THE ROLE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES AND SOCIETAL PRESSURES IN

CREATING IMPOSTOR SYNDROME IN BLACK FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

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Department of Community Care and Counseling, Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the role of gender stereotypes and societal expectations in creating impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. The study used Bandura's self-efficacy theory as a foundational framework. Gender role theory was employed to examine the psychological and behavioral traits associated with different genders based on societal norms. Social role theory contributed to shaping the theoretical framework of this study. The research answered three key questions: (a) How do the lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs affected by impostor syndrome impact their business decision-making and overall business performance? (b) To what extent do gender stereotypes and societal pressures contribute to the development of impostor feelings among Black female entrepreneurs? and (c) What coping mechanisms or strategies do Black female entrepreneurs employ to manage or eliminate impostor syndrome? Data collection involved open-ended, semistructured, online, one-on-one interviews. The study revealed that Black female entrepreneurs often face significant challenges in navigating impostor syndrome, which profoundly impacts their decision-making processes and business performance. Future research should explore the efficacy of specific coping mechanisms in mitigating impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs, as well as examine the intersectionality of race, gender, and other identities in shaping experiences of impostor syndrome. Additionally, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term impact of impostor syndrome on business outcomes and identify effective intervention strategies to support Black female entrepreneurs in overcoming impostor feelings and achieving success in their ventures.

Keywords: Black female entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship, impostor syndrome, gender stereotypes, societal pressures, decision-making process, business performance

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The phenomenon of impostor syndrome has garnered significant attention in recent years, shedding light on the pervasive feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy experienced by individuals despite their evident achievements (Feenstra et al., 2020). The term impostor syndrome was initially coined as the term impostor phenomenon by Clance and Imes (1978). Although anyone can experience impostor syndrome, it is primarily identified in marginalized groups and in high-achieving women who constantly doubt their abilities, have difficulties internalizing their success, and believe they would be exposed as fraudulent (Clance & Imes, 1978). Despite evidence demonstrating the success of Black female entrepreneurs in a predominantly masculine industry, they continue to face challenges in recognizing themselves as entrepreneurs (Bravata et al., 2020). Furthermore, the misalignment surrounding their identity further contributes to the struggle Black female entrepreneurs face in identifying themselves as such (Ludovico, 2017).

This qualitative study explored the psychological phenomenon of impostor syndrome and its effects on Black female entrepreneurs, with a specific focus on the role of gender stereotypes and societal pressures in cultivating and perpetuating impostor feelings among this demographic. The study also described how the psychological effects of impostor syndrome have impacted the success and growth of businesses of Black female entrepreneurs and understood their perspectives and lived experiences. In general, research suggests that Black adults are at a higher risk of experiencing impostor syndrome due to social norms and expectations, negative stereotypes, and marginalization (Cokley et al., 2017). Notably, gender stereotypes, societal expectations, and internalized stereotypes are major contributing factors that cause Black adults to struggle with impostor syndrome (Cokley et al., 2017). Regarding Black female entrepreneurs,

research indicates that they encounter various challenges in both personal and professional domains, leading to their experience of impostor syndrome (Simon, 2021). Chapter 1 presents the background of the study and explores the philosophical assumptions, worldview, and paradigm that inform the researcher's approach to the research. The chapter also includes a review of the problem that was addressed throughout the research, the objectives and significance of the study, and the research questions that directed the inquiry.

Background

In the United States, women entrepreneurs have been rapidly growing in the last sixteen years, with a 59% growth increase in female businesses and an estimated 25% to 33% of businesses globally (Powell & Eddleston, 2013). Black females are the fastest-growing group of entrepreneurs, creating businesses at a rapid rate of 256% between 1997 and 2014 (Kilkenny, 2016). Studies show that although the growth of female entrepreneurs has made a substantial contribution to the national economy (Beriso, 2021; Said & Enslin, 2020), Black female entrepreneurs have experienced numerous challenges, including gender stereotypes, prejudices, and society's perception of entrepreneurship (Kilkenny, 2016). Moreover, Black female businesses have underperformed and experienced difficulties in business expansion compared to male businesses (Juma & Sequeira, 2017). Scholars have argued that government rules and regulations, a lack of education and training, and limited resources have also hindered the financial growth (Beriso, 2021) and expansion of black female businesses (Juma & Sequeira, 2017). Notably, the existence of societal stratification, which encompasses several factors such as race, socioeconomic level, financial resources, traditional norms, gender, and wealth, significantly hampers entrepreneurial opportunities, especially for women and minority groups (Shoma, 2019).

Women and minority groups who experience impostor syndrome attribute their performance to their competency because they believe that success is based on external factors such as luck or getting help from people, and setbacks are because of their inadequacy to do the job (Bravata et al., 2020). Despite the proof of their success and accomplishment, repeated exposure to stereotypes and societal expectations has caused Black females to have low self-esteem, doubt their abilities, and believe they must work twice as hard to accomplish their goals or pursue entrepreneurship. These emotional states are similar to impostor syndrome, where an individual doubts their abilities despite the evidence of their success (Ladge et al., 2019).

Notably, impostor syndrome is a significant contributing factor leading Black female entrepreneurs to experience low business performance (Beriso, 2021; Kilkenny, 2016). Impostor syndrome can hinder individuals from taking risks to improve and develop both themselves and their businesses (Kumar, 2013). Due to external factors such as stereotypes and the pressure to be successful, Black female entrepreneurs may be afraid to take risks in their businesses because of the fear of failure. Impostor syndrome can cause an individual to feel like a fraud and constantly question their ability to be successful in life (Beriso, 2021). The current research used the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) to measure and assess the components of the phenomenon, such as self-doubt and being successful by luck or chance (Mak et al., 2019). The author defined CIPS as a 20-item instrument researchers frequently use to measure and acknowledge the fear of assessment and others' feelings of being less capable than their peers (Mak et al., 2019).

Historical Context

Throughout history, women have actively participated in various entrepreneurial activities, often operating within the confines of established gender norms and expectations

(Bullough et al., 2022). In ancient times, women actively participated in commercial activities, arts and crafts, and small-scale businesses (Thomas, 2020); however, societal norms and legal restrictions limited their ability to participate openly in economic activities. The emergence of the Industrial Revolution provided new opportunities for women in business to engage in business activities, with a particular emphasis on industries such as textile manufacturing and retail (Berg & Hudson, 1992). However, they often encountered prejudice based on gender and had limited opportunities to access resources and education (Bullough et al., 2022).

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, there was a significant surge in the suffrage movement, which aimed to promote women's rights, including several aspects such as economic autonomy (McCammon & Campbell, 2001; Steinem, 2019). The expansion of entrepreneurial endeavors coincided with the increased participation of women in the workforce and their attainment of voting rights during World War I (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a resurgence of conventional gender norms, characterized by a significant number of women exiting the labor field to prioritize the needs of their families (Waylen, 1994). For female entrepreneurs, impostor syndrome became more pronounced due to prevailing societal norms that often doubt their abilities outside the confines of the domestic realm (Bravata et al., 2020). However, the feminist movement emerged as a response, challenging these traditional gender norms and advocating for women's active participation in professional pursuits and entrepreneurial endeavors (Swirsky & Angelone, 2016).

Kamberidou (2020) observed a notable increase in female entrepreneurs who successfully overcome obstacles in various male-dominated industries. Despite this transition, impostor syndrome has persisted as a significant challenge for several female entrepreneurs who encountered male-dominated sectors and struggled with self-doubt (Eddleston et al., 2020).

Research shows that following the abolition of slavery, significant social, economic, and political consequences emerged where Black females were subjected to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes within the dominant American society (Ashley, 2014; Opara, 2018). One prevalent stereotype is the myth of the angry Black woman, which portrays these women as displaying traits such as aggression, anger, loudness, irrationality, domineering behavior, hostility, and lack of knowledge without any apparent cause (Ashley, 2014; Opara, 2018). Another stereotype that is common in society that is placed on Black females is the strong Black woman label (Godbolt et al., 2022). This stereotype is characterized by the fortitude shown by Black women, including both physical and emotional work, which they are expected to do due to their experiences as victims of oppression and prejudice. Generally, Black females are confronted with a societal expectation to demonstrate strength, compelling them to behave in a way that showcases their resilience and capacity to work well even in demanding circumstances (Godbolt et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the emergence of several unfavorable attributes and stereotypes associated with the angry Black woman and the strong Black woman attributed to external pressures has resulted in emotional and psychological discomfort (Collins, 2004; Grollman, 2012; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Social Context

This study uncovered the nuanced interplay between gender stereotypes, societal pressures, and impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. By investigating the psychological and sociocultural factors contributing to the development and persistence of impostor feelings, the researcher understood the mechanisms through which these forces shape Black female entrepreneurs' experiences. Black female entrepreneurs represent a unique subgroup facing distinct challenges and opportunities within entrepreneurship (Jackson &

Sanyal, 2019). One psychological phenomenon that significantly affects their success as entrepreneurs is impostor syndrome. As noted, impostor syndrome is a psychological pattern in which individuals doubt their accomplishments and fear being exposed as frauds (Clance & Imes, 1978). Stereotypes and societal expectations about Black females can contribute to heightened feelings of fear. The pressure to defy stereotypes and prove competence in the face of bias can exacerbate impostor syndrome (Bravata et al., 2020; Eddleston et al., 2020).

Studies show that gender stereotypes, often reinforced by societal pressures, are pivotal in shaping individuals' perceptions of themselves and their abilities (Cokley et al., 2015, 2017). These stereotypes dictate what is considered "appropriate" behavior, roles, and accomplishments for women, contributing to a distorted self-perception among women entrepreneurs. The endeavor to conform to these rigid norms while simultaneously pursuing entrepreneurial goals can lead to feelings of incongruence and self-doubt (Bernard et al., 2018; Cokley et al., 2015; 2017). Societal pressures, including media portrayals, cultural norms, and institutional biases, further contribute to the impostor phenomenon (Peteet et al., 2015). This relentless comparison to idealized notions of success, coupled with the weight of expectations to excel in traditionally male-dominated fields, creates a fertile ground for impostor feelings to take root.

Theoretical Context

The framework that served to advance this study was the four predictors of Bandura's (1986) self-efficacy theory: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, Constantinople and Anne's (1973) gender role theory, which examines the psychological and behavioral traits associated with different genders based on societal norms, and Eagly and Wood's (1999) social role theory, which states that the roles and tasks that are assigned to male and female shape their identities. To analyze the experiences of Black female entrepreneurs and

evaluate the effect of impostor syndrome on their overall business performance, the four predictors from Bandura's self-efficacy theory and the concepts from gender role and social role theories were used as a framework for the participant descriptions. Each experience of Black female entrepreneurs was categorized into one of four categories of Bandura's theory. For example, when classifying experiences, the researcher considered their influence on self-efficacy and self-perception and how Black female entrepreneurs view their experiences with impostor syndrome, their perception of themselves and others in their environment, and how they operate their businesses.

<p style="text-align:center">Situation to Self</p>

As a Black female entrepreneur for the past eight years, impostor syndrome is particularly relevant to my personal and professional experiences. Having originated from a cultural and societal background that places significance on adhering to conventional gender norms, I have encountered several social and cultural obstacles that hindered my entrepreneurial progress. As a result of encountering barriers and certain occurrences, I experienced impostor syndrome. Therefore, I am interested in gaining insights from Black female entrepreneurs on their perspectives and professional encounters with impostor syndrome and how it influences their overall business performance. Although I previously experienced impostor syndrome, I have overcome this obstacle.

The presence of individual experiences and prejudices regarding this issue has challenged me to maintain objectivity and impartiality. Nevertheless, I exerted maximum effort by diligently focusing on the intricacies and narratives shared by the individuals who have encountered similar experiences. Researchers have argued that a thorough comprehension of the phenomenon of impostor syndrome can only be achieved by incorporating the firsthand experiences of the

participants and conducting a rigorous analysis of the collected data (Bravata et al., 2019; Feenstra et al., 2020). The primary objective of this research was to gain comprehensive knowledge of impostor syndrome in Black female entrepreneurs as it relates to their business performance. The goal was to communicate the findings of this study authentically and straightforwardly. In the capacity of a researcher, I performed those responsibilities.

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that qualitative research originates from the researcher's perspective, is perceived through a specific theoretical framework, is directed by well-defined research questions, and is rooted in established philosophical assumptions. To comprehensively understand the phenomenon in this research, it is imperative to identify and describe the fundamental components that shaped my perspective, worldview, theoretical framework, guiding questions, and underlying assumptions, which were consistently maintained throughout the study. I upheld the ontological and axiological assumptions throughout the study. The research was based on the ontological premise that every participant would exhibit evidence of different realities, observing their experience within the phenomenon as distinct (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers using a phenomenological approach document the participants' perspectives as they interpret their experiences within different realities (Moustakas, 1994). The primary focus of this research was to identify the common themes among each participant, specifically as they articulated them individually.

Another assumption taken into account pertained to my axiological assumptions. It is necessary that I identify, understand, and openly acknowledge my own beliefs and their impact on the study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers acknowledge the presence of values in their study, explicitly disclose their personal beliefs and biases, and the inherent value of the data collected from the field. As a Christian, the study will be conducted from a Christian

perspective. An essential element of the phenomenon being examined is the Christian worldview and thoughts about impostor syndrome. Christianity teaches that every individual is created in the image of God and has inherent value and worth. This belief can be empowering for Black female entrepreneurs, affirming their identity and purpose beyond societal roles and stereotypes. It encourages them to pursue their goals and dreams with confidence and faith. The combined perspectives of my own experience and the collective experiences of Black female entrepreneurs can influence the interpretative process in the analytical phase of research.

After disclosing my personal background and philosophical underpinnings in relation to the study, I employed social constructivism as the interpretative paradigm. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the framework of social constructivism directs researchers to investigate and examine how people and communities collaboratively construct their perceptions of reality using various social processes. This entails examining the significance, ideologies, and understandings that people attach to various events and how their social, cultural, and historical backgrounds influence these interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hence, how Black female entrepreneurs perceive and make sense of their experiences with impostor syndrome may be seen as a deliberate process of crafting personal interpretations of their own reality. The acquisition of knowledge, albeit inherently social, plays a significant role in shaping the lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs and their narratives. The study used a Christian constructivist worldview, in conjunction with the selected theoretical framework, to analyze the portrayals of Black female entrepreneurs lived experiences with impostor syndrome.

Problem Statement

The problem is that despite the growing acknowledgment of the importance of diversity and inclusion in entrepreneurship, Black females who are in entrepreneurial positions have

experienced external factors such as gender stereotypes and societal pressures, which contribute to their experiences with impostor syndrome. In addition, there exists a critical gap in empirical research addressing the nuanced lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs grappling with impostor syndrome due to gender stereotypes and societal pressures. In general, there is a lack of scholarly research on the perspectives of Black female entrepreneurs.

Black female entrepreneurs encounter several societal hurdles, including race and gender norms and expectations, which have a profound influence on their business performance and self-esteem. This influence often leads to self-doubt despite the presence of tangible evidence portraying their achievements and competence (Bullough et al., 2022). Although the implementation of governmental systems and laws aimed at mitigating gender biases is underway in some countries, Black females continue to encounter discriminatory practices in entrepreneurship (Conley & Bilimoria, 2021). According to Modarresi et al. (2016), even though women's businesses have had a growth rate three times higher than men's businesses, most of these businesses have not yet undergone expansion. Researchers have underscored concerns, suggesting that impostors' fears stem from gender stereotypes, a lack of role models, and limited resources (Abrams et al., 2014; Modarresi et al., 2016). The absence of detailed empirical studies exploring this specific intersection and its impact on Black female entrepreneurs impedes understanding the root causes and potential remedies for this pervasive issue. Bridging this gap is necessary to develop targeted interventions and support systems to empower Black female entrepreneurs, enabling them to overcome impostor syndrome and achieve their full potential in the entrepreneurial world.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the role of gender stereotypes and societal pressures in creating impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. Exploring the lived experiences, perceptions, and nuanced dynamics shaping their entrepreneurial journeys contributed valuable insights into the complex factors influencing impostor syndrome within this demographic. Using a qualitative approach allowed for a deepened understanding of the unique challenges Black female entrepreneurs face, thereby informing potential interventions and support mechanisms to foster their success in the entrepreneurial landscape.

Significance of the Study

The study filled the existing gaps in the research pertaining to the views of gender stereotypes and societal pressures among Black female entrepreneurs. The research ultimately examined the applied and practical importance of impostor syndrome on the decision-making processes of Black female entrepreneurs, as well as the subsequent effects of these behaviors on their business performance.

Empirical

Studies have shown that impostor syndrome significantly influences an individual mental and cognitive ability, causing anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Gibson-Beverly & Schwartz, 2008; Kananifar et al., 2015; Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016). Furthermore, constantly questioning one's ability results in decision paralysis or a tendency to seek external validation excessively (Bravata et al., 2022). The study has empirical relevance as it contributes to the existing body of research on the perspectives of impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs, specifically in relation to gender stereotypes and societal pressures. Based on the literature, racial discrimination, gender stereotypes, and social norms are external factors that

contribute to creating impostor syndrome in Black female entrepreneurs (Collin et al., 2020;

Conley & Bilimoria, 2021). The study will contribute to advancing inclusive policies and

initiatives by examining the experiences of Black female entrepreneurs concerning impostor

syndrome. Organizations and society can use the knowledge gained to develop initiatives

designed to address gender stereotypes and traditional norms, therefore fostering a more

inclusive environment conducive to the success of aspiring Black female entrepreneurs. Conley

and Bilimoria (2021), stated that gender stereotypes and biases are obstacles to the growth of

Black female businesses.

Theoretical

In this study, three theories serve as the conceptual framework for understanding the

lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs in relation to impostor syndrome, specifically in

the context of gender stereotypes and societal expectations. This approach will contribute to a

deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics between cognitive processes, social comparisons,

self-concept, and beliefs about a person's abilities. Future researchers can use these theories to

enhance their descriptions of such experiences. According to Bandura (1977), there is a direct

correlation between self-efficacy and behavioral change. Individuals with a high level of self-

efficacy tend to have a positive self-concept and a deeper sense of belief in their abilities

(Bandura, 1977).

Practical

The practical applications of this study have paramount relevance. This practical

implementation aims to enhance awareness about unconscious preconceptions and stereotypes

that may influence the perception and evaluation of Black female entrepreneurs. Promoting the

precise and favorable portrayal of Black female entrepreneurs within communities is essential to

challenge stereotypes and highlight a wide range of successful narratives (Kamberidou, 2020).

Through the successful execution of these approaches and the cultivation of a supporting

ecosystem, this practical approach can make a meaningful contribution towards the

empowerment of Black female entrepreneurs, the mitigation of impostor syndrome, and the

cultivation of a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial environment.

Research Questions

The main objective of this research was to explore the role of gender stereotypes and

social pressures faced by black female entrepreneurs, which subsequently leads to their

experience of impostor syndrome. This study answered the following research questions.

RQ1: How do the lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs affected by impostor

syndrome impact their business decision-making and overall business performance?

Individuals with impostor syndrome experience feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and a

persistent fear of being "found out" as not as competent (Clance & Imes, 1978). These feelings

can erode confidence, making it difficult for individuals to believe in their capabilities and

competencies, where the lack of self-assurance can hinder their decision-making and ability to

seize opportunities, ultimately affecting business performance (Clance & Imes, 1978).

RQ2: To what extent do gender stereotypes and societal pressures contribute to the

development of impostor feelings among Black female entrepreneurs?

The focus of this question was to help the researcher understand the challenges and

stereotypes black female entrepreneurs face in various domains, including business, academia,

and society at large (Conley & Bilimoria, 2021). The interviews with Black female entrepreneurs

experiencing impostor syndrome unveiled insights into their lived experiences.

RQ3: What coping mechanisms or strategies do Black female entrepreneurs employ to manage or eliminate impostor syndrome?

The goal of this question was to find out the coping strategies Black female entrepreneurs use to manage or eliminate impostor syndrome. While individual experiences may vary, recognizing their unique experiences and perspectives is critical for creating supportive environments, developing tailored interventions, and fostering dialogue to address impostor syndrome in women entrepreneurs (Bullough et al., 2022).

Definitions

1. *Black female entrepreneur* - an African or African diasporic woman who establishes, operates, and manages a business (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019).

2. *Business performance* - the measurable outcomes and results achieved & by a company in its operations, activities, and overall functioning (Haršányová et al., 2016).

3. *Decision-making* - the cognitive process of choosing a course of action or selecting a solution from among multiple alternatives (Bruch & Feinberg, 2017).

4. *Entrepreneurship* - the process of identifying opportunities, marshaling resources, and creating value through innovation, often with the goal of starting or expanding a business (Casson & Casson, 2014).

5. *Gender role theory* - an approach to sociology and psychology that emphasizes how social norms and expectations affect gender-based behavior, roles, and responsibilities (Constantinople, 1973).

6. *Gender stereotypes* - culturally ingrained beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and assumptions regarding gender-appropriate roles, behaviors, and traits (Constantinople, 1973).

7. *Impostor syndrome* - also known as impostorism, is a psychological pattern in which a successful person has self-doubt and fears of being revealed as a fraud (Clance & Imes, 1978).

8. *Psychological response* - the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions that individuals exhibit in response to various stimuli, situations, or experiences (Bruch & Feinberg, 2017).

9. *Self-efficacy* - a person's beliefs about their own ability to produce certain desired results (Bandura, 1994).

10. *Social role theory* - a psychological and sociological perspective on how social norms and expectations create stereotypes and behaviors (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

11. *Societal pressures* - external influences, expectations, and norms imposed by a society or community on individuals (Bullough et al., 2022).

12. *Stereotypes* - generalized and simplified assumptions about a group based on race, gender, age, nationality, or other traits (Zhang et al., 2022).

13. *Woman entrepreneur* - a female who takes the initiative to start, organize, and manage a business venture (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019).

Summary

Entrepreneurship has traditionally been linked to a masculine notion of success, aligned with societal norms that leave women entrepreneurs questioning their legitimacy as "real" entrepreneurs (Bullough et al., 2022). Notably, gender stereotypes and societal expectations emerge as significant contributors to the development of impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs (Collin et al., 2020). Throughout history, a significant surge in women's engagement in entrepreneurship has led to a noteworthy era of economic and social dynamism

(Bullough et al., 2022). Despite these advancements, the prevalence of impostor syndrome introduces a nuanced perspective, indicating that, even in the face of undeniable accomplishments, women entrepreneurs frequently contend with doubts regarding their competence and qualifications (Eddleston et al., 2020). The emergence and persistence of impostor syndrome among women entrepreneurs can be attributed, in part, to deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and societal expectations (Cokley et al., 2015, 2017; Ladge et al., 2019).

