's central identities interacted with different identities throughout their lives. Sonia commented on role identity as her role is a mum-preneur *"I am a mumpreneur, thus describing myself and my business or work life. I use this term because it helps bring more context to the person I am. It gives you a snapshot of the life, background and what drives me"*. Harriet alluded role identity as being mum, wife, provider *"My life is infused by being a business owner, wife, leader provider, self-employed"*.

### Theme 3: Relationship-focused

The female entrepreneurs explained that having relationships helps them to enhance the entrepreneurial success. It brings the setting out of core rationale for their business, that is, positive outcomes which are associated with being collaborative to customers and employees. It has elevated them in the priorities of entrepreneurship and policymakers, it expands the latent resources base of the

entrepreneur which includes connections to potentially important players, provides resources, including finance and trustworthy employees, on amicably and rapidly agreed on terms. Relationship-focused allows them to learn, share knowledge and expertise, clustered knowledge interactions, and provide support and advice. Last, it provides them with structure and process, building credibility and trust for themselves and the new ventures.

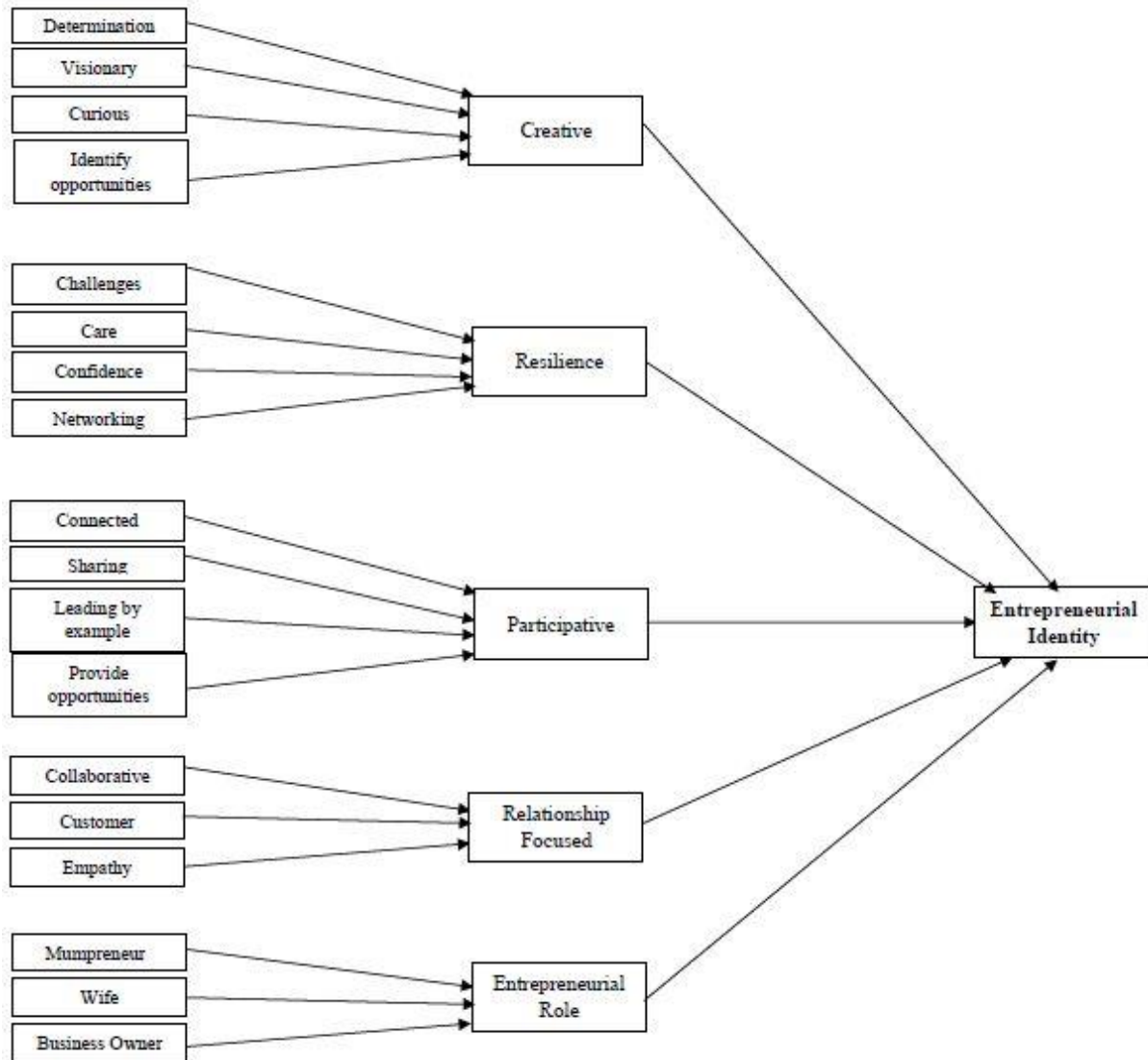


Figure 1. Entrepreneurial Identity Themes

Source: Researchers ATLAS.Ti output

#### *Theme 4: Resilient*

The fourth theme that emerged is resilience, from the interviews with female entrepreneurs, they started their businesses because they could not find employment. They considered starting a business, they faced several challenges as part of their journey. They had to seek ideas for providing for their families whilst running their business with many challenges. They believed that to be self-employed or to be an entrepreneur, one must have high residence and responsibility.

The women also spoke of the stress of running the business. The reality of carrying multiple identities appear to be expressed as resilient. Some of them articulated that from a young age, they were groomed to love themselves and to be strong when faced with challenges. Others shared about networks with other female entrepreneurs in similar positions or business types. This helped with them become resilient. There are indications that context and interactions with externalities may affect the



development of identity and resilience. Engaging in entrepreneurial activities, and as their entrepreneurial identities become more prominent in producing high levels of stress, they require resilience and interaction with a broader network.

