

**The role of personal identity in shaping the scaling of women-owned
construction businesses**

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ABSTRACT

Over the past 25 years there has been a rise in the number of women entering the male dominated construction industry sector. These women are determined to run successful entities to financially sustain themselves and to build a lasting, impactful legacy. Many women are making great strides within the construction sector, and are leading their own organisations, while some are obtaining prestigious titles such as ‘best woman-owned contractor’ and some are proclaiming titles of being named ‘the largest women-owned contractor’. Despite the great strides that some women-owners are making within the construction industry, there is still a large, saturated group at the bottom of the pool who have been unsuccessful. Some women have had to give up and exit the industry, following prolonged constraints and limited growth prospects, while others remained at the same level of business growth, with no prospects of scaling opportunities. The question therefore rises that, ‘what are the contributing factors that influence the scaling of women-owned construction businesses?’. How have these construction women-owners been able to scale businesses despite stringent construction regulatory policies while navigating bias social cultural norms?. The study therefore drew a focus on the role of personal identity in shaping the scaling of women-owned construction businesses. It sought to explore the personal identity traits that construction women owners have that have shaped the scaling of their businesses within the construction industry. The study unpacked aspects such as the character traits of these women-owners, their value systems, the beliefs that drive their motivation and resilience as well as the challenges they have navigated that influenced their personal identity and ability to scale their business.

The study was structured as an exploratory qualitative study, whereby 18 women-owners, within the construction industry participated in semi-structured interviews with their contributions spanning between ten to 30 years of industry experience. The findings showed that the existing literature focuses on business-related factors such as access to capital, as well as networks, and industry related factors such as sexism, gender inequality, and patriarchal roles, without focusing on personal identity factors. The findings from the study addressed this gap, indicating identity through spiritual and socially rounded dimensions. Entrepreneurial resilience and an adaptive mindset, socio-relational identity, jack-of-all trades identity and ethical Identity were the personal identities that shaped the scaling of the participant study women owners within the construction industry. Further, findings showed that structural complexities constrained the scaling of women-owned construction businesses. Through the study, the aim was to achieve a new

prospective, which was to contribute to the body of knowledge based on the outlined conceptualised themes and research frameworks. Furthermore, the study aimed to raise an awareness to the construction industry body, policy-makers, and industry leaders on how inclusive decisions and policies can empower and pioneer the scaling of women-owned construction businesses.

Keywords

Women-ownership in construction, women-identity in construction, women-owned scaling, construction industry, and scaling in construction.

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Signature

Date

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CBE- Council for the building environment

CIDB-Construction Industry Development board

GDP-Gross Domestic Product

UNDP-United Nations Development

SEDA-Small Enterprise Development Agency

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research problem articulated from a practical and academic perspective. The chapter begins by outlining the background of the research problem, the research purpose, as well as the significance of the study and concludes with a description of the scope of the study.

1.2 Background to the research

The construction industry is one of the biggest contributors towards economic growth. In China alone, the construction sector contributed 6.8% towards its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2023 (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2024). While in Germany, the construction sector contributed 5.4% towards its GDP in 2024 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2025). In South Africa, the sector contributed 2.7% towards its GDP in 2023 (Statistics South Africa, 2024). This is an indication of the amount of impact the construction sector has towards economic growth, with one of its biggest enablers being employment creation. Employment creation in the construction sector continues to restore social dignity while promoting transformation. It is a commodity that the construction sector continues to thrive in (Talukdar, 2024). Through employment creation, the construction sector houses entrepreneurial opportunities in the supply chain, skills development and training, and in various other trades such as but not limited to civil construction, building construction, and bulk electrical works. It is with compelling evidence that the construction sector plays a powerful role in the development and growth of any economy (Talukdar, 2024).

In all its strides, the construction sector, however, continues to have systematic barriers that continue to cause inequality and division. Existing scholarly work shows that the value system of women-owners in construction has been framed largely by the background of the construction industry environment. Previous scholars have extensively highlighted that the construction industry is known to be a male dominated industry (Kunene & Msimango-Galawe, 2025). This alludes to the operating environment women-owners in construction often find themselves in. The construction industry environment is not inclusive to women owners, and because of this women often feel overlooked by their male counterparts (Pamidimukkala & Kermanshachi, 2023). Furthermore, existing scholarly work shows that the construction industry is known for a culture that enables the discrimination of women-owners, as a result the homeowners in construction find

themselves facing challenges that limit who they are within the industry (Kunene & Msimango-Galawe, 2025).