This chapter introduced the subject under research and the study's objectives in relation to the perspectives of Black female entrepreneurs. Through a phenomenological qualitative research method, this study addressed the experiences, narratives, and coping mechanisms of Black female entrepreneurs who have encountered impostor syndrome and how it impacted their business decision-making and performance. By understanding how gender stereotypes and societal pressures impact their self-perception and entrepreneurial journey, the researcher can lay the foundation for targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate or alleviate impostor syndrome. Moreover, understanding and providing a thorough overview of these perceptions would promote accurate and favorable portrayals of Black female entrepreneurs in the media and the communities. This, in turn, would serve to challenge prevailing stereotypes and present a wide range of success narratives while also advocating for policies and initiatives that foster gender equality, diversity, and inclusion within the realm of entrepreneurship. Ensuring equitable access to opportunities, resources, and funding makes it possible to address the disparities Black females face in this field. Overall, this research highlighted the fundamental nature of the experience of Black female entrepreneurs grappling with impostor syndrome.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Entrepreneurship plays a significant role in today's economy by lowering the unemployment rate, creating jobs, alleviating poverty, and allowing individuals to express their creativity and innovation and feel a sense of accomplishment. Female entrepreneurs represent the fastest-growing category of entrepreneurs, garnering recent attention from numerous researchers (Cardella et al., 2020). Although female-operated businesses have grown three times faster than men's, most have yet to expand, which researchers have contended is a cause for concern (Modarresi et al., 2016). Additionally, many female entrepreneurs have never experienced business growth since the startup of their businesses. Some scholars (Azmi, 2017; Muhammad et al., 2017) have argued that the lack of business growth is because of the type of businesses women entrepreneurs own, such as service-based businesses, and a lack of business skills and risk-taking, while others have contended that it is due to gender discrimination, impostors' fears, and a lack of role models, and financial resources (Batool & Ullah, 2017; Modarresi et al., 2016; Roomie et al., 2018; Wang, 2019). For women, the critical factor in growing and developing their business is the difference in growth ambition.

Even though women comprise half of the global population, they have encountered numerous challenges regarding impostor fears, gender roles, and gender equality (Bullough et al., 2021). These challenges have impacted their self-worth, leading to self-doubt, even in the presence of tangible evidence showing their accomplishments and capabilities to complete tasks successfully. In some countries, the government implements systems and policies to eliminate gender biases; however, women still face discrimination when it comes to entrepreneurship, especially in developing countries (Conley & Bilimoria, 2021). One major issue for women

entrepreneurs is getting business loans, which hinders the growth and development of female businesses. Khan et al. (2021) reported that female entrepreneurs are less likely to get business loans compared to male entrepreneurs, not only because of a lack of formal requirements but also because of how loan officers perceive them.

Despite the various obstacles, entrepreneurship enhances financial freedom for women and boosts their confidence. Women entrepreneurs start, manage, and operate businesses by recognizing opportunities to develop and successfully grow their businesses (Balachandra et al., 2019). Moreover, the participation of women in entrepreneurship has decreased the unemployment rate and increased the confidence of stay-at-home mothers and those employed to pursue a career in entrepreneurship (Balachandra et al., 2019). On both national and global scales, there has been a substantial increase in the number of female entrepreneurs (Agarwal & Lenka, 2016). The growing phenomenon of women taking control of their personal and professional lives is reflected in the rising number of women entering entrepreneurship (Bianco et al., 2017). Women's entrepreneurship has been a growing phenomenon and is recognized as having a significant impact on all economies (Beriso, 2021). Women's involvement in entrepreneurial activities has played a pivotal role in a country's economic expansion; it is considered a key focus for financial growth, emphasizing the need for more women to actively participate in these operations (Beriso, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura developed the social learning theory (SLT) in the 1960s through extensive research and scholarly contributions (Gibson, 2004). Bandura (1977) eventually released the main book on the subject, titled Social Learning Theory. Bandura proposed that people acquire novel knowledge and replicate actions via observation, imitation, and modeling.

In 1986, Bandura expanded his conceptualization, leading to the rebranding of SLT as social cognitive theory (SCT), which was firmly rooted in the paradigm of reciprocal determinism (LaMorte, 2016). The social cognitive theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) posits that belief in one's capabilities is pivotal, focusing on an individual's assessment of their cognitive and physical capacities. Furthermore, this change in perspective recognizes that behavior is influenced by and influences three hypothesized factors: behavioral, cognitive, and environmental (Bandura, 1986). Bandura's acknowledgment that these characteristics are key determinants of personal success led to the coining of the term "self-efficacy" to denote a belief in one's capacity for personal success (Bandura, 1986).

Self-Efficacy

In the context of Black female entrepreneurs with impostor syndrome, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy takes on added significance. Self-efficacy refers to people's beliefs about their competence to accomplish desired outcomes (Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura (1986), an individual's self-efficacy influences their approach toward goals or obstacles. Bandura also attributed specific characteristics and standards to individuals who exhibited elevated levels of self-efficacy. These individuals perceive challenges as opportunities to be accomplished, develop interest through active engagement, demonstrate a strong dedication to task completion, and exhibit a notable degree of persistence in the presence of obstacles. Consequently, individuals with a strong belief in their capabilities are more likely to achieve success (Bandura, 1986).

Conversely, Bandura (1994) attributed counter-norms to those characterized by low self-efficacy. This understanding of self-efficacy aligns with the study's exploration of how beliefs in one's capabilities may influence the experiences and outcomes of Black female entrepreneurs with impostor syndrome. Moreover, the pervasive influence of Bandura's self-efficacy theory in

the social sciences underscores its relevance and applicability to the study's focus on understanding and addressing impostor syndrome in this specific demographic (Huebner et al., 2008).

Female Entrepreneurs and Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1997) introduced a concept of social learning encompassing the notion of self-efficacy. As defined by Bandura, self-efficacy reflects an individual's belief in their capacity to execute and succeed in any task effectively. This concept delves into the individual's tenacity, resilience, and cognitive processes that can either enhance or diminish their self-perception (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy has been widely recognized as an essential factor in evaluating women's decision-making intentions (Shinnar et al., 2014) and entrepreneurial results (Bulanova et al., 2016). Bandura (1986) asserted that perceived self-efficacy is the most influential factor in determining a profession. It has been argued that individuals with high efficacy are inclined to cognitively perceive ambiguous and challenging situations as attainable challenges (Bandura, 1977).

According to Chandler and Jansen (1992), self-reported abilities significantly predict entrepreneurial achievement. Therefore, a possible approach to enhancing the participation of women in the establishment of new businesses within sectors that are mostly considered male-dominated and experiencing expansion is to increase their self-efficacy in pursuing such endeavors. Using the theoretical framework of Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1986), which states individuals develop their sense of self through observing, evaluating, and comparing their abilities and accomplishments to others, the researcher seeks to understand the underlying factors that contribute to the feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt in Black female entrepreneurs.

Moreover, new and aspiring female entrepreneurs often engage in vicarious learning and social influence by drawing inspiration from both direct and indirect role models (Bloemen-Bekx et al., 2019). It is important to acknowledge the influential role of role models, especially within familial sources where the entrepreneurial parents of girls serve as inspiration and support. The impact of role models extends to shaping a woman's perception of her own entrepreneurial capabilities, influencing her inclination towards entrepreneurship (Bullough et al., 2022). Furthermore, the effect of role models extends to a woman's identification as a female entrepreneur (Hytti et al., 2017). For female entrepreneurs grappling with impostor syndrome and engaging in constant comparisons with others perceived as more competent (Quevedo, 2021), there is a pressing need for a deeper understanding of the social cognitive processes at play. This study has the potential to advance theory by illuminating these processes and aiding Black female entrepreneurs in developing more realistic and accurate beliefs about themselves, their abilities, and their accomplishments.

Gender Role Theory

Constantinople (1973) created a theoretical framework that examined gender similarities. Within this theoretical framework, the researchers posited the notion that men and women can be seen as distinct structures instead of placing them at two opposing ends of a spectrum. According to gender role theory, individuals have certain beliefs and expectations regarding the common psychological and behavioral traits associated with different genders (Eagly, 1997). Gender roles refer to the societal expectations and norms about behaviors and attitudes seen as fitting or permissible depending on an individual's biological or supposed sex. Expanding upon this viewpoint, Bem (1974) developed the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) to acknowledge the potential coexistence of masculine and feminine traits within individuals. Bem's perspectives

were extensively used in subsequent scholarly investigations (Henry & Steiger, 2022; Stieger et al., 2014). Existing literature shows that individuals who identify as males, regardless of their expression of masculine or feminine traits, are often associated with possessing psychological attributes such as self-concept and self-esteem that are conducive to assuming leadership roles (Kent & Moss, 1994; McCabe et al., 2006). The gender theory posits that there are traits that men and women possess that dictate their attitude and behavior, which are appropriate for them on a personal and professional level (Ladge et al., 2019). Exploring how gender theories shape perceptions and expectations can contribute to understanding the complexities faced by Black female entrepreneurs with impostor syndrome.

Women Entrepreneurs and Gender Role

Drydakis et al. (2018) discovered a positive association between the exhibition of male personality characteristics in women and their level of competitiveness compared to women who show feminine characteristics. In such circumstances, women may need to embrace a conventionally "masculine" approach in business, characterized by aggressiveness, assertiveness, and sometimes harshness. The theory of gender roles states that when genders are categorized, people seek cognitive consistency with those from their gender group to display behaviors associated with their gender (Ladge et al., 2019). Additionally, some traits are associated with one gender more than others (Bullough et al., 2022). Therefore, gender identity is a vital component in predicting the traits of entrepreneurs based on women's definition of entrepreneurship (Ladge et al., 2019).

Bianco et al. (2017) argued that some women pursued entrepreneurship to contest traditional gender roles since entrepreneurship was initially associated with men. However, other scholars have argued that women pursue entrepreneurship to seek independence and regeneration

of gender roles (Bianco et al., 2017; Bullough et al., 2022). A study conducted in Iran found that women pursue entrepreneurship to achieve their goals of being independent, being recognized, proving their competence, and helping create jobs to help eliminate poverty (Modarresi et al., 2016). Despite demonstrating competence as successful entrepreneurs, women tend to downplay their potential and accomplishments by comparing themselves to male entrepreneurs (Eddleston et al., 2020). This tendency arises from a self-perception that views entrepreneurship as reserved for those who have achieved notable success in business (Ladge et al., 2019). Nevertheless, female entrepreneurs who have succeeded uphold the belief that maintaining authenticity and discovering one's perspective are crucial factors in surpassing predetermined stereotypes.

Moreover, female entrepreneurs can potentially create change in aspiring female entrepreneurs and women in their communities by increasing gender equality, which can emancipate and empower women (Bianco et al., 2017). Historically, male entrepreneurs have been the model for entrepreneurship because of their characteristic traits of being a leader, having ambition, taking risks, and having an aggressive personality (Bullough et al., 2022; Eddleston et al., 2016). This type of mindset contributed to gender stereotypes. Male entrepreneurs were seen as successful trailblazers, and female entrepreneurs were not taken seriously because their businesses were seen as unprofitable hobbies or part-time businesses (Bullough et al., 2022; Ladge et al., 2019).

Furthermore, social and cultural biases, difficulties accessing loans due to discrimination, and family problems contribute to women questioning their ability to be entrepreneurs, even to the point of compromising and limiting themselves (Eddleston et al., 2020). Although some female entrepreneurs want to overcome these barriers and obstacles, they doubt their capabilities and see themselves as less than male entrepreneurs (Ladge et al., 2019).

These male-female stereotypes have caused women entrepreneurs to feel inadequate and influenced their entrepreneurial identity, significantly impacting their business growth (Gupta et al., 2019; Wilson, 2016). While studies may vary in their findings on gender differences in impostor feelings, Cokley et al. (2015) contended that women often experience impostor syndrome due to gender stereotypes despite some studies not consistently highlighting these differences (Bravata et al., 2019). In addition, Ladge et al. (2019) argued that women entrepreneurs intentionally limit the growth of their businesses, although the reasons for this phenomenon remain unclear.

Social Role Theory

Eagly and Wood (1999) introduced the theoretical framework known as sociocultural theory, also referred to as social structure theory or social role theory. This theory was developed as a framework for understanding the behavior shown by individuals of different genders, as well as the stereotypes, attitudes, and ideologies associated with sex and gender. Within this theoretical framework, it is posited that social roles contribute to specific societal expectations and standards that individuals are anticipated to conform to based on their gender (Eagly, 1997). Consequently, this societal influence contributes to forming distinct patterns of behavior, attitudes, and characteristics often associated with being either male or female. Eagly's (1997) social role theory attributes the emergence of common gender stereotypes to the prevalent gender division of labor within a society (Gupta et al., 2019). The allocation of distinct tasks and responsibilities to men and women by societies influences their behavior and contributes to shaping their identities (Eagly & Sczesny, 2019).

Women Entrepreneurs and Social Role Theory

In contemporary Western countries, a notable disparity exists in the engagement of men and women in prestigious and influential paid jobs, with men predominantly occupying such posts. Numerous studies have found that societal expectations and norms around gender roles influence the experiences, opportunities, and challenges women face in the entrepreneurial context (Bullough et al., 2022; Strawser et al., 2021; Wilson, 2016). Particularly, Black female entrepreneurs have faced stereotypical expectations related to their race, gender role, and education, which can impact how others perceive them in the business world (Bullough et al., 2022). These stereotypes include notions about leadership capabilities, competence, or the types of businesses they are expected to pursue (Hechavarria et al., 2019). This study employed social role theory to better understand how societal expectations, norms, and roles may shape Black female entrepreneurs' lived experiences in the business world.

Although social roles have contributed to the development of an individual's identity (Eagly, 1997), entrepreneurship can empower women to establish identities outside of traditional roles, contributing to changing perceptions of women's capabilities (Bullough et al., 2022). Moreover, the inclusion of social role theory highlights the significance of social hierarchy by emphasizing that the roles fulfilled by individuals of different genders often exhibit differences in the degree of societal acceptance they receive (Eagly, 1997). Regardless of the chosen theoretical framework for elucidating gender disparities and traditional norms, the concept of the "road" of inequality assumes a significant position (Rucker et al., 2018). Efforts to challenge stereotypes, promote diversity and inclusion, and create equal opportunities for Black female entrepreneurs contribute to evolving social roles in the business world (Sundermeier et al., 2020).

Related Literature

Within the sphere of entrepreneurship, the presence of gender stereotypes and social

pressures creates a complex web of dynamics that significantly impact the experiences of Black

female entrepreneurs (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019). This study explored the influences of gender

stereotypes and societal pressures on the creation of impostor syndrome among Black women in

entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the objective of this study was to thoroughly analyze current

academic research, providing insight into how stereotypes based on gender play a role in the

emergence and manifestation of impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. Through

the integration of empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and personal narratives, this study

provided a detailed understanding of the complex dynamics involved. Ultimately, it sought to

contribute to a more comprehensive comprehension of the challenges experienced by this

demographic within the field of entrepreneurship. To understand the variables that contribute to

the difficulties faced by Black female entrepreneurs, it is necessary to examine the historical

elements that give rise to these obstacles in the present day.

History of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has been defined as the process of identifying opportunities, marshaling

resources, and creating value through innovation, often with the goal of starting or expanding a

business (Casson & Casson, 2014). The history of entrepreneurship is long and diverse, spanning

centuries and evolving in response to changing economic, social, and technological conditions

(Carlen, 2016). The concept can be traced back to ancient times when individuals would take

risks and launch new ventures in trades, exploration, and craftsmanship (Chandra, 2018).

Throughout history, different cultures and societies have celebrated and fostered entrepreneurial

activities, such as providing support and resources to individuals who want to start a business

(Chandra, 2018). In the 20th century, there was a rise of entrepreneur icons such as Henry Ford,

Steve Jobs, and Thomas Edison, who revolutionized industries and changed the world (Chandra,

2018). Today, entrepreneurs play a vital role in the growth of the economy and innovation and

offer individuals the opportunity to pursue their passions, create jobs, and positively impact

society.

Entrepreneurship is used for economic development by creating jobs, generating revenue,

increasing competition and productivity, building wealth, and eliminating poverty and

unemployment in developed and emerging countries (Beriso, 2021). Entrepreneurs use their

skills, time, creativity, leadership, and innovation to help them recognize business opportunities,

take risks, and organize and manage resources to become profitable and sustainable businesses

(Beriso, 2021). Businesses play a critical role in a country's economy and development and

contribute to an individual's personal development and happiness. As researchers track the

development of entrepreneurship research, it is vital to understand how entrepreneurship was

established and its validity and to acknowledge potential alternative histories, opportunities, and

contributions.

Entrepreneurial research remains a pivotal subject, offering significant opportunities for

further advancement (Wadhwani et al., 2020). Its rapid growth can be traced back to the

foundational contributions of eminent economists, including Cantillon (2017), Smith (2002),

Knight (1921), and Schumpeter (2021). These scholars laid the groundwork by providing

definitions of entrepreneurship and elucidating its links to innovation, creativity, economic

growth, and uncertainty (Chandra, 2018). Although entrepreneurship research had a period of

slow development over many decades, it has recently acquired impetus, particularly via the

adoption of a person-centric approach (Chandra, 2018; Wang et al., 2016). This method focuses

on the role of psychological traits and individual characteristics as predictors of entrepreneurial behavior (Li et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2016).

Entrepreneurship has transformed history by shifting toward a behavioral perspective (Carlen, 2016; Chandra, 2018; Li et al., 2022). This shift placed increasing importance on understanding the actions and behaviors of entrepreneurs, specifically their processes of recognizing, evaluating, and capitalizing on opportunities (Chandra, 2018). Additionally, researchers who have focused on the behavioral aspects have determined that the inception of entrepreneurship emphasized the actions of entrepreneurs—what they do and how they identify, assess, and capitalize on opportunities (Chandra, 2018; Li et al., 2022). Additionally, researchers adopting a people-centered approach have demonstrated that individuals possess psychological traits indicative of entrepreneurship (Arru, 2020; Şahin et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019). Scholars have contended that personality traits and entrepreneurial actions vary widely, as not all entrepreneurs adhere to specific traits (Cardella et al., 2020). Moreover, certain trends suggest variations in the expression of certain personality traits and behavior between male and female entrepreneurs. These changes in entrepreneurial behavior are evident as the existing body of literature shows that more women are surpassing their male counterparts.

Growth of Women Entrepreneurs

In the United States, women entrepreneurs have been rapidly growing in the last sixteen years, with a 59% growth increase in female businesses and an estimated 25 to 33% of businesses globally (Powell & Eddleston, 2013). Studies done by Beriso (2021) and Bullough et al. (2022), show that the growth of women entrepreneurs globally is the fastest-growing group of entrepreneurs and considerably impacts the national economy (Beriso, 2021; Bullough et al., 2022). Furthermore, female entrepreneurs have increased the gross domestic product (GDP;

Ayogu & Agu, 2015; Bahmani-Oskooee et al., 2013) by creating jobs that reduce poverty and social exclusion (Cardella et al., 2020). Other empirical studies show that when women are empowered on an economic level, there is a positive impact on their social status and their health and well-being for themselves, their families, and the community (Melat, 2015). They experience a boost in their confidence, which increases their capacity to make decisions and control their lives. Overall, women's economic contribution to society as entrepreneurs not only reduces poverty but also improves literacy and education.

According to the International Labor Organization [ILO] (2016), between 31 and 38% of small to medium businesses are owned by women, and that number continues to grow. Coduras et al. (2018) found that the prevalence of female-owned businesses rises with the level of a country's development. However, Beriso (2021) noted that women entrepreneurs, in contrast, tend to underperform compared to their male counterparts, influenced by various factors such as gender roles and family dynamics. Additionally, government policies and systems, a lack of education and training, and inadequate resources have hindered the financial growth of female businesses (Beriso, 2021). Despite the rapid growth of female businesses and their positive impact on society, studies show that pursuing entrepreneurship has been at a lower rate for women than men (Elam et al., 2019).

History of Black Female Entrepreneurs

The first group of Black female entrepreneurs focused their business operations mostly on household duties, including culinary services, housekeeping, and babysitting (Matthaei, 1996; Burgess, 1994). Over time, there has been a notable expansion in business prospects across several sectors, including beauty and health, investing in real estate, restaurant businesses, and the establishment of commercial banks (Burgess, 1994; Smith, 2005). In modern times, Black

females have assumed prominent roles as chief executive officers of organizations with substantial financial worth, overseeing enterprises at the forefront of groundbreaking technological advancements and exerting influence over media networks.

Moreover, there has been a shift from conventional, individually owned businesses of the 19th century, such as those in hair care, social activities, and hospitality, towards profit-generating ventures in building, engineering, and computer design (Bennett, 1993). The active participation of Black females in business endeavors has shown gradual development since the 16th century, which marked the arrival of Africans in North America (Barnett, 1993). Before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Black females managed to achieve success as entrepreneurs while enduring the ongoing effects of slavery, the Jim Crow period, and the other forms of oppression that were inherent in White patriarchal culture (Barnett, 1993).

The historical account of Black female entrepreneurs is a multifaceted and arduous narrative that has been influenced by long-standing patterns of societal prejudice, gender bias and stereotypes, and socioeconomic disparity spanning many decades. Although the presence and activities of Black female entrepreneurs can be traced and recorded as far back as the 1700s (Barnett, 1993; Boyd, 2009), limited studies have explored the variety of means through which Black females establish and cultivate financially successful businesses, possibly attributable to a dearth of available data (Smith, 2005). Black females have encountered distinct challenges in their endeavors as entrepreneurs. These challenges can negatively impact their self-concept, eroding their confidence and self-efficacy and making them more hesitant to pursue opportunities or assert themselves in business settings. Although there is limited research on the prejudices and societal pressures faced by Black female entrepreneurs stemming from historical underrepresentation, existing studies indicate that Black women have successfully overcome

significant obstacles, including prejudice and gender inequality, to make valuable contributions to the realms of business and economic advancement (Barnett, 1993; Smith, 2005).