This study has urged that through an exploration of identity work and the resilience work they engage more explicitly with the power struggles that they negotiate with, which contextualises their entrepreneurial experience and provide visibility of a heterogeneous view of the female entrepreneur. They use the insights of intersectionality and positionality to contextualise and highlight the power struggles understanding of identity and resilience within which entrepreneurship can be captured.

Most female entrepreneurs also expressed their resilience through acknowledging that being an entrepreneur means proving the purpose and impacting or changing many lives. They live with intensity, execute with passion, and lead by example. As much as they fall and then get up, they do so with more clarification because of their positive outlook in the future.

#### *Theme 5: Creative*

The participants expressed themselves as creative, being an entrepreneur entails taking chances when others are unwilling to take risks. Female entrepreneurs also echoed being action-oriented by further describing themselves as optimistic, always positive, and pursuing their ideas. The participants also describe themselves as determined. Joan stated, *"I'm a determined individual."*

## **DISCUSSION**

The questions one asks are how do female entrepreneurs characterise their role identity? and how do female entrepreneurs manage other identities, specifically their self-identity in relation to entrepreneurial role identity? As a result the study provided these questions to discover what the participants believe are their identities. Investigating role identities becomes even more difficult as some female entrepreneurs have to coordinate their roles as mothers, wives, sisters, partners, daughters in building and growing their ventures (Bruni et al., 2004; Byrne et al., 2019). The importance of identity as a mother, wife, and partner is about how they see themselves as entrepreneurs and consider family considerations in work decisions. Running a business can also affect the operation (Chasserio et al., 2014). This study adds evidence as participants recalled their experiences in childhood and connected them to their experiences as they grew up. It is vital to analyse the culture of power over faiths and practices that guide the different behaviour and, thus, their self-identity to comprehend the experiences of female entrepreneurs in these studies. The participants' lives and how they behaved, felt, thought, and constructed the world around them were linked with these practices and beliefs. Female entrepreneurs are also carrying this forward because they cannot only dismiss or shake it off at will.

The study revealed that female entrepreneurs have unique experiences in cultural life that influence their business actions. The adventures of female entrepreneurs are broader and more nuanced than merely being identified as a businessperson. Embedded entrepreneurial values, including intuition, customer happiness, and product quality, were evident in the females' beliefs and identities. These females surmounted the hypothesis that men's business context differs from the norm of entrepreneurship. Females develop coping mechanisms to manage the numerous responsibilities showing how their business operations are linked to their personal and social lives.

In a cultural context, the female entrepreneurs emphasised their entrepreneurial identities while emphasising other social identities relating to females, mothers, and girls' roles in the household. To a certain extent, the building of new identities is driven by the will to support their families and groups. There are opposing components of social identities, especially entrepreneurial identities, and traditional social identities of females (Hogg & Terry 2014). Social identity theory proved helpful in understanding the phenomena of female entrepreneurs' encounters with different identities. The use of the theory of social identity improves the understanding and knowledge of female entrepreneurs in the setting of a group (Brush et al., 2014). The following themes best reflect female entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial identities: participative, role, relationship-focused, resilient, and creative.

## CONCLUSION

The study adopted a phenomenological research approach to explore entrepreneurial identity as it is constructed cultural, social, and relationally. For most female entrepreneurs, their entrepreneurial identity was seen in their business challenges and how they overcame them. This study revealed that resilience is important because it helps female entrepreneurs overcome difficulties, resilience gives strength. The study allowed the researcher to gain valuable insight through respondent stories, demonstrating the differences and similarities of females' self-identity. Females can perceive this difference either at the personal level or business level. Female entrepreneurs also undertake an identity world process to craft a sense of self. Female entrepreneurial identity, contribute to our knowledge development of theory on entrepreneurial identity, and inclusivity of the discipline. The adoption of a phenomenological study approach proved inspirational and productive towards exploring the dynamics between identity structures should be viewed from a broad and inclusive approach. This is significant if considered in the background to this study. Entrepreneurship theory building and practice are not immune to the reordering of group and group affinity discourse from. Yet in academic milieu of disciplines, including entrepreneurship, traditional (or mainstream) scholarship seems to be stunted and playing second fiddle to these robust global if not universal developments. There seem to be lack of urgency, or failure to adequately acknowledge that social narratives, group self-identification, self-definition and identity are important in defining history and shaping the future just like any other underlying socio-cultural and economic forces.

Given that this research focused on female entrepreneurs in South Africa, recommendation future research should cover female corporate entrepreneurs because they also have multiple entrepreneurial identities the exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities like professionalism, the individual propensity of females (skills), confidence. This would strengthen our knowledge of female entrepreneurship in South Africa and aid policymakers and those who can help to develop female entrepreneurs' full potential. Females in other parts of the country, particularly rural areas, and townships in South Africa, must also be targeted. They are always forgotten as opportunity laden contributors to our economy. They contribute to the overall economy in significant ways, such as promotion and fostering job creation. Township businesses offer unique experiences and, more importantly, immediate accessibility to labour and customers. This study generated themes of entrepreneurial identity that should be further researched quantitatively to determine further understanding of the entrepreneurship such research should address the viability of improving entrepreneurs and developing other entrepreneurs in developing countries. Moreover, further research could also be carried out on the entrepreneurial identity on how it is constructed especially for other entrepreneurs who were not part and parcel of this study that is male entrepreneurs in South Africa given that entrepreneurship is a gendered phenomenon.

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