Entrepreneurship emerged as a strategy used by Black females to foster community development by providing goods and services that were otherwise inaccessible to them due to limited access to businesses owned by Whites (Lerner & Lerner, 1992). During the Civil Rights period, there was a notable increase in the entrepreneurial pursuits of Black women as they took the initiative to create employment opportunities for themselves (Bell, 2017). Due to the substantial loss of males within Black households during the Civil War, Black females were compelled to assume roles that extended beyond their traditional caregiving responsibilities. Numerous black women, particularly those who assumed the role of mothers, were compelled to secure the means of subsistence for their households to ensure their survival (Bell, 2017). Therefore, the original impetus for daughters of former slaves or slaves themselves to engage in self-employment was primarily driven by the need for survival and independence (Bell, 2017).

According to Hine and Thompson (1998), entrepreneurship has provided Black women, particularly Black mothers, with a means to generate income to support their children. Furthermore, Black females feel a sense of accomplishment when they can build sustainable businesses. Black female entrepreneurs with a strong belief in their abilities are more likely to set and achieve challenging business goals, resulting in improved business outcomes, growth, and sustainability. While the history of Black female entrepreneurs is rich and complex, their contributions continue to shape the economic and cultural landscape of the United States.

Black Female Contribution to Entrepreneurship

According to the National Women's Business Council (2004), Black females owned 365,110 independently run businesses in the United States in 2004, which accounted for over 6%

of women-owned businesses. Additionally, Black female entrepreneurs employ almost 200,000 individuals and generate earnings exceeding 14 billion dollars (National Women's Business Council, 2004). Nevertheless, there is a lack of scholarly literature on Black females in business. The gap may have been attributed to the absence of a guiding framework within the inequality domain in society and entrepreneurship.

Black females have made significant contributions to entrepreneurship throughout history despite facing numerous challenges related to gender biases, gender stereotypes, and societal pressures (Boyd, 2009). Their accomplishments have had a lasting impact on the business world and society. The following sections will discuss Madam C.J. Walker, Oprah Winfrey, and Janice Bryant Howroyd, three prominent Black female entrepreneurs whose stories and achievements continue to inspire and pave the way for future generations of Black female entrepreneurs.

Madam C.J. Walker

Madam C.J. Walker was the first self-made millionaire and most famous Black woman entrepreneur in American history (Hasan et al., 2020). She is known for creating a successful line of beauty and hair care products for Black females and being one of the first self-made female millionaires in the United States. Walker operated her business during a time of deep-seated racial discrimination in the United States. Even though her entrepreneurship and philanthropy had a lasting impact on the lives of aspiring and Black female entrepreneurs, she faced numerous challenges, including gender biases, racial discrimination, limited access to capital, and stereotyping (Hasan et al., 2020). As a Black female entrepreneur in the beauty and cosmetics industry, Walker navigated stereotypes and societal expectations regarding beauty standards (Hasan et al., 2020). Navigating stereotypes and biases can be emotionally exhausting. The

constant need to prove oneself, counter stereotypes, and break through barriers can drain emotional resources, impacting overall psychological resilience (Ellemers, 2018).

Oprah Winfrey

Oprah Winfrey, a highly successful Black female entrepreneur, is a media mogul, television host, producer, and philanthropist who established an extensive media empire. Winfrey is the founder of OWN (Oprah Winfrey Network) and has been involved in various businesses, including publishing and entertainment (Okun, 2016). Although The Oprah Winfrey Show undeniably had a significant influence, not just in its profound impact on the lives of people from all over the world, where it gave rise to a transformative movement in the annals of human history, Winfrey faced many challenges, including stereotypes, biases, and discrimination (Okun, 2016). Her guiding principle and aspiration have been to mobilize an army to bring about positive social change (Okun, 2016). One of her significant accomplishments was establishing the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa. Winfrey has consistently communicated her commitment to empowering women and creating a more secure world by means of education, both in her public appearances and private interactions (Okun, 2016). Winfrey's philanthropic gestures have significantly impacted women throughout many communities. She has provided financial assistance and support to women and empowered and motivated them through educational opportunities, imparting truth, and sharing valuable life lessons.

Janice Bryant Howroyd

Janice Bryant Howroyd is a highly accomplished businesswoman and entrepreneur renowned for her role as the founder and chief executive officer of The ActOne Group, one of the largest minority-woman-owned employment agencies in the United States (Kimbro, 2013).

The narrative of Howroyd's rise as a pioneer in the realm of business is a remarkable account characterized by unwavering resolve, resolute determination, and an enterprising disposition. In 1978, Howroyd founded ActOne Personnel Services, a small staffing agency with the primary objective of offering individuals high-quality career prospects and addressing the staffing requirements of various enterprises (Kimbro, 2013). This event marked the beginning of her business endeavor. Howroyd's unwavering dedication to achieving excellence and fostering innovation was pivotal in ActOne's fast growth (Kimbro, 2013). Her astute business skills and unwavering commitment to cultivating connections with customers and applicants, as well as going against traditional norms and the critics, were crucial factors in the organization's success (Kimbro, 2013).

The ActOne Group has a worldwide presence, including various locations such as the United States, Canada, India, and many other nations (Kimbro, 2013). Howroyd is well acknowledged for her notable achievements as an entrepreneur and her active promotion of diversity and inclusion throughout the labor market (Kimbro, 2013). She has emerged as a pioneering figure within the business realm, exemplifying the African American female experience by shattering societal boundaries and igniting motivation within others to actively pursue their own entrepreneurial aspirations (Kimbro, 2013). Howroyd has earned numerous accolades and distinctions in acknowledgment of her significant achievements. Forbes recognized her by including her among the distinguished individuals comprising America's Richest Self-Made Women (Kimbro, 2013). Her influence extends beyond business, as she actively engages in philanthropic endeavors and community involvement. Howroyd's path is a source of inspiration for anyone seeking to become an entrepreneur, particularly Black women and individuals from marginalized communities. It exemplifies the notion that, with unwavering

drive, diligent effort, and a steadfast dedication to achieving perfection, one can surmount obstacles and attain remarkable accomplishments within the realm of business.

Despite the significant contribution Black female entrepreneurs have made in society, they lack representation and are still susceptible to gender stereotypes and societal pressures, which have the potential to cause psychological stressors that increase an individual's risk of developing impostor fears and prevent them from pursuing a career in entrepreneurship (Feenstra et al., 2020). Consistent with scholars Ladge et al.'s (2019) research, while external factors limit the growth and development of female businesses, they have been linked to impostor syndrome.

Gender Stereotypes

This research examined the primary attributes of women entrepreneurs, as stated in the existing literature (Koe Hwee Nga & Shamuganathan, 2010), to ascertain the potential impact of gender stereotypes on entrepreneurship. Studies have shown that the history of entrepreneurship is marked by a gradual evolution in societal attitudes and expectations regarding the roles and participation of men and women in business (Bullough et al., 2022; Cerbara et al., 2022). Gender stereotype refers to a preconceived or oversimplified belief or idea about the characteristics, roles, or behaviors typically associated with individuals based on their gender (Constantinople, 1973). Through these stereotypes, it is believed that certain professions are more suitable for one gender over the other. This is consistent with Haines et al. (2016) argument that women tend to be disproportionately assigned nurturing responsibilities; these societal dynamics have contributed to the development of stereotypes that identify qualities of agency with men and qualities of communion with women. Even though entrepreneurship is associated with a male identity, it does not have a gender identity (Bullough et al., 2022). Therefore, women entrepreneurs should not be perceived as less than male entrepreneurs.

Research indicates that leadership is frequently associated with masculine traits such as aggression, assertiveness, and risk-taking (Gupta et al., 2019). This connection can introduce bias against women in leadership roles (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Jennings & Brush, 2013), possibly due to societal perceptions that women may be less reliable than male entrepreneurs because of their nurturing characteristics (Eddleston et al., 2016; Wilson, 2016). Other researchers have contended that biological differences in strength and reproductive capabilities necessitate specific roles (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). There is also an argument that perceptions of women being too emotionally driven impose limitations on the potential options available to individuals based on their gender, resulting in the assignment of distinct roles (Brescoll, 2016). Although gender stereotypes include the expectation that women are nurturing and emotional and assume that their primary role is caregiving, whereas men are assertive and rational, scholars have argued that these stereotypes can be culturally ingrained and may not accurately reflect the diverse range of behaviors, abilities, and preferences within each gender (Bente et al., 2020; Ellemers, 2018; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016).

Female entrepreneurs have an advantage in their leadership styles due to their feminine characteristics and have gained more trust from others because of their transformational leadership style, which makes them more inspirational and nurturing (De Paola et al., 2022). Additionally, the transformational leadership style helps them lead in a way that is in harmony with female gender roles by reducing the possibility of role incongruity and impostor fears and increasing their confidence to perform effectively in their business and other leadership roles (Jennings & Brush, 2013; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Constant exposure to gender stereotypes can take a toll on the psychological well-being of women entrepreneurs. This can lead to stress, anxiety, and a constant feeling of having to prove oneself, impacting overall mental health.

Society's expectation of entrepreneurs is masculine, which has been shown to affect women's accomplishments in the entrepreneurial industry (Bullough et al., 2022). Due to these gender stereotypes, women have been discouraged from starting businesses, which creates barriers and affects the way they interact with people in the community (Ladge et al., 2019). According to Said and Enslin (2020), the numerous challenges women entrepreneurs have experienced and overcome include gender stereotypes and society's perception of entrepreneurship. While substantial progress has been made to encourage and support gender equality in the corporate world, women are still confronted with a persistent glass ceiling, which hinders them from "climbing the corporate ladder" (Ambreen et al., 2022). Similarly, female entrepreneurs are faced with another glass ceiling in the business world because of gender discrimination and stereotypes (Salahuddin et al., 2021).

Ambreen et al. (2022) conducted a phenomenological qualitative research design study in Pakistan to describe the lived experiences of female entrepreneurs who revealed that they were confronted with another glass ceiling when they started their businesses. The study included five in-depth semi-interviews with female entrepreneurs from different segments. They all reported that they encountered the barrier of gender stereotypes, which caused them to question if they had the characteristics of an entrepreneur according to society's perception. These findings highlight the significance of ongoing efforts needed to demolish both the systemic and societal barriers that block and hinder women's progress in the workplace and business (Ambreen et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Raghuvanshi et al. (2017) concluded that other barriers women entrepreneurs face include lack of representation, entrepreneurial support, and business networks. In addition, Naidu and Chand's (2017) study in Sub-Saharan Africa found that female

entrepreneurs face unfavorable government regulations and a lack of family support due to gender roles. These barriers contribute to a sense of insecurity and a feeling of being out of place (Feenstra et al., 2020). Although there has been an increase in policies and government regulations to prevent gender inequality and stereotyping to help female entrepreneurs have successful businesses (Nziku & Henry, 2021), in some cultures, gender stereotypes are not easily recognized (Jaim, 2020). One reason is that gender stereotypes are deeply embedded in some cultures (Naidu & Chand, 2017), which makes it difficult to identify.

Additionally, in every society, some norms are not considered gender stereotypes, even by the individuals of those societies. For example, in some cultures, women are taught to stay at home and take care of the family while the men go out to work (Naidu & Chand, 2017). Consistent with the social theory, societies often assign specific roles and behaviors to individuals based on gender (Eagly, 1986). In the context of entrepreneurship, these traditional gender roles may influence societal perceptions of women entrepreneurs. Breaking through these cultural barriers and gender roles can be challenging for women who want to pursue entrepreneurship. Similarly, these organized gender and structural biases prevent women entrepreneurs from assessing the resources they need to start and maintain a business (Bianco et al., 2017). However, local organizations have established initiatives tailored for female entrepreneurs to help them increase their overall business performance (Harrison et al., 2020).

In many developing countries, there has been some progress in decreasing gender inequalities to help bridge the gap between men and women entrepreneurs (Melat, 2015). These restrictions that society and culture place on women based on gender roles have negatively impacted the success of female businesses (Bullough et al., 2022; Cardella et al.,2020). Women entrepreneurs are seen differently than men and are not considered authentic, dedicated, and

credible (Eddleston et al., 2016). Guzman and Kacperczyk (2019) showed that women are less likely than men to receive external financing to start a business. In addition, there is a 35% residual gender gap in entrepreneurship, which reflects investors' gender preferences (Guzman & Kacperczyk, 2019). Findings indicated that female entrepreneurs identified obtaining finances as their primary challenge in running businesses. To address this issue, they had to rely on personal funds, borrow from family members, or liquidate assets to gather enough funds to start, expand, or sustain their businesses (Guzman & Kacperczyk, 2019).

Furthermore, due to a lack of monetary support, women entrepreneurs have found it difficult for their businesses to grow (Balachandra et al., 2022; Wilson, 2016). These experiences create feelings of impostor fears that cause female entrepreneurs to question their ability as entrepreneurs (Ladge et al., 2019). According to the self-efficacy theory, individuals who believe in their ability to perform specific tasks successfully have a high level of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). For female entrepreneurs, having a strong belief in their competence in entrepreneurial activities, such as business planning, decision-making, and problem-solving, contributes to their overall success and helps them persist in the face of external barriers and challenge societal expectations about gender and entrepreneurship (Solesvik et al., 2019).

Societal Pressures

Studies show that the factors determining the success of female entrepreneurship are contingent upon several circumstances, which are subject to change due to the intricate and interrelated structure of their lives (Bullough et al., 2022). These factors are described as societal pressures and include the societal expectations, norms, and influences on individuals to adhere to certain standards, behaviors, and values (Bullough et al., 2022; Wilson, 2016). These pressures arise because of cultural, social, economic, and political influences and can substantially

influence individuals' attitudes, self-perceptions, beliefs, and actions within a community or society. Societal pressures can take various forms, such as the imposition of gender roles, cultural norms, adherence to societal norms, stigmatization, discrimination, and the burden of career, professional decisions, and achievement expectations (Brush et al., 2018). These pressures may manifest in overt and covert forms, influencing individuals' self-perception and societal roles.

Societal influences have the potential to affect health behaviors and contribute to mental health challenges and other psychological problems (Dejonckheere et al., 2022). The pressure female entrepreneurs face to succeed in a male-dominated industry may negatively affect their mental health and self-validation (Bernard et al., 2020). According to Bullough et al. (2022), societal pressures create difficulties for women, influencing social norms, decision-making, and behaviors. Conforming to societal expectations incongruent with personal ideals has led female entrepreneurs to experience tension, worry, and discontent. The ability to navigate these external pressures while staying true to oneself is important for personal identity and overall well-being, potentially positively affecting both personal and professional lives (Mayor, 2015).

The existing body of literature shows that societal pressures can play a role in the development of impostor syndrome among female entrepreneurs (Bernard et al., 2020; Bullough et al., 2022). Within female entrepreneurs, social pressures can intensify these emotions (Cokley et al., 2015), as societal expectations have imposed a substantial emotional and psychological burden on women engaged in entrepreneurial endeavors. Acknowledging these limitations and providing assistance and tools to female entrepreneurs to address impostor syndrome can foster self-assurance and help them flourish in their entrepreneurial efforts.

While internal factors such as perfectionism, internalized stereotypes, lack of self-compassion, and fear of failure contribute to impostor feelings in Black female entrepreneurs, scholars have argued that external factors play a more significant role (Bravata et al., 2019; Cohen & McConnell, 2019). These external factors include social structures marked by socioeconomic disparities and limited access to educational resources, systemic injustices, and pressures to overcome stereotypes. Women often feel compelled to live up to societal expectations, making these external elements a major contributor to the development of impostor feelings (Bravata et al., 2019; Cohen & McConnell, 2019). The environment that people come from and their interaction with others can influence how people see themselves, increasing their risk of experiencing impostor feelings (Feenstra et al., 2020). These insecurities and negative perceptions of self can come from interacting with people in their environment and lead to them questioning their ability and worth. Therefore, impostor feelings can originate externally and permeate internally. Although Clance and Imes (1978) elucidated the intricacies of impostor feelings, examining how both internal and external factors can influence them, there remains a gap in research focusing on how external factors serve as the root cause of impostor feelings (Eddleston et al.2020; Feenstra et al., 2020).

Research indicates that women and minority groups, as well as individuals occupying specific positions in the social hierarchy, are particularly prone to encountering negative stereotypes that contribute to impostor feelings (Ellemers, 2018; McClain, 2016). Moreover, studies demonstrate that female entrepreneurs, influenced by societal perceptions characterizing the business world as masculine, often grapple with self-doubt and compare themselves to their male counterparts (Bullough et al., 2022; Eddleston et al., 2020). Good leadership skills are often associated with masculine qualities, and men are perceived to be more assertive and better suited

for positions of authority because of their natural ability to lead (Bullough et al., 2022; Ladge et al., 2019). Conversely, women are perceived as not having "good" leadership skills and not "fit" to be in higher positions of authority (Bullough et al., 2022; Haynes & Heilman, 2013). These stereotypes have caused insecurities and impostor feelings in women, making them feel they do not belong in leadership positions or should pursue entrepreneurship (Haynes & Heilman, 2013). Fundamentally, societal pressures compounded by stereotypes can result in the underestimation of the competence and abilities of Black female entrepreneurs. Preconceived notions about leadership and business acumen may lead to skepticism and undervaluation of their skills and potential (Ellemers, 2018).

Furthermore, certain ethnic and minority groups face stereotypes that depict them as lazy, lacking essential skills, and unintelligent. These stereotypes can instill concerns among individuals regarding access to prestigious educational institutions, securing high-level job opportunities, or starting their own businesses (Feenstra et al., 2020). These individuals believe their opportunities are attributed more to luck than their inherent abilities (Feenstra et al., 2020). Research that examines impostor feelings among minorities shows that individuals who were stereotyped, victimized, and discriminated against reported feeling like impostors (Bernard et al., 2018). This suggests that an individual's experience of impostor syndrome can be influenced by societal and environmental factors, including the groups to which they belong (Feenstra et al., 2020).

Impostor Syndrome

In the last ten years, the topic of impostor syndrome has advanced and become a popular topic of study not just for academic research but also for media outlets (Feenstra et al., 2020). Although not formally classified as a clinical condition, impostor syndrome has been the subject

of research in several groups and has been documented across various areas, such as education and business. Impostor syndrome is a behavioral health phenomenon that includes doubting one's ability, skills, and accomplishments, especially among high-achieving women and marginalized groups (Clance & Imes, 1978; Feenstra et al., 2020).

A comprehensive analysis conducted in 2020 included 62 studies to assess the prevalence of impostor syndrome. The findings indicated that the rates of impostor syndrome were notably high, ranging from 56% to 82%, across various professional groups such as graduate students, women in leadership roles, nurses, and others. The symptoms associated with this condition include a range of psychological discomforts, such as anxiety, sadness, burnout, weariness, avoidance of high-level or challenging work, inflexible thinking, and rejection of positive feedback (Bravata et al., 2020).

Moreover, recent research has explored the intersectionality of impostor syndrome, recognizing its differential impact on individuals based on their gender, ethnicity, and other social factors (Addison & Johnson, 2022). Studies indicate that women and minority groups are more susceptible to experiencing negative stereotypes, which contribute to the development of impostor feelings (Ellemers, 2018), along with individuals in specific positions in the social hierarchy (McClain, 2016). In the realm of entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurs may question their abilities and compare themselves to their male counterparts due to societal perceptions of the business world as masculine (Bullough et al., 2022; Eddleston et al., 2020). This intersectional perspective highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of impostor syndrome and underscores the importance of considering various social and cultural contexts in addressing and mitigating its impact on individuals across diverse backgrounds and professional settings.

Furthermore, researchers have started exploring interventions and coping mechanisms for individuals experiencing impostor syndrome. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), mentoring programs, and workshops focusing on self-affirmation and building resilience have shown promise in alleviating impostor feelings and promoting psychological well-being (Bravata et al., 2020; Cokley et al., 2017). Additionally, organizations are recognizing the significance of creating inclusive environments that celebrate diversity and challenge stereotypical expectations, aiming to foster a culture where individuals feel valued and acknowledged for their unique contributions (Clance & Imes, 1978; McNamara et al., 2016). As the discourse on impostor syndrome continues to evolve, it becomes necessary to identify its prevalence and implement effective strategies and interventions that empower individuals to overcome impostor feelings and thrive in their personal and professional pursuits.

Impostor Syndrome in Minority Entrepreneurs

Impostor syndrome is indiscriminate in its manifestation and affects individuals across many demographics. However, this phenomenon has a higher prevalence rate among women, minority leaders, and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged families, caused by factors such as stereotypes, societal prejudices, and microaggressions (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). There is a constant fear among minority entrepreneurs with impostor syndrome that they will be exposed as frauds. This fear can be paralyzing and may prevent them from fully embracing their achievements (Bernard et al., 2018). Black female entrepreneurs, who are already facing structural barriers, may be more vulnerable to this occurrence because of social norms and preconceptions (Bernard et al., 2017). The underlying factors contributing to this phenomenon are multifaceted and intricate. Merely stating that White men mostly govern society, a significant

portion of whom come from privileged socioeconomic origins, oversimplifies the complexity of the issue at hand. Rather, the matter exhibits a higher level of complexity.

Research that has examined the emotional and social factors connected with impostor syndrome and its effects (Bernard et al., 2017, 2018; Craddock et al., 2011) shows that this phenomenon can have a significant effect on individuals' determination and success (Villwock et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the current conceptualization of the impostor phenomenon poses certain issues as it primarily concentrates on the psychological aspects related to impostorism while largely neglecting to examine how these aspects are influenced by societal interactions and structures. These interactions and structures serve as mechanisms that facilitate the development and persistence of impostorism (Tao & Gloria, 2019). The concept of impostor syndrome neglects to adequately recognize, and it minimizes the influence of institutional factors, policies, stereotypes, and practices that contribute to the adverse outcomes faced by Black female entrepreneurs. This disregard undermines the legitimacy of their feelings of distress and dissatisfaction.

Mitigating Impostor Syndrome: Strategies for Empowerment

Understanding the root causes of impostor feelings is necessary in helping individuals mitigate or overcome them. Vergauwe et al. (2014) highlighted that differences in attachment styles and personality can increase an individual's chance of experiencing impostor feelings. Ling et al. (2020) concluded that when individuals are exposed to stereotyping, discrimination, and biases, they also have a higher risk of developing impostor syndrome. The concept of impostor syndrome ignores the repercussions of systemic racism, classism, stereotypes, social expectations, xenophobia, and other biases (Nadal et al., 2021). It pathologizes a shared

experience of dissatisfaction, second-guessing, and mild anxiety in the workplace, particularly in male-dominated industries among women.

The solution to impostor syndrome lies not in fixing individuals but in fostering an environment that embraces diverse leadership styles. In such an atmosphere, diversity of racial, ethnic, and gender identities is regarded as equally professional as the existing model (Dzubinski et al., 2019). Addressing impostor syndrome can be challenging because most solutions and approaches emphasize "fixing" the individual; therefore, the resolutions are clinically based and include coaching, counseling, and other therapeutic interventions (Zanchetta et al., 2020). While these approaches may show promise, their effectiveness in addressing impostor syndrome may be limited, as their approach needs to account for external factors such as gender stereotypes and societal influences on an individual's sense of being an impostor (Clance & Imes, 1978; Feenstra et al., 2020). At its worst, some of these individual-focused approaches can strengthen the belief of blaming the victim, where people believe that the individual is the "problem" and is responsible for resolving their situation (Niemi & Young, 2016).

Scholars have argued that although personal values and worth can contribute to impostor fears, environmental and societal factors significantly create impostor feelings in women (Feenstra et al., 2020; Ling et al., 2020). For example, individuals from marginalized groups may not have equal opportunities to access necessary resources as other members of society. They recommend additional research on the implementation of diversity plans by institutions and organizations, along with assessments to determine the effectiveness of these plans in reducing impostor feelings (Binning et al., 2020).

Various strategies exist to counteract impostor feelings. Research suggests a proactive approach rather than solely emphasizing an individual approach and adopting a reactive one.

This involves addressing stereotypes, societal pressures, and organizational culture and promoting equality for all to prevent impostor feelings (Joshi & Mangette, 2018; Ling et al., 2020; Zanchetta et al., 2020). Therefore, challenging societal norms and stereotypes, as well as making the culture of organizations more inclusive by providing equal opportunities for ostracized members, can contribute to the prevention of impostors' feelings. Moreover, the literature seeks to convey to scholars that impostor syndrome is not a dysfunctional condition or disorder afflicting individuals but rather an emotional response to a dysfunctional environment (Feenstra et al., 2020; Joshi & Mangette, 2018). Getting to the root cause of impostor feelings will allow researchers to understand this phenomenon better and develop practical solutions, including systematic change where Black female entrepreneurs and other marginalized groups can operate in an environment where they feel they belong.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

Female entrepreneurs continue to grow more rapidly than men, with Black female entrepreneurs being the fastest-growing group (Haimerl, 2015). The history of Black female entrepreneurs can be traced back to the 1700s. Black females have made significant contributions to society and the economy by creating jobs, promoting diversity and inclusion, economic empowerment of their community, inspiring aspiring entrepreneurs by being role models, and breaking down barriers, stereotypes, and preconceived notions about entrepreneurial success (Robinson, 2019). However, lack of resources, expanding their businesses, and getting help from financial institutions have presented challenges. Gender stereotypes, cultural norms, and traditional roles have all played a significant role in fostering impostor syndrome among black female entrepreneurs, leading them to question their abilities and competence. These barriers have caused them to question their abilities and competence as Black female entrepreneurs

(Jackson & Sanyal, 2019). Likewise, women aspiring to enter entrepreneurship are often deterred from pursuing their dreams by cultural and social barriers that contribute to developing impostor feelings. While female entrepreneurs have significantly contributed to the economy's growth by creating jobs and reducing poverty among poor women, they have not received the recognition and support they deserve, mainly due to traditional practices and societal norms (Beriso, 2021). Terminating these societal norms and traditional practices is crucial because instead of feeling intimidated by gender stereotypes, they will be empowered to produce more (Melat, 2015).

Impostor fears create a lack of confidence in how women entrepreneurs see themselves, which interferes with how they perform in their businesses (Ladge et al., 2019). Successful women struggle more with impostor syndrome compared to men (Eddleston et al., 2020). Additionally, female entrepreneurs need help accepting their titles and positions to be more worthy, competent, and qualified enough to be entrepreneurs. Scholars have argued that women who experience impostor syndrome attribute their performance to competency because they believe success is based on external factors such as luck or getting help from people and that setbacks are because of their inadequacy to do the job (Bravata et al., 2020). Impostor syndrome does not discriminate and affects everyone. However, women and marginalized groups are at higher risk for developing impostor syndrome due to their exposure to discrimination, biases, and stereotypes (Feenstra et al., 2020).

Impostor syndrome significantly affects Black female entrepreneurs, exerting influence on their self-assurance, decision-making processes, and overall well-being (Molatseli, 2022). It presents itself in several ways, including diminished self-confidence, persistent fear of failing, and a tendency to ascribe accomplishments to external circumstances. Black female entrepreneurs often experience impostor syndrome, leading to difficulties in acknowledging and

accepting their achievements. This may manifest in behaviors like excessive workloads and striving for perfection, ultimately resulting in elevated levels of stress and anxiety. This condition is known to have a detrimental impact on individuals' ability to connect with others in their professional field, resulting in feelings of isolation and impeding their prospects for networking and creating relationships. Moreover, the navigation of preconceptions pertaining to race and gender further exacerbates the difficulties since the experience of impostor syndrome heightens the need to confront society's norms and expectations. Overall, this psychological phenomenon imposes constraints on pursuing possibilities and might result in a reluctance to assume leadership positions (Bravata et al., 2020).

Although studies have shown that impostor syndrome is developed due to internal factors such as self-doubt, low self-esteem, and a persistent internalized fear of being exposed as a fraud (Chrousos & Mentis, 2020; Feenstra et al., 2020; Wilkinson, 2020), more research is needed to explore the root cause of impostor syndrome in Black female entrepreneurs. This study filled the gap by exploring the root cause of impostor syndrome as it relates to Black female entrepreneurs and how external factors such as gender stereotypes, societal pressures, and their perception of entrepreneurship can contribute to its development. The mitigation of impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs requires the cultivation of nurturing settings, the facilitation of mentoring opportunities, challenging stereotypes, and the recognition and celebration of their accomplishments, all of which promote the advancement of a more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem (Bowser et al., 2023).

Three specific research questions were developed to understand how these external factors contribute to impostor syndrome:

RQ1: How do the lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs affected by impostor syndrome impact their business decision-making and overall business performance?

RQ2: To what extent do gender stereotypes and societal pressures contribute to the development of impostor feelings among Black female entrepreneurs?

RQ3: What coping mechanisms or strategies do Black female entrepreneurs employ to manage or eliminate impostor syndrome?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the role of gender stereotypes and societal expectations in creating impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. Chapter 3 will provide a comprehensive overview of the research design, procedures, and analysis for the study. The chapter will describe the research design and the research questions that serve to provide guidance and focus. The chapter will further provide an overview of the site, participants, and criteria used for the sampling process. In addition, the chapter will describe the researcher's role in the study and provide a summary of the methodologies used for data collection and analysis. Chapter 3 concludes by addressing the trustworthiness of the research findings and the ethical considerations that impose limitations or exhibit influence on the research process. The chapter's objective is to provide comprehensive information and explain the methodologies to replicate the study without any obstacles.

Design

Qualitative research allows researchers to use a literary and semi-flexible writing style that will enable them to effectively convey stories or descriptions of experiences without having restrictions on formal academic standards (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This flexibility is important because it allows for the description of individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, qualitative research enables readers to have a deeper comprehension of the context and the setting in which the phenomenon of impostor syndrome happened (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design study (Neubauer et al., 2019), the researcher aims to understand and describe the phenomenon of impostor syndrome through the perception of Black women entrepreneurs (Santiago et al., 2020).

According to Moustakas (1994), the word transcendental pertains to the notion of viewing all things in a state of newness, as though encountering them for the first time. The process involves acquiring the required information to articulate and explain a particular experience. Hegel (1807) stated that phenomenology may be understood as the scientific study of explaining an individual's immediate awareness and experience, including the description of perceptions, sensations, and knowledge. The objective of this research was to accurately understand the experience that female entrepreneurs have with impostor syndrome.

Kant first used the term phenomenology in his publications in 1765 (Kockelman, 1967). However, the transcendental phenomenological design is rooted in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher known as the founder of phenomenology (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Husserl's work laid the groundwork for phenomenology, highlighting the significance of investigating experiences without preconceived notions and focusing on the direct experience of things themselves (Creely, 2018). According to Matua and Van Der Wal (2015), the two main phenomenology research methodologies are descriptive and interpretive. Transcendental phenomenology, the descriptive method, examines the basic structure and significance of people's lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). In addition, the goal is to understand the phenomenon from the unbiased perspective of the individuals who have experienced it. The second method is hermeneutic phenomenology, a method of interpretation that derives from Martin Heidegger's work (Neubauer et al., 2019). To evaluate and make sense of lived experiences, this method delves deeper into underlying meaning and context by examining cultural influences (Neubauer et al., 2019). Although hermeneutic phenomenology explains how culture influences how a person perceives and interprets an event, the transcendental method is

most appropriate for this study since the researcher aims to understand and describe the complexity of the participants' lived experiences (Matua & van der Wal, 2015).

The study design offered a structured framework for conducting research that closely aligned with participants' lived experiences, allowing for the exploration of the core elements of their perceptions and understanding. van Manen (1990) stated that exploring the lived experience of individuals is complex, not only because of the complexity of human nature but also because their lived experiences are a multidimensional phenomenon that includes their culture, the way they socialize, and their psychological orientation. Therefore, interviewing participants gave the researcher a better understanding of the complexity of their lived experience than employing a quantitative strategy that relies on questionnaires and Likert scales that only provide cursory knowledge of participants' experiences with impostor syndrome.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this phenomenological study:

RQ1: How do the lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs affected by impostor syndrome impact their business decision-making and overall business performance?

RQ2: To what extent do gender stereotypes and societal pressures contribute to the development of impostor feelings among Black female entrepreneurs?

RQ3: What coping mechanisms or strategies do Black female entrepreneurs employ to manage or eliminate impostor syndrome?

Setting

The setting or site refers to the physical, social, or organizational context where research is conducted (Aspers & Corte, 2019). It provides the environment for data collection and where participants, events, or phenomena are situated. The setting is essential to research design,

offering the context for interpreting and understanding the study's findings. In this study, the setting was virtual, with data collection conducted via Zoom, an online platform. There were several reasons for choosing this virtual setting.

First, virtual settings can make data collection more efficient, streamlining processes and reducing costs associated with travel, accommodation, and physical materials. Online surveys, interviews, and experiments can be automated and administered with ease, saving time for researchers and participants. Also, a virtual setting can enhance data anonymity and privacy. Participants might feel more comfortable providing honest responses on sensitive topics due to the anonymity a virtual platform offers (Keen et al., 2022). Researchers can also implement secure data encryption and storage protocols to safeguard participants' privacy.

Lastly, a virtual setting provides greater accessibility, enabling researchers to reach a broader and more diverse pool of participants. This approach overcomes geographical limitations, allowing engagement with individuals from various locations, cultures, and backgrounds (Keen et al., 2022). This was key to this study, which used maximum variation sampling to gather insights from Black female entrepreneurs with different experiences, aiming to gain a more nuanced understanding of their perspectives on impostor syndrome and its impact on their business success.

Given the setting's versatility, the geographical dispersion of participants did not present any challenges, as the use of online platforms like Zoom made it easier to reach participants. This virtual approach also supported convenience sampling, a method where participants are selected based on their accessibility to the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The use of an online platform made it easier and more convenient for participants to engage with the study,

contributing to their willingness to participate since they could do so from the comfort of their homes. This flexibility helped ensure robust participation and a rich data set for the study.

Participants

With the utilization of purposeful criteria sampling (Gill, 2020), 10 Black female business owners were recruited from an online business group. After the seventh participant, data saturation was reached. Although a phenomenology study can have a participant range of one to 325, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that a sample size of three to 10 participants is necessary for a phenomenological study to be successful (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, getting data saturation should be the practice. The researcher used the online Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale [CIPS] (Clance, 1985) for participant selection. The selection of each participant was determined by the responses they provided to the CIPS. The goal of this instrument was to ensure that every Black woman entrepreneur met the requirements to participate in the study. The study focused on seven Black female business owners who experienced impostor feelings, have been operating their businesses for at least five years, and were at least 18. The duration of business operation holds significance in this study as it gives the researcher insights into how business owners have sustained their businesses over the years. Examining the challenges they have encountered and continue to face sheds light on the impact on their businesses. Additionally, participants who have been in business for a longer period and those with different age groups can include different perspectives and experiences within the scope of the study.

Purposefully seeking out participants who have experienced the phenomenon of impostor syndrome, as well as those who operate their businesses for various lengths of time, will strengthen the validity of the findings of the study (Campbell et al., 2020). Purposeful or purposive sampling refers to the process of identifying individuals who could provide

information essential to the research (Gill, 2020). Participants were recruited from an online business group for women. First, the group administrator or moderator was contacted via email to let them know about the study and to get their permission to ask some of the group members to participate (IRB A). The rules and guidelines of the online business group were reviewed to ensure that the researcher's recruitment efforts align with the group's policies to avoid any potential issues and to ensure the researcher's recruitment method adheres to ethical standards.

After permission was granted from the administrator or moderator, the recruitment message was posted on social media, and potential participants were instructed to respond by sending the researcher a direct message via Facebook Messenger (Appendix E). The message clearly outlined the purpose of the study, the benefits of participation, and any incentives. Additionally, the relevance of the study to the members of the business group was highlighted. When members message about their interest in the study, any additional questions regarding the research were addressed. At that point, they were instructed to provide their email address to facilitate the transmission of additional study-related information, including the CIPS and consent form.

Purposeful sampling is a valuable approach for setting specific criteria in a study (Campbell et al., 2020). In employing a purposive sampling strategy, researchers identify and include individuals with particular traits or experiences relevant to the study goals. This method distinguishes itself from other sampling techniques (Campbell et al., 2020). Furthermore, CIPS and the demographic survey helped the researcher select participants based on the symptoms of impostor syndrome in their lives and their duration of experience as black business owners. A deliberate attempt was made to include Black female entrepreneurs from diverse demographics to investigate and comprehend the range of experiences, perspectives, and attributes among

participants within a particular population. Selecting a wide-range and varied group of participants with diverse characteristics is known as maximum variation or heterogeneous sampling (Ames et al., 2019). The objective of this method was to include a wide range of perspectives, experiences, or qualities within a specified population.

Researchers often find it beneficial to ensure that their study involves a wide range of diversity within a certain environment (Gill, 2020). Maximum variation sampling facilitates comprehensive data collection, enabling researchers to conduct a more rigorous and nuanced analysis (Gill, 2020). This assists the researcher in interpreting participants' responses in the context of their backgrounds, which may influence their perspectives. When conducting research, it is important to enhance the representation of distinct groups within the sample due to various rationales, such as acquiring an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the population, ensuring fairness, and mitigating bias (Gill, 2020).

The objective of the CIPS was to identify female entrepreneurs who have experienced the phenomenon of impostor syndrome at any point throughout their years as business owners. Creswell and Poth (2018) asserted that using this sampling method will effectively secure the inclusion of participants who contributed valuable insights to comprehending the phenomena under investigation.

Procedures

Before conducting the study, the researcher sought IRB approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (Appendix D). Upon approval, the researcher began the data collection process. The first step of the data gathering process was identifying individuals who have experienced impostor syndrome. The individuals included in this research are Black female entrepreneurs. The participants were selected using an online CIPS, which was sent to

them via the email addresses the researcher collected during the recruitment process. The development of the CIPS was attributed to Clance (1985), who designed this assessment tool with the specific purpose of recognizing impostor syndrome in high-achieving women and marginalized groups.

Participants were required to have a minimum score of 41 or above in three categories to be eligible for consideration. Scores falling within the range of 41 to 60 are categorized as having moderate levels of IP; scores ranging from 61 to 80 are associated with frequent experiences with IP, and scores beyond 80 indicate severe levels of IP (Clance, 1985). Those who satisfied the specified criteria were eligible to participate in the study. It is important to acknowledge that the study identified the prevalence of impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. Including maximum variance in the sample was crucial for the researcher, as it was a significant component of the study. Individuals who scored highly on several categories of the impostor feelings questionnaire were effectively functioning and adapting to their circumstances.

After receiving permission from the administrator of the Money Mindset private business group on Facebook and from IRB, the researcher posted a recruitment post to the group as outlined in Appendix E. An email was sent to the participants from the researcher, which was included in a copy of the CIPS (Appendix C). The researcher received the participants' written consent to facilitate their participation in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The informed consent form, administered via email, included a condition stating that participants who submit their completed CIPS within one week will be eligible for entry into a randomized selection process to potentially win a $50 gift card (Appendix F). This amount is considered minimal per the IRB guidelines. This incentive encouraged and motivated the prompt submission of more

completed surveys without compromising the fundamental drive for participation. According to Largent and Fernandez Lynch (2017), providing participants with compensation that exceeds a mere token might impact their desire to participate in the research.

After obtaining written approval, the researcher scheduled appointments and conducted individual interviews with each Black female business owner who met the criteria for the study. Given the inherent characteristics of the research, conducting face-to-face interviews would have been better suited for the purpose of data collection, as it allows for a more comprehensive capture of the essence of the experiences (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). However, based on the geographical distance between the researcher and each participant, Zoom, an online technology-assisted software, was utilized. Audio and video recordings were used throughout the interviews to record both the verbal and nonverbal details of communication. Its auditory component was transcribed to assist with coding and analysis procedures.

The Researcher's Role

As the primary researcher, I assumed the role of the human instrument throughout the study. My responsibilities encompassed various tasks, such as choosing the appropriate research design, creating a research proposal, securing IRB approval, collecting data using the three methods described in the Data Collection section, employing transcendental phenomenology techniques for data analysis, and presenting the research findings in a narrative format consistent with qualitative research principles. My intention as a human instrument was to contribute to the existing body of literature on women entrepreneurs' perspectives about their lived experiences, with a specific focus on the effects of impostor syndrome on Black female entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, in my capacity as the researcher, I had a duty to openly share any firsthand experiences I might have had that were relevant to the study. To ensure full transparency, I

acknowledged that my personal experiences and biases related to this issue could pose a challenge in maintaining objectivity and impartiality. While acknowledging the challenge of fully disentangling my own experiences from those of female entrepreneurs, I cautiously minimized their influence on me. According to Moustakas (1994), Husserl referred to this condition as the epoche, whereby individuals eliminate their preconceived notions, prejudices, and prejudgments regarding things. The term Epoche in Greek denotes the act of refraining or maintaining distance from something. Accordingly, I exerted maximum effort.

Data Collection

A key component of qualitative research is the use of rigorous and diverse methodologies for data collection. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the process of data collection may be described as a comprehensive cycle that involves many key steps. These steps include identifying an appropriate setting and participants, establishing access, developing a rapport, purposeful sampling, collecting, documenting, recording, and storing data, and addressing field-related concerns. Additionally, Moustakas (1994) stated that transcendental phenomenological procedures include the identification of a specific phenomenon for investigation, the deliberate suspension of one's own experiences, and the collection of data from numerous sources, including individuals who have encountered the phenomenon in question. The main form of data collection in a qualitative study is an interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this research, the data collection was done through online, individual, semistructured interviews.

The method of data collection was one-on-one, in-depth, semistructured interviews. Each participant was interviewed for 30 to 45 minutes. The interview consisted of ten questions. The researcher chose the questions from the literature and further developed them to gain more knowledge of the perceptions of the Black female entrepreneurs who experienced the

phenomenon of impostor syndrome (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus of the interview was to capture detailed descriptions of individuals' experiences. This researcher created a safe, comfortable, open environment for participants to express their emotions and share their thoughts, interpretations, and experiences of the phenomenon. During the interview, this researcher took notes and observed verbal and nonverbal cues from the participants. Denham and Onwuegbuzie (2013) stated that research can collect and interpret rich data about participant experiences from nonverbal communication instead of solely using verbal data. After the interview, the researcher followed up with each participant to ensure the accuracy of the data.

A limited amount of research was available that provided a clear definition or recommendation for the specific quantity of sources required for data in a qualitative study. Creswell and Poth (2018) argued that qualitative research lacks definitive conclusions and instead generates ongoing questions. The primary objective of data collection is to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the narrative, ensuring that any descriptions provided are an exact replica of the participants' statements (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, to achieve this objective, it was important to include several types or levels of information to ensure the meticulously constructed narrative effectively connected with those who have encountered the phenomenon of impostor syndrome.

Interviews

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study utilized the individual experiences of participants to facilitate the researcher's comprehension of commonalities among individuals who experienced the phenomenon of impostor syndrome. In qualitative phenomenological studies, the conventional approach to data collection involves conducting face-to-face interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon to some

degree (Moustakas, 1994). Typically, open-ended questions are employed, and the approach is unstructured (Moustakas, 1994); nevertheless, in this study, a one-on-one semistructured online interview was used to assist the researcher in obtaining a comprehensive narrative of the Black female entrepreneur's experience with the various facets of the impostor syndrome phenomenon. All questions were open-ended, with just a selected few relevant probing questions being asked. This type of questioning is often seen in the context of phenomenological research, as noted by Moustakas (1994).

The interviews were allocated 30 to 45 minutes, during which they were recorded in video and audio format. Afterward, the researcher transcribed the recorded interviews. The questions outlined in Table 1 were used as a framework throughout the interviews conducted with the Black female entrepreneurs who participated in the study. Additional questions were used, where needed, to enhance the probability of participants providing a comprehensive textual description of the phenomenon being studied. The data produced from these interviews was subjected to analysis, in conjunction with other forms of data, to explain the fundamental nature of the phenomena (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Table 1

Standardized Open-Ended Semistructured Interview Questions for Black Female Entrepreneurs

Questions
1. Why did you decide to be an entrepreneur?
2. How would you describe a typical day as an entrepreneur?
3. Describe factors that create or alleviate impostor syndrome in your life.
4. Describe your experiences with impostor syndrome.

5. Explain how you cope with the psychological feelings of impostor syndrome as a black female entrepreneur.

6. Describe the meaning you assigned to your experience with gender stereotypes as a Black female entrepreneur.

7. Explain how your interaction with others in the community influences how you see yourself.

8. What societal challenges have you encountered since you started your business, and how did these challenges affect you psychologically?

9. Explain how the feelings of impostor syndrome have affected your business decision-making and overall business performance.

10. Is there anything else you would like to add or that I should know about from your experience with impostor syndrome as a woman entrepreneur?

The primary objective of Question 1 was to gather foundational data on each female entrepreneur and to serve as an icebreaker question to start a conversation. Icebreaker interview questions play a vital part in the whole interviewing process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). They are designed to help create a comfortable and open atmosphere at the beginning of an interview, allowing both the interviewer and the interviewee to establish rapport and set a positive tone for the conversation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the use of icebreaker questions serves to foster dialogue and promote authenticity, establishing a conducive environment for a more successful and effective interview.

The researcher designed the second and third questions to gain insights into the responsibilities undertaken by Black female entrepreneurs as well as the underlying factors contributing to the phenomenon of impostor syndrome. Research has shown that individuals

from underrepresented groups, such as women and minorities, may be more likely to experience impostor syndrome due to the added pressure of breaking stereotypes or feeling like they must work harder to prove themselves (Feenstra et al., 2020). Other studies have shown that impostor syndrome might be attributed to several socioeconomic and cultural influences (Bravata et al., 2020). In some cultural contexts that prioritize humility and downplay the significance of individual accomplishments, people may be more prone to experiencing the phenomenon of imposter syndrome upon achieving success (Bravata et al., 2020). In addition, research has shown that people who have impostor syndrome often credit their accomplishments to other causes, such as fortunate situations or assistance from others, rather than acknowledging their own abilities and hard work; individuals may tend to minimize or underestimate their own contributions to their accomplishments (Duncan et al., 2023). The nature of this question provided a range of responses. Question 3 sought to discover if Black female entrepreneurs are aware of what factors trigger impostor syndrome in their lives and how they mitigate the impact of the impostor phenomenon (Bravata et al., 2020).

The purpose of Question 4 was to provide Black female entrepreneurs with an opportunity to share their own narratives about their experiences with impostor syndrome. This question was expected to provide comprehensive and detailed textual descriptions of the phenomenon of impostor syndrome (Cardella et al., 2020). The main goal of Question 5 was to gain insight into the coping methods and resources used or accessible to the Black female entrepreneurs in the study. The purpose of this question was to give the researcher insights into what resources are available to help black female entrepreneurs manage impostor syndrome (Bravata et al., 2020). Question 6 sought to understand the perspective of Black female entrepreneurs' experiences with gender stereotypes and societal expectations (Eagly, 1997). The

goal of Question 7 was to inquire about the possible influence of interactions with community members on the self-perception of women entrepreneurs (Eagly, 1997). Research shows that when individuals do not receive adequate validation or recognition for their accomplishments, they may begin to doubt their abilities and feel like impostors (Vaughn et al., 2020). This phenomenon is often seen when achievements are overlooked or dismissed.

Question 8 had two components, which aimed to investigate the socioeconomic barriers faced by Black female entrepreneurs at the start of their businesses, as well as the physiological effects of these barriers on their emotional well-being (Guzman & Kacperczyk, 2019). The purpose of Question 9 was to determine the influence of impostor syndrome on the decision-making process and overall business success of Black female entrepreneurs (Cardella et al., 2020). Question 10's goal was to invite Black female entrepreneurs to provide additional data pertaining to the phenomenon of impostor syndrome. This question provided the interviewees with the chance to discuss other topics that the researcher may have missed (Sutton, 2015).

Survey/Questionnaire

The CIPS was designed by psychologist Pauline Rose Clance in the late 1970s (Clance, 1985). The original version of the assessment focused exclusively on evaluating this phenomenon among high-achieving women. The survey was particularly designed for women who have achieved prominent levels of success and other marginalized groups. Authorization to use the instrument was obtained by email from its developer (Appendix B). The measure was subjected to rigorous testing by researchers to assess its reliability and validity. The results of these tests indicated that the instrument was reliable in accurately identifying impostor syndrome among women entrepreneurs (Chrisman et al., 1995; Holmes et al., 1993; Mak et al., 2019). The inventory was used to identify the presence of impostor syndrome among Black female

entrepreneurs to varying extents. In academic literature, this is known as purposeful sampling (Gill, 2020). The CIPS will be sent out to a sample of thirty black female entrepreneurs via secure email.

Data Analysis

Creswell and Poth (2018) defined the data analysis processes proposed by Moustakas (1994), which include the researcher analyzing the data, summarizing it into significant statements or subthemes, and then organizing these statements into thematic categories. Moustakas (1994) extensively examined the need for a three-tiered framework for data analysis, including epoché, phenomenological reduction, and creative variation. The objective of the method is to identify recurrent meanings, points of view, or overarching themes. Once these recurring themes, referred to as "horizons" by Moustakas, have been recognized, they are further developed into textual and structural descriptions to effectively convey their core meaning. Subsequently, these various descriptions are combined to provide an in-depth account of the fundamental nature of the experience.

The researcher presented a comprehensive account of their personal experience with impostor syndrome. Subsequently, the researcher set aside their individual experiences and views. This approach aids the researcher in concentrating on the participants' comments while minimizing bias. According to Mackieson et al. (2019), researchers should acknowledge and recognize their own preconceived beliefs, biases, experiences, and assumptions related to the research topic. This self-awareness is crucial in qualitative research because it allows researchers to be more mindful of how these preconceptions might affect their interpretation of data. As stated by Moustakas (1994), this phenomenon in question might be considered a distinct experience characterized by an unrestricted perspective; it is often referred to as the epoché.

Epoché

Epoché, a term originating from the Greek language, denotes the act of refraining or abstaining (Moustakas, 1994). In the context of transcendental phenomenology, epoché refers to the act of suspending preconceived notions and approaching the research interview with an impartial and receptive attitude (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher has a responsibility to refrain from forming preconceived notions about the participant or their narratives by achieving a state of impartiality and objectivity (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon is only identified and understood based on the description of the event. The notion of epoché, however difficult to comprehend, presents an even greater challenge when it comes to its practical application. However, the objective is to accurately depict phenomena, devoid of any personal biases or preconceived notions that the researcher may normally and unconsciously impose based on prior experiences (Mackieson et al., 2019).

Bracketing

In a research study, bracketing refers to a methodological technique used primarily in qualitative research to manage and address potential biases or preconceived notions that researchers or participants may bring into the study (Sorsa et al., 2015). The purpose of bracketing is to enhance the validity and trustworthiness of the study's findings by acknowledging and addressing the potential influence of the researcher's or participants' preconceptions on the data collection and analysis process (Sorsa et al., 2015). The researcher used her expertise as a life and trauma coach to effectively focus on the experiences of the Black female entrepreneurs through active listening. The skills encompassed in this study were characterized by real concern, caring, paraphrasing, and verifying for comprehension. Based on the response to certain questions, the researcher posed a probing question to gain clarity on what

the participant shared. However, the researcher's main priority was to focus on and actively listen to the participant's narrative. After conducting the Zoom interviews, the researcher reviewed the video and audio recordings from the interviews.

According to Mackieson et al. (2019), once researchers have identified their preconceptions, they must consciously set them aside or "suspend" them during the data collection and analysis phases. This involves making a deliberate effort to remain open-minded and not let their preconceptions unduly influence their interactions with participants or their interpretation of the data (Mackieson et al., 2019). Throughout this process, the researcher minimized her own thoughts and recollections about her experiences with impostor syndrome and instead focused on paying close attention to the stories shared by the participants.

Review of Data

After the reviewing of the audio recordings were completed, digital copies of the transcripts were generated and sent to the participants via email to ensure they were accurate. Each participant confirmed their approval of the digital copies of the transcripts, acknowledging an accurate transcription of their online interview. After completing this assignment, the researcher listened to the audio recordings while reviewing the digital transcripts. During this process, the researcher deliberately highlighted and identified important statements by circling them. Upon completion, the researcher printed the transcripts and performed a final review of the transcripts together with the audio recordings, engaging in data analysis to identify constructed statements. This concept is known as the "dimension of phenomenological reduction" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95). A constructed statement refers to a statement that has distinct characteristics or stands out in comparison to other statements (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Throughout the course of the data analysis, the researcher again made a

conscious effort to set aside her own prejudices and opinions to ensure a deeper understanding of the participant's lived experience. In addition to highlighting and circling words and phrases that have significance, the researcher used the margins of the transcripts to jot down notes and memos.

At this stage, the data posed a challenge due to its substantial magnitude. The researcher created a spreadsheet using Excel to organize the data. Each research question was assigned its own column at the top of the spreadsheet, while each female entrepreneur was assigned a pseudonym associated with a color-coded row. The researcher then transcribed the significant statements found in each Black female entrepreneur interview and placed them underneath the corresponding research question column. This process was repeated until an extensive review of every research question and transcript was conducted. It is important for each formulated statement to be assigned equal value, as noted by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Moustakas (1994). This procedure allowed the researcher to build a catalog of specific themes that exhibit no overlap or similarity.

Trustworthiness

In the realm of quantitative research, the terminology used to describe the characteristics of this specific component is often known as validity or reliability. Given that qualitative research does not require the utilization of tools that possess established criteria for validity and reliability, it becomes imperative to explore the means through which qualitative research might be seen as trustworthy and dependable. Given the objective of contributing to the current body of research on the lived experiences of students, it is essential for this study to be duplicated to establish its empirical nature. Consequently, ensuring the results are reliably measurable becomes crucial. The trustworthiness of the study was assessed using four-fold criteria, as

proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This criterion includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility pertains to the internal validity of the research. The primary concern with internal validity is the accuracy and reliability of the data obtained via interviews. According to Johnson et al. (2020), credibility is enhanced by many features that contribute to the perception of data trustworthiness. These attributes include (a) prolonged involvement, (b) persistent observations, (c) triangulation, (d) referential adequacy, (e) peer debriefing, and (f) member checks. The use of one distinct method for data collection facilitated the attainment of deep engagement with the participants. Member checks were used to confirm the accuracy of the data. The previously mentioned components should culminate in the production of a comprehensive depiction of the research outcomes, which was presented in a detailed and immersive narrative structure (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability relate to the level of credibility the research demonstrates. To ensure dependability, comprehensive documentation and data records were maintained to provide a robust audit trail for quality assurance purposes. Member checking was used to ensure confirmability, which pertains to the objectivity and impartiality of the study based on the participants' perspectives and experiences rather than being influenced by the researchers' biases or preconceived notions. Findings were shared with participants to ensure accuracy and confirm the validity of their experiences. In addition, participants were asked to provide feedback and corrections to enhance the credibility of the researcher's interpretations of

the data. Their critical evaluation can help identify and mitigate potential biases or subjective interpretations.

Transferability

Transferability pertains to the extent to which the findings of research may be extended or applied to other settings, populations, or contexts, therefore reflecting the study's external validity. The identification of relevant elements within a study has significance in the context of future research endeavors. Although achieving absolute transferability in qualitative research is challenging, a concerted effort was made to prioritize Black women entrepreneurs' lived experiences to enhance transferability. The intention of describing the experience is to enable scholars to examine the real experiences of Black women entrepreneurs and how their business performance is affected. Regarding researcher activities, the potential to enhance the probability of transferability would be contingent upon using a comprehensive and detailed narrative.

Ethical Considerations

The privacy of all data obtained was maintained. All data was meticulously reviewed to ensure no identifiable information was left unsecured. A pseudonym was assigned to each participant for the purpose of their interviews and survey participation. The pseudonyms used in this study were only disclosed to the researcher and the participant. The pseudonyms were secured on the researcher's password lock computer.

Upon receiving the data, as mentioned before, a pseudonym was assigned to the participant, and the researcher transcribed the data using the Zoom transcription feature. After the transcription process, the researcher thoroughly checked the data and confirmed its accuracy, and an agreement was made by both the researcher and the participant. Afterward, the audio recordings and the computer data were stored on the researcher's personal computer, which is

secured with a password. The electronic recording files will be destroyed by disposal three years

after the study. The hard copies of transcribed texts were securely stored in a locked file cabinet

inside the researcher's designated home office for three years. The key to the cabinet is in a safe

place separate from the cabinet. After three years, the hard copy data will be destroyed by

shredding.

The female entrepreneurs experienced elevated emotions and increased anxiety while

addressing the feelings of impostor syndrome and its challenges. Nevertheless, this did not result

in excessive difficulties. In addition, the female entrepreneurs had difficulties expressing their

personal views. To address this issue, the researcher explained to the participants that steps were

taken to remove any personal data that may potentially link them to their replies throughout all

stages of the research project and in the future publication of the research findings. All

participants were informed that they have the option to withdraw from the research if they

experience any discomfort.

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Summary

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The methodologies that were used in this research have equal significance to the study

itself. Chapter 3 provided a comprehensive overview of the sequential methodologies that were

used throughout the study process. The present study used a qualitative research approach,

specifically adopting a transcendental phenomenological framework. The primary objective of

this study was to explore and get an in-depth understanding of the personal experiences of Black

female entrepreneurs who are experiencing impostor syndrome due to societal expectations and

gender stereotypes. Seven Black female entrepreneurs engaged in the completion of open-ended

semistructured individual interviews, and the CIPS aimed at analyzing the data and discussing

emergent themes. The data obtained from these interactions was transcribed and subjected to

coding procedures to facilitate the identification of emerging themes. The perspectives were systematically categorized based on consistency and subsequently expanded upon to include structural descriptions of the phenomenon. This account is presented in a detailed and immersive narrative format in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Impostor syndrome is defined as a behavioral health phenomenon that includes doubting one's ability, skills, and accomplishments, especially among high-achieving women and marginalized groups (Clance & Imes, 1978). This qualitative study explored the psychological phenomenon of impostor syndrome and its effects on Black female entrepreneurs, specifically focusing on the role of gender stereotypes and societal pressures in cultivating and perpetuating impostor feelings among this demographic. The study also sought to describe how the psychological effects of impostor syndrome can impact the success and growth of businesses of Black female entrepreneurs and understand their perspectives and lived experiences. The research addressed the problem that despite the growing acknowledgment of the importance of diversity and inclusion in entrepreneurship, Black females who are in entrepreneurial positions experience external factors such as gender stereotypes and societal pressures, which contribute to their experiences with impostor syndrome. The purpose of the study was to describe the role of gender stereotypes and societal pressures in creating impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. Chapter 4 will present the findings of the study.

Participant Profiles

The study focused on ten Black women entrepreneurs who were 18 or older, had been in business for at least five years, and experienced the phenomenon of impostor syndrome. Using purposeful criteria sampling (Gill, 2020), these business owners were recruited from an online business group. Data saturation was reached after collecting data from seven Black female entrepreneurs from an online business group. These participants were assigned the following pseudonyms: Kate, Ann, Brenda, Rita, Karen, Denise, and Yvette.

Kate

Kate is between 30 and 35 years old, holds a master's degree, and has been an entrepreneur since 2015. She started as a boutique owner selling clothes online before becoming a sales coach for content creators in 2016. In addition to being a business owner, Kate is an author, speaker, and a fur mommy of two pups. Kate also reported being a Christian. She expressed that she became an entrepreneur because of her experience in her field. In addition, despite her qualifications, she had difficulty securing a promotion at her job. Kate mentioned experiencing impostor feelings, such as not feeling good or qualified enough to run her business when she compares herself to others and their expectations. She reported that being a first-generation graduate and the first to start a business, the pressure to succeed is sometimes challenging.

Kate stated, "Being raised by a single mother, I have experienced many firsts. I feel as though I have to live to societal expectations as a Black woman and take on the identity of a super-syndrome woman." During the interview, Kate expressed that whenever self-doubt or impostor feelings arise, she either takes a break from her computer and goes for a walk or centers herself in the present moment by expressing gratitude and reminding herself of her longstanding success in business.

Ann

Ann is between 50 and 60 years old and holds a doctoral degree. She has worked as a manager at a financial institution for the last 30 years and has been an entrepreneur since 1995. Her first business was teaching etiquette and manners to women, men, boys, and girls. She is also a life and wellness coach who coaches midlife women. Ann mentioned that although she has been an entrepreneur for over 20 years, it was not until five years ago that she embraced the

mindset of being an entrepreneur and CEO of not only her business but also the CEO of her life. She shared that her motivation for becoming an entrepreneur is freedom of time. Specifically, Ann stated, "The freedom of time is important to me, having that flexibility and being able to serve."

Ann described herself as a divorced woman who is single and an empty nester. She has three children and two grandchildren. Ann stated that she was a VIP (very involved parent) and sometimes misses those experiences. During the interview, she shared that she prioritizes exercising, praying, and trusting in God to keep her focus on knowing her identity in Him. Ann stated whenever she experiences impostor feelings and starts to doubt her abilities, she reminds herself of her identity in God, but she also goes back to the evidence there. She said, "I go back and read my bio and my client's testimonials. It reminds me that I belong in the room, I am not a fraud, and I have worked hard to accomplish all I have."

Brenda

Brenda has been an entrepreneur for ten years and coaches corporate leaders. She is between 40 and 50 years old and holds a master's degree. Brenda is a single mother with a daughter. Brenda reported becoming an entrepreneur because she wanted the time and freedom to travel and spend time with her daughter. She stated, "I became an entrepreneur because I wanted the freedom to spend with my daughter, the freedom to do what I want to do. I love to travel." Brenda mentioned the happiness she feels from getting in her car and going anywhere without being on someone else's schedule. Her day begins with spending time with God and getting her daughter ready for school before she takes on clients. She stated, "I have my personal time getting my daughter ready for school and spending time with God, reading my Bible, and then I will start seeing clients, I would probably say around 11 o'clock." Brenda mentioned that

self-care is important to her. When she experiences impostor syndrome, she journals, reads the Bible, and remembers who she is in God.

Rita

Rita is an entrepreneur between 45 and 50 years old with a master's degree. She has been in business for the last eight years. Rita became an entrepreneur because she wanted to have the time to take care of her daughter. She explained how her son had to spend most days with relatives because she and her husband were not around much due to work. Rita stated, "I want to be home with my daughter. When I had my son, I was running all over the place, filling in gaps where his dad couldn't, and sometimes, we would be out of the country at the same time." Rita reported feeling inadequate when she compares herself to others because so much is expected of her. She feels she is constantly proving herself despite her qualifications. One of Rita's coping mechanisms is positive self-talk. She stated, "I keep talking to myself every day until I snap out of it. I also remind myself of who I am in God."

Karen

Karen has been an entrepreneur for 15 years. She is a leadership development coach and holds a doctoral degree. Karen is between 40 and 45 years old and became an entrepreneur because she wanted freedom of time. She shared, "I wanted the freedom to be able to do things that I just couldn't do while working for someone else." During the interview, Karen mentioned the importance of her morning routine before starting her day and called it her spiritual power hour. Despite all her accomplishments, Karen expressed experiencing impostor feelings not only when she compares herself to other entrepreneurs on social media but also when she is labeled angry or aggressive by her counterparts for speaking up.

Additionally, she shared that she realized that to be accepted by others, she should look or dress a certain way. She stated, "Being an African American woman in a leadership role, all of

these things definitely just perpetuated me feeling like I had to be and look a certain way to feel accepted." Karen copes with impostor syndrome by staying spiritually connected, reminding herself of who she is in God, and setting healthy boundaries.

Denise

Denise has been an entrepreneur for over 15 years. She is a leadership coach who holds a Ph.D. and is between 40 and 50. Denise is a wife and mother. She got into entrepreneurship because she desired autonomy. She shared, "I became an entrepreneur because I don't like people telling me what to do." During the interview, Denise expressed that although people in the community see her as an expert and a leader, she still experiences impostor syndrome. Her experience with impostor syndrome has mostly been through stereotypes and unequal treatment. To help her deal with feelings of impostorism, Denise stated, "I am heavy on self-care, and I believe in getting help from professionals, so I have that, too." In addition, Denise stated her morning routine includes spending time with God, and her personal time with God helps keep her grounded as she starts her day.

Yvette

Yvette is between 45 and 55. She has been an entrepreneur for over 20 years and holds a master's degree. During the interview, Yvette shared that although she experiences challenges in her business, her excitement, and willingness to help people were the main reasons she became an entrepreneur. She also stated that although each day is different, she starts with devotional time with God and exercise. She shared, "You know, just trying to get in the things I need to do for myself first, so that would be my devotional time with God and my exercise. These get my mind right."

After her morning routine, Yvette stated she would check her schedule and prepare for the day. She mentioned that she usually experiences impostor feelings when she compares herself by thinking someone else can do a better job than her. She said this happens mostly when she is overlooked, and someone else gets the opportunity. In addition, Yvette shared that she experiences self-doubt when she is with a male business partner and gets overlooked during discussions. She stated, "It's really been a very rude situation. I can be in partnership with another male, and I would be ignored like I'm not in the room." In addition to spending time with God to help her cope with impostor feelings, Yvette shared that she was disappointed in dealing with the negative experiences that made her doubt her abilities; she uses those negative experiences to learn about herself and grow. Table 2 presents the participants' demographic and Clance (1978) Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) scores.

Table 2

Black Female Entrepreneurs Participants Demographic and CIPS Scores

Participant	Age	Education Level	Years in Business	CIPS Score
Kate	30-35	Masters	8 years	64
Ann	50- 60	Doctorate	23 years	61
Brenda	40-45	Masters	10 years	50
Rita	45-50	Masters	10 years	50
Karen	40-45	Doctorate	15 years	73
Denise	40-50	Doctorate	15 years	47
Yvette	45-55	Masters	20 years	42

Note: CIPS = Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale

Table 2 summarizes information regarding each Black female participant's demographic, years in business, and level of impostor syndrome. This information regarding the level of impostor syndrome score was taken from the CIPS, which was administered to each potential participant via email. The CIPS was developed by Clance (1978) to identify high-achieving women and marginalized groups experiencing impostor syndrome.

Results

After completing the data collection and transcription, the researcher analyzed participant statements within the data and generated and identified codes. The researcher created a spreadsheet in Excel with a pseudonym for each participant, the ten questions from the interview, and the participants' answers, which were placed under the appropriate research question. The researcher subsequently extracted codes directly from participants' accounts detailing their experiences with impostor syndrome. The researcher reassessed the data three times, analyzing each statement individually to identify the codes.

Afterward, the researcher removed repetitive statements from participants unrelated to the research questions in the process of horizontalization. The researcher then analyzed the codes to formulate the themes (see Appendix G). Four major themes emerged from the data to describe the participants' experiences of impostor syndrome. The themes varied in prevalence and were used to answer the three broad research questions guiding this study. Participants described experiencing impostor syndrome through comparing themselves to other entrepreneurs, societal expectations on their appearance, inequality, doubting their abilities, and constantly having to prove their competence and stereotypes. Each participant shared their lived experiences of a different combination of the many aspects of impostor syndrome. In addition to the overarching themes that were developed from the data, each participant added their personal information that was unique to their experiences of impostor syndrome.

Theme Development

RQ1: Business Decision-Making and Business Performance

Research Question 1: How do the lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs affected by impostor syndrome impact their business decision-making and overall business performance?

As the data were analyzed, one main theme and three formulated statements emerged regarding the impact of impostor syndrome on their business decision-making and overall business performance. Theme 1 emerged from RQ1 and is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Formulated Statements and Emerging Themes from Research Question 1

Theme 1 Formulated Statements
Theme 1: Comparison, self-doubt, procrastination, and challenges with visibility.
1. I delay in making decisions. 2. Showing up on social media is challenging. 3. I compare myself to other entrepreneurs and doubt my abilities.

Theme 1: Comparison and Self-Doubt, Procrastination, and Challenges With Visibility

The overarching theme "comparison and self-doubt, procrastination, and challenges with visibility" was developed by multiple significant formulated statements from Black female entrepreneurs. Black female entrepreneurs mentioned that they took longer than they should have to make decisions related to their business because they believed they must do things perfectly to be accepted. One of the formulated statements was, "I delay in making decisions." They also talked about the pressure they felt to conform to certain standards or expectations.

Another formulated statement from the overarching theme was "showing up on social media is challenging." Most Black female entrepreneurs felt they lost business opportunities because they feared appearing on social media. Not showing up prevented them from accomplishing their business goals. Moreover, not taking action toward their business goals also costs them financially.

The last formulated statement, "I compare myself to other entrepreneurs and doubt my abilities," was clustered into the larger theme of "comparison, self-doubt, procrastination, and

challenges with visibility." Some participants mentioned that comparing themselves to other entrepreneurs at times caused them to be judgmental about themselves and self-sabotage, which affects their decision-making and business performance. The following is a textual description shared by the Black female entrepreneurs of the impact of impostor syndrome on their business decision-making and overall business performance during the interviews.

Formulated Statement: I Delay in Making Decisions. This significant statement developed when asked to explain how the feelings of impostor syndrome have affected their business decision-making and overall business performance. Ann stated that she sometimes procrastinates because she is concerned about what people think about her. She answered:

> Me allowing people to define me and trying to live up to their expectations of me had me stuck for a while. More so than being consciously aware of it. So then, when I have decisions to make, I tend to stay away from doing anything or just don't say anything.

Kate expressed that her experience with impostor syndrome has been a roller coaster. She stated that there are times when she feels like she is on top of things, and other times she is not doing what she needs to do in her business. Kate responded:

> My experience with impostor syndrome sometimes feels like it is running the show. I've experienced cycles of feeling on top of things and sometimes questioning why I am not doing the things I'm supposed to be doing or why am I overthinking it. And, of course, there are times when I feel so overwhelmed when I have to make a decision about what I should be doing to the point where I have to go for a walk, cook, or listen to music. Sometimes, I also feel stuck in decision paralysis. I think it's because I want it to be perfect.

In response to the same question, Brenda stated that she procrastinated and lost opportunities because she did not think she was good enough to do what was being asked of her. She also mentioned that when she gets turned down for funding, she loses interest in trying again. She stated:

> When the bank denies me funding or gives me a hard time because I have to do all the extra things, I give up; I do give up. Then days will go by, and then I'll say, "No, I gotta do this. I gotta keep pushing through." But then it's challenging to do the things I have to do and make those tough decisions because I don't want to get denied again.

Denise provided an interesting response to the question, stating:

> It can be challenging being the only woman of color in the room. I realized that I'm the only woman of color in the room; that sometimes makes me go after the things that I should have gone after and not prolong it any further.

Rita shared that making business decisions has cost her both time and money because she makes decisions that are not aligned with her business due to comparison and self-doubt. She stated:

> So, in terms of making business decisions, it was costly. Impostor syndrome cost me a lot of time, energy, and money. I would procrastinate because I didn't know exactly what to do. Like I said before, trying to live up to what other people were doing, what was working for them, and getting these certifications that I didn't care about. The performance in my business was not great because I was not doing the things that were important for my business.

Karen and Yvette described their experiences in making business decisions as challenging. Karen shared, "My business could have definitely been farther than where it is right now. So, it has definitely impacted everything that I've done in some capacity or another, even in my

personal life." Yvette stated, "It's challenging just to make the decision to show up for your business."

      Formulated Statement: Showing Up On Social Media Has Been Challenging: This formulated statement is significant and was revealed when asked to describe their experiences with impostor syndrome. The Black female entrepreneurs shared that there are so many expectations of how they should show up on social media that sometimes the pressure to conform causes them not to show up. Yvette stated:

> Well, for one thing, it does not feel good, especially when it comes to going online. The online part of business has been very challenging for me to show up. I just want to be able to be freed up from that.

Karen was concerned about her appearance and thought she had to dress in a certain way on social media to be seen as a leader. Her experiences came from what society's standards of success look like. She shared:

> There was almost a standard that I felt like I had to live inside of to be accepted. Let me just give you an example. So often, I would never go on social media without my makeup done, my hair done, and the very best of outfits as if I'm going to a job interview or something such as that. Realistically, that's not me. My success, my measure of success, looks different than other people. My success, my measure of success, looks like me being able to not have to wear a business suit every day, to be able to be in my fluffy socks, to be able to put on my yoga pants and my hoodie and put my hair up in a bun and work and do what I need to do. That's my definition of success: being not really confined to how I show up on social media. But what I'm saying is it's for myself personally. I felt like I had to show up a certain way to be accepted so I wouldn't show up.

Brenda said she lost business opportunities because she shrunk back from showing up online. She shared, "I have lost opportunities because I didn't want to show up online because I feel like I was not good enough to do what I'm doing." Brenda acknowledged that impostor feelings had made her feel unworthy and prevented her from being more visible online. In contrast, Denise expressed that she has no major problems with being visible online; however, she still experiences impostor syndrome when she shows up but gets past it. She stated, "I just have to do it. When I start showing up, it increases my drive, and it makes me continue to show up."

During the interview, Kate shared how she can be hard on herself with not getting enough done. She described her experiences, saying:

I judge myself a lot, wondering if what I'm doing when I show up online is enough or not enough. This social media has a false perception of the highlight reels, right? So, although I show up, I still have to deal with the discomfort of feeling like I'm not doing enough.

Ann stated that her challenge with being visible online is trying to be perfect. She is afraid of being judged by others as someone who is not competent in their field. When asked the same question, she replied:

The big piece for me that has impacted my business is my visibility on social media. But I know that it's important to show up, particularly with my tribe, and being out there doing lives and videos and webinars, all the things we are taught to do to build a successful coaching program. I think not showing up enough has slowed me down. It's not a physical thing, so I don't have a problem with that. But it's like, would they believe me? Who does she think she is? Where does she come from?

Rita provided an interesting response. Her challenge for not showing up was more about not being able to relate to people in society. She responded:

My experience with impostor syndrome makes me feel like I don't know what I'm talking about or how to relate to others in civilian settings despite my knowledge and skills. You know what I mean? It's like I couldn't relate to people. They're not going to be able to relate to me, so it's difficult being online like that.

Formulated Statement: I Compare Myself to Other Entrepreneurs and Doubt My Abilities. Every Black female entrepreneur shared that doubting their abilities made them compare themselves to other entrepreneurs. This was a major source of impostor syndrome that affected their decision-making and overall business performance. When asked to explain how the feelings of impostor syndrome have affected their business decision-making and overall business performance, Yvette and Kate thought that what they offer is good enough. However, they expressed that they compared themselves to others on and offline and thought they were not as qualified as other entrepreneurs. Yvette stated, "My experience with business has been more like comparing myself to others. I would always think that there was always somebody better that could do the job." Kate replied, "I often wonder if something is enough or not enough. I go on social media and compare what I'm doing to other entrepreneurs."

Karen mentioned confidence and appearance. She stated that she feels she must look a certain way as others to be accepted, sharing:

Watching other entrepreneurs and comparing myself caused a lot of self-doubt and just perpetuated my feeling like I had to be a certain way to be accepted. There was almost a standard that I felt like I had to live inside of to be accepted. So, being in a leadership

role, being an African American, and being a woman, all these things definitely made me

question my abilities, even though I know I am an intelligent woman.

Denise shared that being honest about not knowing something and how she feels about herself is

important because it helps her not to compare herself to others as much. She responded:

As a woman of color, it can be challenging because of the constant comparison. It's like

you know you are an expert, and you are more experienced than any other in the room,

but you still feel some type of way. So, being honest about how I feel about these things

is important.

Brenda felt as though she had lost a lot of opportunities due to comparison. She answered, "I

compare myself to others because sometimes I don't feel good enough. I have lost opportunities

because I didn't feel like I was good enough to do that." Rita stated that she feels she always has

to live up to what other people are doing. She replied:

I was doing all the things the other coaches were doing and what was working for them,

getting these certifications that I didn't care about because I was comparing myself to

them and what I was doing. I kinda doubted myself and what I could do starting out, so it

was costly because I was spending money to keep up with what everybody else was

doing.

Summary

"Comparison, self-doubt, procrastinating, and challenges with visibility" was a major

theme in this study. All seven Black female entrepreneurs expressed that the causes of the

phenomenon of impostor syndrome impacted their decision-making abilities and overall business

performance. Each spoke explicitly about comparing themselves to other entrepreneurs, doubting

their abilities, and feeling pressured to conform to a certain standard to be accepted, especially

being visible both online and offline. Karen provided an appropriate summary when she stated, "Social media can be a big comparison trap. It makes you doubt yourself and feel inadequate, and this is where impostor syndrome comes in."

The constant comparison and doubting of one's ability was an ongoing challenge for these Black female entrepreneurs. Rita stated, "I just keep comparing myself to people. Feeling inadequate compared to others, expecting to know more right away." The feelings of self-doubt impacted the way these Black female entrepreneurs saw themselves. It caused them to delay making decisions they knew would be helpful for their business. However, feeling like they were qualified enough affected their business performance.

Additionally, they were self-conscious of their appearance and more concerned with how others would see them. Therefore, it was difficult for them to be visible online, even though showing up meant getting more clients. Brenda mentioned:

> I have refused to take on more clients because I don't want to be that visible online. And you know the thing is, although I have been told by others in the community that they see me as a leader, I still struggle with impostor syndrome because I compare myself a lot, you know. I still think someone else can do a better job.

RQ2: Gender Stereotypes and Societal Pressures

Research Question 2: To what extent do gender stereotypes and societal pressures contribute to the development of impostor feelings among Black female entrepreneurs?

After analyzing the data from the interviews, the following formulated statements concerning gender stereotype and societal pressures and their role in developing impostor feelings in Black female entrepreneurs were revealed. The second and third emerging themes were "striving to prove competence and expectations of appearance" and "stereotypes, prejudice,

and inequality." The second research question generated these two larger themes and four

subthemes, as displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

Formulated Statements and Emerging Themes from Research Question 2

Themes 2 and 3 Formulated Statements
Theme 2: Striving to prove competence and expectations of appearance. 　　　1.　I have to do too much to prove my competence. 　　　2.　I am expected to look a certain way. Theme 3: Stereotypes, prejudice, and being treated unequally. 　　　1.　They labeled you! 　　　2.　I do not get equal treatment.

Theme 2: Striving To Prove Competence and Expectation of Appearance

The underlying theme of "I have to do too much to prove my competence" was relatable

to most of the Black female entrepreneurs. Two significant formulated statements from the

interviews were used to construct the overarching theme of "striving to prove competence and

expectation of appearance." The participants shared how they often feel the need to do more to

feel competent due to societal expectations. Although they are educated and experts in their field,

they believe society has held them to higher standards than their counterparts. Even though they

are all experts in their field and educated, they feel they must constantly exceed expectations to

be seen as competent.

The next formulated statement that developed the larger theme of "striving to prove

competence and expectation of appearance" was "I am expected to look a certain way." Some

Black female entrepreneurs frequently encountered the pressure to adhere to societal standards

regarding the appearance of a businesswoman. Karen specifically mentioned that she prefers to

wear yoga pants or dress comfortably.

Four participants indicated that society often links professionalism and competence with appearance, as they faced differential treatment based on their hairstyle choices. Consequently, they felt compelled to adopt a more conservative or formal attire to garner respect in professional environments despite it not aligning with their authentic selves.

Formulated Statement: I Have to Do Too Much to Prove My Competence. When asked about the societal challenges they have encountered since starting their business, most of the Black female entrepreneurs responded they felt that they had to do more to prove that they were competent in their work as entrepreneurs. They expressed feeling undervalued or ignored, which led them to perceive a necessity to exert additional effort to earn recognition. Rita shared:

> For me, it's a constant having to prove myself and show that I am competent. I feel like I always have to do more. It doesn't matter how educated or how competent I am. I can be as smart as a whip and have the degrees to show it.

Ann responded similarly, stating:

> Having to feel like you must prove yourself and just not being accepted. Instead of saying well, I am going to assume and give her the benefit of the doubt that she is coming prepared and not being treated like I don't know anything. So, sometimes, I can find myself doing the most just to make sure that I am seen as the expert. That is exhausting!

Denise shared a different perspective. She stated that although society's expectations of her are higher compared to her counterparts, when she faces rejection from funding or when people make assumptions about her capabilities, she indicated, "It increases my drive, and it makes me continue to show up." Conversely, Brenda shared:

> People would say to me, I didn't think you'd make it. I thought you would've closed your
>
> doors by now because not many African American women make it in the entrepreneur
>
> world because they have to do too much.

Brenda related being shocked by those comments. However, she acknowledges that the absence of successful Black women entrepreneurs in mainstream representation might lead others to hold such beliefs, as Black female entrepreneurs often need to continually demonstrate their competence just to be acknowledged. Brenda mentioned that even individuals who would recommend clients to her would joke about her continued presence in business.

Formulated Statement: I Am Expected to Look a Certain Way. Societal expectations related to appearance, particularly regarding Black women's hair, were another concern that some Black female entrepreneurs discussed during the interview. Four Black female entrepreneurs indicated they have dealt with people who negatively judged them based on their hair and dress code. They stated that Black women's natural hair textures have often been stigmatized, leading many to feel pressured to chemically straighten or alter their hair to conform to Eurocentric standards of beauty. The pressure to look a certain way can be particularly acute in professional settings, where natural hairstyles may be perceived as unprofessional. When asked about the societal challenges that Black entrepreneurs faced in their business, Karen replied:

> Falling into what society says is acceptable to be in business. I am expected to look a
>
> certain way. So, the challenges related to appearance, specifically regarding how I wore
>
> my hair to conform to societal norms. I remember I used to wear my hair a certain way
>
> for it to be considered acceptable. I dressed in a certain way, not necessarily comfortable

and as a reflection of myself, but as a reflection of the surroundings that I'm in because I knew that it would not be well accepted.

Like Karen, Yvette shared similar sentiments regarding the expectations from others to have straight hair. She stated:

I was told I should be looking a certain way. My hair was straight and looked a certain way, but I didn't feel like me. So, this is why I started to embrace my natural hair, and that was a breakthrough for me.

Ann replied:

How you show up because for me; image goes a long way because society judges us on how we show up or how we look. Our appearances. We say we can't judge a book by its cover, but society expects us to show up a certain way otherwise, we would be judged.

Summary

The theme of "striving to prove competence and expectation of appearance" holds significance in this study. Each Black female entrepreneur shared insights when asked about the societal challenges they faced at the outset of their business ventures and how they impacted them. They revealed that they often feel compelled to maintain a consistently professional appearance, which is directly linked to perceptions of their competence. Karen noted that these societal expectations have fostered unrealistic pressures for Black women. Rita articulated that constantly having to validate herself in various situations contributed to feelings of impostor syndrome, where she questions her abilities despite her achievements. This sheds light on why Black women entrepreneurs may perceive the need to exert greater effort than others to establish their competence and value, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and impostor syndrome.

Theme 3: Stereotypes, Prejudice, Biases, and Inequality

The third overarching theme, "stereotypes, prejudice, and inequality," was developed based on statements made by Black female entrepreneurs when asked to describe the meaning they assigned to their experience with gender stereotypes. The following two formulated statements were clustered into Theme 3: "They labeled you" and "I do not get equal treatment." Theme 3 and the two formulated statements will be discussed in the following section.

Formulated Statement: They Labeled You. During the interview, all the Black female entrepreneurs mentioned that they had been labeled just because they were Black women. They reported facing stereotypes and biases in the business world that portrayed them as less competent than their counterparts, leading to self-doubt despite their success. They noted that individuals often presumed that simply because they were Black women, they lacked knowledge or education or were not credible in their discourse. When asked to describe the meaning they assigned to their experience with gender stereotypes as Black female entrepreneurs, each Black female entrepreneur made at least one significant statement explaining their experiences, recounting that they experienced stereotypes and unfair treatment just because they were Black women. Ann responded:

> Oh, she's a woman, or people look at you and assume that you know you don't know anything, and you're not educated, that you haven't been exposed to anything, and then having to feel like, *Okay, I had to say something, so they know who I am*. That is exhausting! And not just being accepted just because of being a Black woman. Treating you off the bat like, oh, here she goes; she's gonna have a neck going and this and that. All that stuff is stereotypes.

Kate indicated having negative experiences with stereotypes and men commenting on her weight. She said she feels safer being in spaces with women instead of men or having a woman as a coach for some of those said reasons. She replied, "I do not have any interest in working with a male coach because I have experienced men commenting on my weight and saying that losing weight would be beneficial for me."

> Karen replied:

> The angry Black woman. I must tell you, Marlene, it just gets under my skin just to even hear that saying because all things being equal, a man, Caucasian, African American, Asian American, whatever, sitting in the same position would never be labeled as a mean or angry man. He's just not aggressive. He's a go-getter. He gets things done. All the same traits that I represent, but I'm listed as an angry Black woman because I have standards. I have boundaries, and there are things that are going to be associated with me that are going to be haphazard.

Yvette stated that her work requires her to be in a male-dominated industry and that the experiences that she encounters are sometimes rude. She answered:

> In business, it's really disappointing in this phase because not only you're not a male, you're female in the male-dominated industry. Because I am a Black woman, people assume things about me. They label. This has been my experience whenever I show up in the room. I just get ignored.

Brenda and Rita answered the question similarly in terms of their personal experiences. They shared that their experiences were more about assumptions and biases. Brenda responded, "As a Black woman, I have to do so much extra stuff just to get funding." Rita stated, "The racial and

systematic biases I've encountered when it comes to my business are disappointing. As a Black woman, there's already a stereotype."

Formulated Statement: I Do Not Get Equal Treatment. Each Black female entrepreneur had similar answers regarding the meaning they assigned to gender stereotypes, especially concerning inequality. They believed that because they are not only women but especially Black women, are the reasons why they encountered many negative experiences both in their professional and personal lives. Each one shared their personal encounter with prejudice and biases in business settings and how they were being overlooked for opportunities, receiving less favorable treatment, or facing additional scrutiny compared to their counterparts. When asked about the meaning they assigned to gender role as a Black female entrepreneur, Yvette shared:

> It is very disappointing. I can be in partnership with another male, and when I show up with him, the other males just overlook me like I was not really part of the discussion. Due to my line of work, I sometimes work with males. So, whenever I go to work in a male-dominated industry, I still feel as though I am fighting for what's right or to be heard. They don't treat me the same.

Karen stated that although she is the CEO of her company and can make million-dollar deals, whenever she goes out to do business transactions, she gets treated as the secretary. She answered:

> Being in a predominantly male-dominated industry, I'm the only woman there. I have been in one-million-dollar negotiations, and a guy would ask me to give him coffee. He just assumed that I was the secretary. I also had men not answer the questions I was

asking so that I could sign off on their deal. But they didn't know that I could do that

until I told them. Then, you see them treat you differently.

During the interview, Ann expressed how being automatically underestimated based on appearance alone can get exhausting. She highlighted how the stereotypes and disparities in treatment faced by Black women pose obstacles to seeking assistance, a phenomenon seemingly normalized in society. She replied:

Sometimes, your voice is marginalized, or you're not heard. I had an experience where I

had something to say and was ignored. Then my counterpart—White male—says the

exact same thing and their idea is applauded like I just didn't say a word. Then, for me,

it's okay. Well, there's no sense in me saying anything right, and I think a lot of this

happens on the subconscious level. More so than being consciously aware of it, where

subconsciously, it just becomes the norm in the way we are being treated unequally.

Brenda, Denise, and Rita indicated that they experienced unequal treatment when it came to funding. They expressed that they realized that unfair treatment in funding is a significant challenge many Black female entrepreneurs face. Moreover, despite their talent, innovation, and potential for success, they frequently confront barriers to accessing capital and investment opportunities. Brenda stated:

I experience biases the most when I go to the bank for business funding. It makes me

again question like, "What's going on here?" I don't feel included. I give up. I do give up.

And then a couple days will go by, and then I'll say, no, I gotta do this. I gotta keep

pushing through because there has to be a yes.

Denise replied:

As a woman of color, I've always experienced a lack of access to funding compared to my counterparts. I'd know that once I knock down the doors and alleviate the barriers that make room for others to follow. So, the meaning I assigned to gender stereotype as a Black entrepreneur is opportunity for growth.

Rita shared:

It was tough for me as far as my business is concerned because, like I said, I had professionals that I was coaching, and I needed funding. So, I'll talk about the loans. I applied for the loans just like everybody else, and they got them, and I didn't. And I was like, but they don't even have a small business, so I didn't understand it. I just couldn't get the support I needed financially from the government or the banks. That really affected me because I was like, I don't understand. I felt left out of financial support programs and opportunities, and that really affected me—having to have to prove too much to get assistance for a legitimate business. It wasn't like I'm selling bag juice out of my house.

Kate answered based on her experiences with pricing her products. She stated, "Some things that come up are around selling and around charging because, as a woman, I find myself having to overexplain why I'm charging for something compared to a male coach."

Summary

The second research question in this study explored the extent to which gender stereotypes contribute to impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. Black female entrepreneurs recounted their encounters with stereotypes, often being labeled as aggressive, loud, angry, or excessively strong. Two noteworthy statements or subthemes emerged from these interviews, forming the overarching theme: stereotypes, prejudice, biases, and inequality. This

theme holds significant importance in the study, shedding light on the pervasive influence of societal attitudes and perceptions on the experiences of Black women in entrepreneurship. The Black female entrepreneurs in this study faced stereotypes, prejudices, and biases related to their gender and race, such as being perceived as less competent than their counterparts. They also experienced unfair treatment and systemic barriers to success, such as limited access to funding. These stereotypes and biases can influence how Black women are perceived in the entrepreneurial environment and can contribute to feelings of impostor syndrome.

RQ3: Coping Mechanisms to Manage Impostor Syndrome

Research Question 3: What coping mechanisms or strategies do Black female entrepreneurs employ to manage or eliminate impostor syndrome?

The data collected from the online semi-structured interviews were analyzed, and several themes regarding how Black female entrepreneurs cope with the psychological feelings of impostor syndrome were explained. From the formulated statements, the theme "spiritually connected, knowing their identity, and external validation" emerged. The formulated statements were categorized into two subthemes: "personal coping strategies" and "external support and perspectives." The fourth emerging larger theme and the two subthemes were developed by the third broad research question shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Formulated Statements and Emerging Themes from Research Question 3

Theme 4 Formulated Statements

Theme 4: Spiritually connected, knowing their identity, and external validation.
  1. Personal coping strategies.
  2. External support and perspectives.

Theme 4: Spiritually Connected, Knowing Their Identity and External Validation

During the interviews, each entrepreneur shared how their spirituality and identity in God, self-care, and feedback from others helped them cope with impostor syndrome. Most described how their clients' testimonials have constantly reminded them that they are experts in what they do, allowing them to feel more confident in themselves. Others mentioned that their relationship with God helped them identify all they have accomplished, embrace their identity, and know they are not frauds. Some of the self-care practices that were described include, but are not limited to, journaling, affirmations, grounding, walking, setting boundaries, and prayers.

Formulated Statement: Personal Coping Strategies. During the interview, the Black female entrepreneurs were asked how they cope with impostor syndrome. All shared multiple strategies they used to help them cope with the psychological feelings of impostor syndrome. Denise indicated that her way of coping is through self-care. She stressed the importance of self-care and how it helps her cope when she experiences impostor feelings. She answered, stating:

> I have a coach—a therapist—and I'm heavy on self-care. You need to maintain health and wellness. So, I exercise, try to eat right, do things that are good for my body, things that are good for my mind, things that are good for myself. I also say affirmations and stay connected to God and remind myself of who I am.

Brenda shared the importance of her morning routine to help her stay grounded. She stated, "I journal and write affirmations. Spending time with God and reading my Bible is my self-care." Kate mentioned doing multiple things to keep her grounded. She said that sometimes it means just walking away from the computer. She responded, "Grounding is important to keep me focused on my business. Reminding myself of who I am in God and what I've done. Sometimes,

stepping away from the computer, journaling, praying, having fun, and taking care of biological,

hormonal, and emotional needs are my personal ways to cope with impostor syndrome.

Ann also shared several ways she copes with impostor feelings, stating:

> For me, I had to build confidence muscle. And, like I said, cultivating the love for myself
>
> and extending grace, compassion, and kindness. Embracing the fact that I can be brilliant
>
> and imperfect. I think that's been one of the biggest things, having that confidence within
>
> myself and positive self-talk, lots of it. Saying to myself, "I deserve to be here. I worked
>
> to get here." And for me, that has been the biggest thing, and knowing my value. Don't
>
> diminish my worth and my value whenever I show up. Also, spending time with God,
>
> trusting the God in me and understanding my identity. Going back to Him to remind me
>
> of who I am.

Rita expressed that she used a lot of self-talk and self-awareness to help her cope. She

stated:

> Using self-talk and self-awareness to cope because I tend to isolate myself a lot.
>
> Recognizing when I'm isolating myself and pushing me to snap out of it through self-talk
>
> helps me. I just keep talking to myself every day until it hits me. Okay, that's been four
>
> days. That's been five days. You gotta get up. It's becoming an easier transition for me
>
> because I'm learning. I'm learning as I'm going along because I know God is in control.

Yvette had an interesting take on coping. She stated that not only does her spiritual

connection with God help her cope, but she also does extra. Yvette shared:

> My way of coping with impostor syndrome is really trying to make sure that I was always
>
> doing extra. Yeah, and if I didn't have a relationship with God, I don't know that I'd still

be doing it, to be honest, because my devotional time with God helps me get my mind

right.

Karen shared that she engages in multiple strategies to help her cope, stating:

I have a spiritual power hour. Being spiritually connected keeps me spiritually and

mentally grounded. I have to be! I have to! I operate a lot in my human design, so I know

what best fits me. So, I'm very, very stingy with my energy. Yes, and my time as well.

And so, that's the only way I can cope with that, truly being sure of who I am, what I

expect, what I'm going to allow or accept into my life.

Formulated Statement: External Support and Perspectives. Four Black female

entrepreneurs shared how important it was for them to remind themselves of the impact they

made in the lives of others and how that was communicated to them not only from their clients

but also from people in their community. Some shared that reading their client's testimonials

helped them manage impostor feelings. Others shared that their interactions with community

members were helpful. When asked how people in the community see them, Ann replied:

They ask me for my opinion on things. That lets me know that they trust me. If I've given

counsel or I said something, and they come back and ask me again for something else,

that's feedback. So that lets me know that I'm on the right track. It's like confirmation

that I'm doing what I'm supposed to do. Also, in my interactions or when someone

invites me to be on a panel or a guest on a podcast, again, that's the confirmation I need

to walk in purpose and serve who you call me to serve. Thank you, God! I also read my

client's testimonial as a reminder that I'm doing a great job.

Kate stated she is supported in her community, but there are some spaces she is not. She

responded:

In some spaces, women support me and look to me. But unfortunately, some spaces

where I've invested to be with women were not good for me. Also, I created a brag

board, reminding myself of my accomplishments and the people I have helped through

my business.

Brenda noted that people in her community view her as a leader, sharing, "I have been told by

others and at community events that they see me as a leader. I have gotten off stage speaking and

giving presentations, and people have said, 'Wow, you're such a powerful leader.'"

 Denise replied, "Well, because of the community I'm in now, I'm considered an expert."

Rita stated, "I interact in the community; it's exactly what I give off, and I have very good

relationships with people, strangers, and I'm always amazed at how things are easy for me."

Summary

The formulated statement, "external support and perspectives," was relatable to some of

the Black female entrepreneurs. Two significant formulated statements from Black female

entrepreneurs were used to construct the overarching theme of "spiritually connected, knowing

their identity and external validation." The third research question in this study sought to

understand the coping strategies Black female entrepreneurs use to help them alleviate and

manage impostor feelings. Participants shared several coping mechanisms they employed. Some

of their coping strategies were personal, such as journaling, affirmations, and devotional time

with God. Others were external, such as how others see them in the community and client

testimonials.

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Summary

</div>

Chapter 4 provided an analysis and summary of participant data on Black female

entrepreneurs' experiences with impostor syndrome. The participants described diverse,

individualized experiences of impostor syndrome unique to their backgrounds, life situations, and personalities. The researcher provided information on each participant's experiences and composed narrative descriptions of elements that combined to create the phenomenon of impostor syndrome. During data analysis, nine significant formulated statements were discovered. Each statement was thoroughly analyzed. From these statements, the four overarching themes relating to the three research questions emerged. Appendix G shows the major formulated statements and themes that emerged from the data analysis, the research questions, and contributions by seven Black female entrepreneurs. The themes informed answers to the three research questions as they emerged from the literature.

The Black female entrepreneurs shared rich descriptions of their lived experiences with impostor syndrome. Comparison and being treated equally were significantly the most common problems described by participants related to experiences of impostor syndrome. They also described experiences of self-doubt, acceptance, and the need to constantly prove themselves as factors that negatively influenced impostor syndrome within their experiences in a male-dominated industry.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the role of gender stereotypes and societal expectations in creating impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. The researcher sought to describe the lived experiences of impostor syndrome to address the problem of Black female entrepreneurs' business performance and its effects on the growth of their businesses and stakeholders in the entrepreneurial industry. This chapter discusses interpretations of the findings from the participants' lived experiences, themes that emerged from the data, implications for policy and practices, limitations, and delimitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary and recommendations for further research.

Summary and Findings

Through in-depth interviews, the data were analyzed. After multiple analyses of the data, several significant formulated statements were clustered into themes based on each research question. The themes contributed to answering the three research questions: (a) How do the lived experiences of black female entrepreneurs affected by impostor syndrome impact their business decision-making and overall business performance? (b) To what extent do gender stereotypes and societal pressures contribute to the development of impostor feelings among black female entrepreneurs? (c) What coping mechanisms or strategies do black female entrepreneurs employ to manage or eliminate impostor syndrome?

RQ1: Business Decision-Making and Business Performance of Black Female Entrepreneurs

The first research question sought to understand how the lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs affected by impostor syndrome impacted their business decision-making and overall business performance. The Black female entrepreneurs experienced self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy, which hindered their ability to take risks and seize opportunities for growth.

Emerging Theme from Research Question 1

1. Pressure to conform to standards, comparison and self-doubt, and challenges with visibility.

    a. I delay in making decisions.

    b. Showing up on social media is challenging.

    c. I compare myself to other entrepreneurs and doubt my abilities.

RQ2: Gender Stereotypes and Societal Pressure

The second research question examined how gender stereotypes and societal pressures contribute significantly to the development of impostor feelings among Black female entrepreneurs by imposing unrealistic expectations of success and perfection, labeling, and unequal treatment, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

Emerging Themes from Research Question 2

2. Striving to Prove Competence and Expectations of Appearance.

    a. I have to do too much to prove my competence.

    b. I am expected to look a certain way.

3. Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Inequality.

a. They labeled you!

b. I do not get equal treatment.

RQ3: Coping Mechanisms and Strategies

The third research question describes how Black female entrepreneurs employ various coping mechanisms to manage or eliminate impostor syndrome, including seeking support from mentors, spirituality, practicing self-care, affirming their achievements, and challenging negative self-perceptions. These strategies help them build resilience and confidence in their abilities, enabling them to navigate challenges and succeed in their businesses.

Emerging Theme from Research Question 3

4. Spiritually Connected, Knowing Their Identity, and External Validation.

a. Personal coping strategies.

b. External validation and perspectives.

The following discussion, implications, and recommendations for future research are based solely upon these findings on how Black female entrepreneurs described their lived experiences with impostor syndrome.

Discussion

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to answer the three research questions through individual in-depth interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. Seven participants provided rich descriptions of their lived experiences with impostor syndrome and how it impacted their decision-making process and overall business performance. Four major themes emerged: (a) comparison, self-doubt, procrastination, and challenges with visibility; (b) striving to prove competence and expectation of appearance; (c) stereotypes, prejudice, and inequality; and (d)

spiritually connected, knowing their identity, and external validation. Multiple themes co-occurred or had simultaneous relevance to the Black female entrepreneurs' lived experiences with impostor syndrome.

Discussion and Implications in Light of the Relevant Literature and Theory

Empirical Implication

The empirical implications in this study refer to the practical applications of the research findings and how they can be applied in real-world settings or inform practical decisions or actions. The findings are relevant to policymakers, practitioners, or other stakeholders who can use the research findings to guide their actions or decisions.

Theme One: Comparison, Self-doubt, Procrastination, and Challenges with Visibility

The first research question was: How do the lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs affected by impostor syndrome impact their business decision-making and overall business performance? This question formed the first theme that emerged in this study: comparison, self-doubt, procrastination, and challenges with visibility. This theme was prominent among all the Black female entrepreneurs. The participants reported constantly struggling with self-doubt, procrastination, and comparing themselves to other entrepreneurs. Cultivating self-compassion can help Black female entrepreneurs recognize and validate their feelings of self-doubt while reminding themselves of their strengths and accomplishments. Providing resources such as self-compassion exercises or workshops can help entrepreneurs develop this skill. According to Bravata et al. (2020), individuals experiencing persistent symptoms of impostor syndrome, including self-doubt or comparison, should seek support from groups and mentors or seek professional help from a therapist or counselor for managing anxiety and self-esteem issues.

Theme Two: Striving To Prove Competence and Expectation of Appearance

Theme 2, "striving to prove competence and expectation of appearance," emerged from RQ2, which explored the extent to which gender stereotypes and societal pressures contribute to developing impostor feelings in the participants' lives. Two formulated statements that developed this theme were: "I have to do too much to prove my competence" and "I am expected to look a certain way." All participants shared their personal experiences with dealing with impostor feelings in relation to their competence and appearance. Six participants reported that their challenge with being visible on social media is due to how they are expected to dress in society's standard of professional attire. However, Karen indicated that attire goes against her authenticity because she does not always want to wear makeup but rather dress in yoga pants and sweaters instead of business suits. Ann stated that her main reason for not being as visible as she would like was fear that others would think she is incompetent.

Social norms and cultural expectations are deeply embedded in society (Anambane & Adom, 2018). Additionally, these societal norms and expectations have created barriers for women entrepreneurs (Anambane & Adom, 2018) that decrease their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and cause self-doubt, which is a symptom of impostor syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978). The study recommends that interventions aimed at reducing impostor syndrome should be culturally sensitive and consider the unique experiences of Black female entrepreneurs. This highlights the importance of tailoring interventions to the specific needs of this group.

Theme 3: Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Inequality

The third theme that emerged from this study was "stereotypes, prejudice, and inequality." Answers to RQ2 resulted from the formulated statements: "They labeled you" and "I do not get equal treatment." The Black female entrepreneurs in this study described their

experiences with gender stereotypes and biases as being treated unfairly and being overlooked because they were Black women. Additionally, some recalled being labeled as loud or angry. Historically, Black female entrepreneurs have encountered social injustice, biases, and stereotypes (Barnett, 1993; Boyd, 2009). Stereotypes and biases have been proven to cause impostor syndrome in women, according to previous research by Bravata et al. (2020). The findings suggest that efforts to reduce impostor syndrome should focus not only on individual-level factors but also on addressing the broader societal factors that contribute to impostor syndrome, such as gender stereotypes and societal expectations.

Theme 4: Spiritually Connected, Knowing Their Identity and External Validation

The fourth theme that emerged from this study was "spiritually connected, knowing their identity and external validation." This theme was relevant to all Black female entrepreneurs. During the interviews, the participants discussed their strategies for coping with impostor syndrome. All reported having a self-care routine that helps them to stay grounded and focused. Most stated that reviewing their client's testimonials, feedback from people in the community, and their devotional time with God also helps them cope with impostor syndrome. In addition, they mentioned that always going back to God to remind them of who they are is important to them. Denise shared that besides her self-care routine and being spiritually connected with God, she also has a coach and a therapist.

This study has several practical implications for policymakers, educators, and practitioners. Overall, the study's findings highlight the need for interventions to reduce impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. This could include providing mentorship and support programs that address the unique challenges faced by this group, as well as promoting positive representations of Black female entrepreneurs in the media.

Theoretical Implications

Three theories guided this study: Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, Constantinople's (1973) gender role theory, and Eagly and Wood's (1999) social role theory. Four broad themes were derived from the three theoretical frameworks, and their relevance to the study findings was explored.

Theme 1: Comparison, Self-doubt, Procrastination, and Challenges With Visibility

The first broad theme that emerged from the study was "comparison, self-doubt, procrastination, and challenges with visibility." This theme was developed from three formulated or subthemes: (a) "I delay in making decisions," (b) "Showing up on social media is challenging, and (c) "I compare myself to other entrepreneurs and doubt my abilities." Within the self-efficacy framework, the results showed several aspects of impostor syndrome that Black female entrepreneurs experienced, such as doubting their abilities, comparison to others, underestimating their achievements, and avoiding challenging opportunities. Yvette's statement, "There is someone else better to do the job," and Kate's statement, "I judge and compare myself to other entrepreneurs," capture Bandura's stance on low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Three participants expressed that doubting their abilities and difficulties internalizing that they are experts in their field oftentimes causes them to procrastinate and not do what is necessary to succeed in their business. These experiences aligned with Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, which states that individuals with low self-efficacy are more likely to doubt their abilities or express feelings of helplessness and failure. Conversely, people with high self-efficacy view challenges as opportunities for growth and development because they believe in their ability to accomplish difficult tasks and persevere amid obstacles (Bandura, 1986). Additionally, individuals with high self-efficacy view themselves as proficient and capable of

effectively completing any task. Although Denise recalled experiencing feelings of impostor syndrome at times, she shared, "The challenges I encountered, I look at them as an opportunity for growth. Instead of giving up, I push forward."

Individuals with high self-efficacy view their challenges as opportunities and maintain optimism where there is a possible failure (Locke & Latham, 2006). Moreover, they put in effort and persistence amid obstacles (Gist, 1987). This study's findings support the literature highlighting a relationship between efficacy and procrastination (Becks et al., 2000). People with poor or low self-efficacy tend to procrastinate due to feelings of low self-esteem and inadequacy (Becks et al., 2000).

Theme 2: Striving To Prove Competence and Expectation of Appearance

The second major theme that emerged from the study was "striving to prove competence and expectation of appearance." This theme was prominent with all the Black female entrepreneurs. "I have to do too much to prove my competence" and "I am expected to look a certain way" were two formulated statements that were clustered to form this larger theme. The participants shared how they often felt they must constantly prove who they are by doing twice as much when compared to their counterparts. They also described their experiences of having to dress and show up a certain way to be considered professional or successful. Most stated that they are expected to dress professionally, including wearing their hair and speaking a certain way. According to Constantinople (1973), gender roles are norms of how people should behave, dress, and speak based on their sex. Constantinople's theory suggests that individuals internalize these expectations and conform to traditional gender roles, which can impact their self-perception and behavior (Constantinople, 1973).

The Black female entrepreneurs expressed feeling pressure to prove their competence and capabilities in a male-dominated entrepreneurial environment and the need to constantly prove themselves, which led to feelings of impostor syndrome when they perceived they were not meeting these expectations. The study showed that gender roles and societal expectations of how Black female entrepreneurs should look and behave are consistent with prior research that suggested that women, especially Black women, should look and behave in a particular way (Abrams et al., 2014). Yvette stated, "I feel pressured because I should be looking a certain way." These expectations and comparisons led participants to internalize these expectations, contributing to feelings of impostorism. Karen questioned, "Do I really have what it takes? Can I really make this work and not fall into what society says is acceptable to be in business?" Ann mentioned, "It's not so much of a physical thing for me, but it's more how I'm expected to show up and conduct myself."

The findings also add to the literature that states female entrepreneurs may face stereotypes that undermine perceptions of their competence and leadership abilities (Bullough et al., 2022). When participants feel like they must constantly prove themselves, it creates a self-fulfilling prophecy where they doubt their abilities and struggle with impostor syndrome. Bandura (1997) stated that self-efficacy beliefs play a significant role in various domains of human functioning, including academic achievement, career success, and psychological well-being. The findings in this study concerning self-efficacy supported that Black female entrepreneurs have had decreased self-efficacy due to impostor syndrome, which has diminished confidence in their capacity to succeed in business endeavors and affected their motivation to take risks and pursue aspiring goals.

Theme 3: Theme 3: Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Inequality

The third theme that emerged from this study was "stereotypes, prejudice, and inequality" from the two formulated statements, "They labeled you" and "I do not get equal treatment." This theme was noticeable among most Black female entrepreneurs after their answer to RQ2: To what extent do gender stereotypes and societal pressures contribute to the development of impostor feelings among Black female entrepreneurs? During the interview, most of the Black female entrepreneurs stated that they experience some level of unfair treatment when it comes to funding, being labeled, and being called names such as aggressive, loud, angry, and strong Black woman. The findings add to prior research by Nelson et al. (2016) on African American gender roles. Their study concluded that African American women are portrayed as loud, strong, aggressive, and sexually uninhibited (Nelson et al., 2016). These stereotypes have prohibited African American women's help-seeking behaviors and affected their emotional well-being (Abrams et al., 2014). In the interview, Yvette and Ann shared that it is difficult for Black women to ask for help because they are labeled as "strong" and feel the need to live up to those expectations instead of asking for help so they are not perceived as weak.

Studies show that the contributions to gender stereotypes are due to entrepreneurship being represented as a male industry, and to be successful, individuals must possess masculine traits (Bullough et al., 2022; Eddleston et al., 2016). Five participants mentioned having difficulties accessing funding for their business and being treated unequally compared to their male counterparts. Bullough et al. (2022) asserted that female businesses are not considered real businesses but more of a hobby. Additionally, Balachandra et al. (2019), Kanze et al. (2017), and Wilson (2016) found that women have faced more barriers to accessing funding for their businesses, including limited opportunities for funding, mentorship, or networking, due to

gender-based biases in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, which can reinforce gender stereotypes

and undermine their confidence and sense of belonging in the entrepreneurial world. These

biases in the entrepreneurial ecosystem can reinforce stereotypes and limit opportunities for their

growth and success. This study's findings also align with Constantinople's (1973) gender role

theory, which states that gender roles can impact women entrepreneurs' access to resources such

as funding, mentorship, and networks.

The last framework that guided this study was Eagly and Wood's (1999) social role

theory. Social role theory suggests that people's behavior is influenced by the roles they occupy

in society and the expectations associated with those roles (Eagly & Wood, 1999). According to

this theory, societal norms and expectations define specific roles for individuals based on their

gender, race, age, and other social categories. Like Constantinople's (1973) gender role theory

stated, these roles come with expectations about how individuals should behave, think, and

interact with others. The findings in this study aligned with this framework and supported the

experiences of Black female entrepreneurs in their businesses, such as being mistaken for being

the secretary or an administrator instead of the CEO of their business. The findings in this study

also add to the literature on how gender roles, societal norms, and customs can cause barriers and

constraints for female entrepreneurs that can negatively affect the success of their businesses

(Anambane & Adom 2018; Baughn et al. 2006; Khandelwal & Sehgal 2018).

Theme 4: Theme Four: Spiritually Connected, Knowing Their Identity and External
Validation

The fourth theme that emerged from this study was "spiritually connected, knowing their

identity and external validation," from the RQ3: What coping mechanisms or strategies do Black

female entrepreneurs employ to manage or eliminate impostor syndrome? The two formulated

statements that were clustered to form the larger theme were "personal coping strategies" and "external support and perspectives." Individuals who experience impostor feelings are at a higher risk of accumulating stress, which may result in higher levels of emotional fatigue as they constantly struggle to internalize their accomplishments despite being perceived as successful externally (Whitman & Shanine, 2012).

All seven Black female entrepreneurs described and shared their coping mechanisms and experiences with impostor syndrome, such as feelings of incompetence and constantly questioning their abilities. They expressed that being connected to God, positive self-talk, and prioritizing self-care such as walking, exercising, journaling, and repeating affirmations have helped them stay grounded and focused. Five participants also mentioned additional strategies they employ to cope with impostor feelings, including seeking external validation through client testimonials and support from community members and engaging with a coach and a therapist for guidance and support.

The findings support previous research by Whitman and Shanine (2012), who suggested that individuals can seek social support to help them cope with impostor syndrome. Additionally, they can get help from mentors, peers, or support groups, which can provide emotional validation and practical advice, helping to reduce feelings of isolation and impostor syndrome and enhance emotional well-being (Whitman & Shanine, 2012). In relation to the self-efficacy framework, those with high self-efficacy are more likely to view setbacks as temporary and take proactive steps to overcome obstacles, while those with low self-efficacy may doubt their abilities and struggle with feelings of impostor syndrome (Bandura, 1997). All seven participants reported struggling with self-doubt and comparison. Three participants stated that

they have difficulties internalizing their accomplishments and sometimes worry about what people would think about their success.

Implications of the Study

Implications for Policy

This study provides an understanding of the Black female entrepreneurs' experiences of impostor syndrome and its implications for policy development and practice. Impostor syndrome in women and marginalized groups is influenced by a combination of factors, including gender stereotypes, societal expectations, and individual experiences (Feenstra et al., 2020).

Comprehensive policy interventions are needed to manage or eliminate impostor syndrome in Black female entrepreneurs. Additionally, community organizations and leaders can raise awareness, provide support, and advocate for policies that promote inclusivity and diversity in entrepreneurship. Promoting diversity and representation in entrepreneurship should be a key policy priority. This includes supporting minority-owned businesses through funding, incentives, and initiatives to increase the visibility of successful black female entrepreneurs. By highlighting diverse role models, policies can help challenge stereotypes and societal expectations, which can help reduce the impact of impostor syndrome in Black female entrepreneurs.

Policies should also focus on increasing awareness about impostor syndrome and its impact on Black female entrepreneurs, as well as providing training and skill development opportunities for them. This can be done through educational programs in schools, colleges, and entrepreneurial training programs. Workshops and seminars can also be organized to help entrepreneurs recognize and address impostor feelings. Offering workshops and courses to enhance entrepreneurial skills can build confidence. By investing in training programs, policies can empower entrepreneurs to overcome impostor feelings and reach their full potential.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs. This approach was effective in capturing the nuances and complexities of impostor syndrome in this population. This study added to the qualitative literature regarding Black female entrepreneurs' experience with impostor syndrome. Through the lived experiences of Black businesswomen, the researcher shared a comprehensive description of the participants' experiences with impostor syndrome. Participants communicated their experiences with impostor syndrome as it relates to unfair treatment regarding business funding, visibility, and business performance. The study adds to the research on Black female entrepreneurs' experiences with impostor syndrome, as previous research in that area is limited. Participants described societal expectations, stereotypes, and cultural dynamics of being in what society calls a male-dominated industry, supported by prior literature (Brush et al., 2018; Bullough et al., 2022).

During the study, the use of semistructured individual interviews was effective in helping participants solidify their descriptions of their experiences with impostor syndrome. Although Zoom could have limited individuals' ability to connect due to proximity or difficulties in discerning cues, the researcher created a safe space for participants to feel comfortable sharing by ensuring the environment was enclosed and that no one could overhear their conversation.

The experiences of impostor syndrome can be personal and emotional. Four of the seven participants got emotional during their interviews when they shared their experiences with impostor syndrome. Emotional vulnerability may indicate why the interview process was successful, as it provided space, time to process, and the ability to succinctly present experiences

with impostor syndrome. Researchers conducting similar studies should consider using qualitative methods to better understand the phenomenon.

Christian Worldview

The Christian worldview informed the interpretations and findings of this study. The Christian worldview places significant emphasis on the inherent dignity and value of every individual as created in the image and likeness of God. Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (English Standard Bible). This perspective would emphasize the importance of affirming the worth and competence of Black female entrepreneurs, countering any negative stereotypes or societal pressures that may emasculate their self-assurance. Galatians 3:7 discusses oneness. The Apostle Paul stated, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Another Christian consideration is that Christianity teaches principles of justice and equity, emphasizing the importance of fair treatment for all individuals. From this perspective, the study's findings highlighted the need to address systemic biases and barriers that Black female entrepreneurs face in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, advocating for greater equity and opportunities for all.

Participants in this study shared that one way they seek to cope with impostor syndrome is through social support or external validation. The Christian worldview emphasizes the importance of community and support for individuals facing challenges. In interpreting the study's findings, this perspective may highlight the importance of providing a supportive community for Black female entrepreneurs, where they can receive encouragement, mentorship, and resources to overcome impostor syndrome and succeed in their ventures. Humility and authenticity are another Christian worldview. Christianity teaches the value of humility and

authenticity, encouraging individuals to acknowledge their limitations and embrace their true selves, as is stated in 1 Peter 5:9 (ESV). Considering this, the study's findings may highlight the importance of Black female entrepreneurs being true to themselves and their unique strengths rather than feeling the need to conform to external expectations or stereotypes.

A final Christian worldview consideration in relation to this study is for Black female entrepreneurs to have hope and resilience despite their challenges. The Christian perspective emphasizes hope and perseverance when confronted with adversities. Interpreting the study's findings from this perspective may encourage Black female entrepreneurs to have hope for the future and persevere in their entrepreneurial endeavors, knowing that God is with them and their efforts can positively impact the world.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study stemmed from the researcher's decisions regarding participant criteria, experiences, and the study setting. This study focused on the lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs who grappled with impostor syndrome. Although the participants have experienced success in other areas of their lives and have evidence to prove their accomplishments, being constantly exposed to societal stereotypes and expectations has caused them to doubt their abilities, impacting their confidence and self-esteem. While the study focused on Black female entrepreneurs' experiences with impostor syndrome as it pertains to their business, some participants discussed their experiences with impostor syndrome in their personal lives and how it affected them. The researcher did not intend to explore the experiences of impostor syndrome in their personal lives, so the study was limited to the experiences within their professional lives as entrepreneurs.

Selecting participants based on specific criteria, such as their status as Black female entrepreneurs and demographics, helps to ensure that the study's findings are relevant to the target population. However, this delimitation may exclude individuals who do not meet these criteria but may still have relevant insights and experiences with impostor syndrome. This can potentially limit the diversity of perspectives included in the study. A final delimitation is the scope of impostor syndrome. Focusing specifically on impostor syndrome in the context of gender stereotypes and societal expectations may have overlooked other important factors that contribute to impostor syndrome.

Limitations

This study had several limitations—the first limitation pertained to subjectivity. Qualitative research inherently involves subjectivity as it relies on researchers' interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To address this, the researcher adhered to ethical practices and engaged in reflexivity to scrutinize their biases. However, researchers may still unintentionally impose their biases onto the data collection and analysis process, potentially influencing results. Another limitation was social desirability bias. Despite participants providing detailed information about their experiences with impostor syndrome, there's a possibility they may have provided socially desirable responses rather than reflecting their true experiences (Bispo Júnior, 2022). Although rapport was built with participants and a non-judgmental environment was created, discussing sensitive topics like impostor syndrome may have pressured participants to present themselves positively.

Time and resource constraints posed additional limitations. Qualitative research can be resource-intensive, requiring significant time for data collection, transcription, and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These constraints limited the researcher's ability to collect data from a

large and diverse sample, potentially impacting the generalizability of the findings. This remained a limitation despite careful consideration of the research design and prioritization of key questions. Limited generalizability is a common limitation in qualitative studies focused on exploring specific phenomena in-depth (Lesko et al., 2017). The study findings may not apply to all Black female entrepreneurs or other racial and gender groups.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future researchers should conduct additional studies to understand Black female entrepreneurs' experiences with impostor syndrome. Although this study expanded on the groundwork for gaining a deeper awareness of the lived experiences of impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs, limited contextual factors were explored, including gender stereotypes and a limited number of participants. A singularly focused study on any contextual factor may provide additional understanding of the lived experiences of Black female entrepreneurs. Therefore, the researcher recommends that further research be done to provide rich, nuanced insights into different stereotypes, societal expectations, and contextual factors that influence their perceptions of self-worth and competence.

As gender stereotypes and societal expectations continue to play a role in creating impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs, further research could examine how organizational cultures, industry norms, and broader societal attitudes toward race and gender influence the prevalence and manifestation of impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. This research could explore the impact of discrimination, tokenism, and microaggressions on Black female entrepreneurs' self-perceptions and psychological well-being. Through increased qualitative literature, Black female entrepreneurs could be given a voice to change practices within society and policy implications of addressing impostor syndrome among

Black female entrepreneurs, such as advocating for diversity and inclusion initiatives within entrepreneurial ecosystems, promoting equitable access to resources and opportunities, and challenging systemic barriers to success. Additionally, researchers could investigate the role of cultural values, community support networks, and collective resilience in buffering against impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. Understanding how cultural resources and social support systems contribute to individuals' sense of belonging and self-efficacy can inform interventions aimed at fostering empowerment and confidence.

This study highlighted that confidence and equality were critical for Black entrepreneurs to experience success in their businesses. Participants stated that they wanted to be seen and treated as the experts they are and wanted their experiences to be validated. This validation can help participants recognize that their feelings of inadequacy are not solely internal but are influenced by systemic factors. Future studies on impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs can contribute to the well-being, empowerment, and success of individuals within this demographic group by fostering greater awareness, understanding, and support for their unique challenges and strengths.

The Black female entrepreneurs in the study identified the need for equal treatment significantly more frequently than other needs, and it was most often the coinciding need with experiences of impostor syndrome. Further understanding the influence of the satisfaction of the need for equal treatment for Black female entrepreneurs may help manage or eliminate their impostor feelings. There were no situations of stress or trauma that surfaced in this study as universal deterrents to unfair treatment. However, a significant number of participants identified continuing challenges due to societal expectations. As Black females continue to rapidly launch

businesses, future research regarding access to funding is recommended to identify strategies to mitigate its negative impact on their well-being and professional trajectories.

Although this study analyzed how Black female entrepreneurs dealing with impostor syndrome cope with impostor syndrome, there was no recommendation for specific coping strategies or support mechanisms tailored to their unique experiences. Therefore, further research should focus on enhancing coping skills by developing and evaluating interventions specifically designed to address impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs and its impact on their decision-making processes. This could involve implementing mentorship programs, providing skills-building workshops, or offering therapeutic support tailored to the unique needs and challenges this demographic group faces. The research also indicates that further exploration into recovery and individualized methods to enhance the emotional well-being of Black female entrepreneurs may be necessary.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the role of gender stereotypes and societal pressures in creating impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. This study stemmed from the problem that despite the rapid formation of businesses among Black female entrepreneurs, there is a lack of growth and expansion among their businesses. Guided by three theoretical frameworks, Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, Constantinople's (1973), and Eagly and Wood's (1999) social role theory, the researcher explored Black female entrepreneurs' experiences with impostor syndrome.

The theoretical, empirical, and practical significance were explained, and a comprehensive review of the literature on how gender stereotypes and societal expectations contribute to impostor syndrome in Black female entrepreneurs was provided. A qualitative

phenomenological methodology was used to gather detailed descriptions of participants'

experiences through individual semistructured online interviews, leading to the identification of

four themes that deepened the understanding of impostor syndrome among Black female

entrepreneurs.

This study contributes to the existing literature on the business decision-making process

and performance related to impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. The study

presents implications for policies and practices aimed at supporting Black female entrepreneurs

and aspiring Black women entrepreneurs. In addition, recommendations for future research were

provided, emphasizing the need for further exploration of the impact of impostor syndrome,

considering its association with the relatively low business performance and growth observed

among Black female entrepreneurs. In conclusion, this study serves as a valuable contribution to

understanding impostor syndrome in the context of Black female entrepreneurship, offering

insights that can inform both research and practical interventions to support this demographic in

their entrepreneurial endeavors.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Permission to Recruit Online Group Members

From: ██████████████████████████████████ >
Sent: Tuesday, December 5, 2023 6:50 PM
To: Phillip, Marlene ████████ ████████████████ >
Subject: [External] Re: Requesting permission to recruit black female entrepreneurs from your
████████████████████

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

Hi Marlene! Yes, you absolutely can. Please reach out to them individually - let them know you are in the group together and that's how you are connected. yayyy

From: Phillip, Marlene ██████████████████████████ >
Sent: Tuesday, December 5, 2023 4:26 PM
To: ██████████████████████████████ >
Subject: Requesting permission to recruit black female entrepreneurs from ████████████
████████

████████████,

I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University in Virginia, and I am writing a dissertation about Black Female Entrepreneurs. I would like your permission to use some of the members from your ████████████████████ to recruit participants for my study. Would you be able to grant that permission?

Thank you for your help. I look forward to hearing from you.

Marlene Phillip
Doctoral Candidate Liberty University

APPENDIX B: Permission to use Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS)

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

I am copying this to my associate who will send you the correct permissions.

Dr. Clance

From: Phillip, Marlene
Sent: Thursday, December 14, 2023 6:30 PM
To: drpaulinerose@comcast.net
Subject: Requesting permission to use your instrument (CIPS) for my study

Hello Dr. Pauline Clance,

I am a doctoral candidate with Liberty University in Virginia, and I am writing a dissertation about impostor syndrome. I would like your permission to use your instrument (CIPS) for my study. Would you be able to grant that permission? Thank you for your help. I look forward to hearing from you.

Marlene Phillip

Doctoral Candidate Liberty University

Re: [External] RE: Requesting permission to use your instrument (CIPS) for my study

████████████████████████████████████

Tue 1/9/2024 11:05 AM

To:Phillip, Marlene ████████████████████

📎 2 attachments (439 KB)
CIPS.pdf; CIPS abbreviated copyright.pdf;

You don't often get email from annewerkheiser@gmail.com. Learn why this is important

Hi Marlene,

Thanks so much for reaching out with your interest in the Clance IP Scale. My apologies for the late response! Please fill out this form where you can indicate your assent to the use agreements and tell us more about the project. Given the delay on my end, you may have permission to use the scale upon completion of the form. No need to wait for a formal response from me, though if you require one for your records please let me know and I will be happy to send! I have attached the scales for your use.

Please let me know if you have any questions!

Best,

██████

--
████████████████
Assistant
Pronouns: she/her/hers
██████████████████████████

On Tue, Dec 19, 2023 at 1:37 PM Phillip, Marlene ████████████████████████ wrote:

> Hello Dr. Clance,
>
> I am still awaiting the approval to use your CIPS in my study.
>
> I look forward to hearing from you for the approval.
>
> Thank you,
>
> Marlene Phillip
>
> _____
>
> **From:** Pauline Rose Clance <drpaulinerose@comcast.net>
> **Sent:** Friday, December 15, 2023 1:22 PM
> **To:** Phillip, Marlene ████████████████████
> **Cc** ████████████████████████████
> **Subject:** [External] RE: Requesting permission to use your instrument (CIPS) for my study
>
> You don't often get email from drpaulinerose@comcast.net. Learn why this is important

APPENDIX C: Clance IP Scale

Clance IP Scale

For each question, please circle the number that best indicates how true the statement is of you. It is best to give the first response that enters your mind rather than dwelling on each statement and thinking about it over and over.

1. I have often succeeded on a test or task even though I was afraid that I would not do well before I undertook the task.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

2. I can give the impression that I'm more competent than I really am.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

3. I avoid evaluations if possible and have a dread of others evaluating me.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

4. When people praise me for something I've accomplished, I'm afraid I won't be able to live up to their expectations of me in the future.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

5. I sometimes think I obtained my present position or gained my present success because I happened to be in the right place at the right time or knew the right people.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

6. I'm afraid people important to me may find out that I'm not as capable as they think I am.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

7. I tend to remember the incidents in which I have not done my best more than those times I have done my best.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

8. I rarely do a project or task as well as I'd like to do it.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

9. Sometimes I feel or believe that my success in my life or in my job has been the result of some kind of error.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

10. It's hard for me to accept compliments or praise about my intelligence or accomplishments.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

11. At times, I feel my success has been due to some kind of luck.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

12. I'm disappointed at times in my present accomplishments and think I should have accomplished much more.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

13. Sometimes I'm afraid others will discover how much knowledge or ability I really lack.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

14. I'm often afraid that I may fail at a new assignment or undertaking even though I generally do well at what I attempt.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

15. When I've succeeded at something and received recognition for my accomplishments, I have doubts that I can keep repeating that success.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

16. If I receive a great deal of praise and recognition for something I've accomplished, I tend to discount the importance of what I've done.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

17. I often compare my ability to those around me and think they may be more intelligent than I am.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

18. I often worry about not succeeding with a project or examination, even though others around me have considerable confidence that I will do well.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

19. If I'm going to receive a promotion or gain recognition of some kind, I hesitate to tell others until it is an accomplished fact.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

20. I feel bad and discouraged if I'm not "the best" or at least "very special" in situations that involve achievement.

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

Scoring the Impostor Test

The Impostor Test was developed to help individuals determine whether or not they have IP characteristics and, if so, to what extent they are suffering.

After taking the Impostor Test, add together the numbers of the responses to each statement. If the total score is 40 or less, the respondent has few Impostor characteristics; if the score is between 41 and 60, the respondent has moderate IP experiences; a score between 61 and 80 means the respondent frequently has Impostor feelings; and a score higher than 80 means the respondent often has intense IP experiences. The higher the score, the more frequently and seriously the Impostor Phenomenon interferes in a person's life.

APPENDIX D: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 23, 2024

Marlene Phillip
███████████

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY23-24-1235 The Role Of Gender Stereotypes And Societal Pressures In Impostor Syndrome In Black Female Entrepreneurs

Dear Marlene Phillip,███████████

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: February 23, 2024. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

For a PDF of your approval letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

███████████

Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX E: Recruitment Post

Social Media Recruitment Post

ATTENTION███████████████████ am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education Degree specializing in Traumatology at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to describe the role of gender stereotypes and societal expectations in creating impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs. To participate, you must be at least 18 years of age and a Black female entrepreneur who has been in business for 5 or more years and have experienced impostor feelings. The procedures are a 15-minute online survey, a 30-45-minute online interview, and 30-minute member checking. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please send me a direct message via Facebook messenger for more information. An email with a survey will be sent to you to determine if you meet the criteria. A consent document will be emailed to you one week before the interview, and you will need to sign and return it at the time of the interview. Participants who complete the online survey within one week of receiving it will be entered in a random draw for a chance to receive a $50 Amazon gift card as compensation.

APPENDIX F: Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: The Role of Gender Stereotypes And Societal Pressures in Impostor Syndrome In Black Female Entrepreneurs

Principal Investigator: Marlene Phillip Doctoral Candidate, School of Behavioral Sciences, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be,18 years of age or older, a Black female entrepreneur who has been in business for at least 5 years and has experienced impostor feelings. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe the role of gender stereotypes and societal pressures in creating impostor syndrome among Black female entrepreneurs.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Rate yourself on the online Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) which takes 15 minutes.
2. Participate in a video and audio-recorded online interview via Zoom that will estimate between 30 to 45 minutes long.
3. Review your interview transcripts and the developed themes to check for accuracy or confirm agreement. A copy of the transcript along with the developed themes will be sent to your email within 24 hours of the interview. The estimated time to check for accuracy would be no longer than 30 minutes.

An overall time estimate for total participation in the procedures of this study would be no longer than 1 hour and 30 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

- Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.
- The benefit of the study to society is that the study aims to contribute to advancing inclusive policies and initiatives by examining the experiences of Black female entrepreneurs concerning impostor syndrome. Organizations and society can use the knowledge gained to develop initiatives designed to address gender stereotypes and

traditional norms, therefore fostering a more inclusive environment conducive to the success of aspiring Black female entrepreneurs.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted online in an area where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on the researcher's password-locked computer. Hard copy data will be stored and locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home office. The key to the cabinet will be locked in a drawer in the researcher's home office. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on the researcher's password-locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher is the only person who will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants who complete the online survey within one week of receiving it will be entered for a chance to be randomly chosen to get a $50 Amazon gift card using an online tool called Random Name Picker. The gift card will be delivered via email.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Marlene Phillip. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ██████████ or ████████████████ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, ████████ at ████████████

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX G: Standardized Open-Ended Semistructured Interview Questions

Questions
11. Why did you decide to be an entrepreneur?
12. How would you describe a typical day as an entrepreneur?
13. Describe factors that create or alleviate impostor syndrome in your life.
14. Describe your experiences with impostor syndrome.
15. Explain how you cope with the psychological feelings of impostor syndrome as a Black female entrepreneur.
16. Describe the meaning you assigned to your experience with gender stereotypes as a Black female entrepreneur.
17. Explain how your interaction with others in the community influences how you see yourself.
18. What societal challenges have you encountered since you started your business, and how did these challenges affect you psychologically?
19. Explain how the feelings of impostor syndrome have affected your business decision-making and overall business performance.
20. Is there anything else you would like to add or that I should know about from your experience with impostor syndrome as a woman entrepreneur?

APPENDIX H: Summary of Emerging Themes, Research Questions, and Formulated

Statements

Themes	Research Questions	Formulated Statements	#Black Female Entrepreneurs
1. Comparison, Self-Doubt, Procrastination, and Challenges with Visibility.	1	1. I delay in making decisions. 2. Showing up on social media is challenging. 3. I compare myself to other entrepreneurs and doubt my abilities.	7/7
2. Striving To Prove Competence and Expectation of Appearance.	2	4. I have to do too much to prove my competence. 5. I am expected to look a certain way.	7/7
6. Stereotypes, Prejudice, Biases, and Inequality.	2	6. They labeled you! 7. I do not get equal treatment.	7/7
7. Spiritually Connected, Knowing Their Identity and External Validation.	3	8. Personal coping strategies. 9. External support and perspectives.	7/7