The construction industry remains known as a male dominated industry, creating segregation between the genders and limiting scaling opportunities for woman owners in the industry (Rotimi et al., 2024). The scaling of these businesses is defined as the ability to move from one level to the next in terms of growth and expansion. It is the ability for businesses to grow in terms of operational efficiency, and to generate more revenue streams, while gaining a stronger competitive advantage which maintains a positive cashflow and generates profit (Khattar et al., 2025). As a result, many women-owned construction businesses end up remaining at the same growth level, and therefore are unable to scale (Huang et al., 2021). Some women end up pivoting to other ventures that are more accommodating to who they are (Darshani & Perera, 2021). There are many stories told by women owners in construction, of failed businesses because of the lack of support from the industry (Talukdar, 2024). The representation of scalable, women-owned construction businesses is still low and requires continuous review on ways to improve the statistical reports.

There is also still a high resistance from the private sector to align with government policies and it requires stringent intervention (Talukdar, 2024). However, policy structures are not the only determinants that contribute to the scaling challenges faced by women-owned construction businesses. The personal identity of women entrepreneurs in the construction sector plays a key role in their ability to scale and grow businesses (LI, 2024). Identity can be defined as how a person sees themselves, alluding to who they are as a person. This is often shaped by upbringing and social norms (Arshed et al., 2023). Applied to this study, this concept reflects how women entrepreneurs identify themselves in society and how society receives them determines how successful their businesses will be. It is therefore important for entrepreneurs in the construction industry to be aware of these determinants and how they impact businesses. There are a few women entrepreneurs who have been able to break the glass ceiling and push beyond the high berries to entry (Greed, 2000). It is also notable that there is still very little written in the scholarly domain about this challenge and therefore a huge gap to interrogate this phenomenon remains (Orser, 2022). The study drew from various bodies of literature on socio economic norms, leadership practices, social affiliations and individual legitimacy to examine how personal identity shapes the scaling of women owned construction businesses (Talukdar, 2024).

1.3 Research problem

1.3.1 Practical problem

In accordance to insights from the Global Entrepreneurship Report South Africa, there is a low percentage of women owning established businesses, meaning it is a challenge for women to scale (*GEM Global Entrepreneurship Monitor*, n.d.).

The ability for any business venture to scale is essential for the business to drive more revenue streams, while remaining profitable. However, over the years, businesses have found it increasingly difficult to scale, due to the increasing abrupt market conditions that businesses find themselves in (Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB), 2024). Many businesses undergo challenges such as the financial market volatility, stringent regulatory compliance, and unforeseen events such as pandemics (*Small Enterprise Development Agency, 2024*). The same can be said about the construction industry as many businesses, particularly women-owned construction businesses struggle to transition from being start-ups to growing into well-established entities due to discrimination, socio-cultural barriers and high barriers to entry, within various sectors in the industry (Construction Industry Development Board, 2024). The challenges for women-owned construction businesses to scale stem from being marginalised because of the industry being such a male dominated industry (Council for the Built Environment, 2024).

1.3.2 Academic Problem

There has been various studies about women entrepreneurship. However, there is limited research on the role of personal identity in shaping the scaling of women owned construction businesses (Arshed et al., 2023).

The limited literature on women entrepreneurship includes what motivates women entrepreneurs to start businesses within the construction industry, despite the construction industry being a male dominated (Aneke et al., 2021). Previous studies sought to understand the reason for women entrepreneurs to want to enter into an industry that still faces gender bias, whereby women are not seen as capable to execute the same expertise as male counterparts (Aneke et al., 2021). Furthermore, previous studies also show that women entrepreneurs continue to navigate in industries that are still much governed by socio-cultural beliefs that marginalise women. Other scholars say that women entrepreneurs still struggle to navigate a work life balance and often have to make family sacrifices to obtain measurable business success (Kunene & Msimango-Galawe, 2025). Previous scholars further argue that when it comes to the personal identity of

women entrepreneurs, there are distinct key motivator traits between men and women entrepreneurs. While men draw motivation from social status and business strategy, women entrepreneurs are motivated by a personal desire to build families and communities at large. As a result, women entrepreneurs are still seen as nurturers as opposed to capable, astute business women within many industries (Hegarty et al., 2023).

Although there have been many efforts to address matters that continue to marginalise women entrepreneurs within male dominated industries, there has been no study that addresses the role personal identity has in shaping the scaling of women owned construction businesses.

There is still a gap in establishing the impact of the personal identities of these women on their ability to scale their businesses. The study therefore sought to identify the influence of personal identity in shaping the scaling of women owned construction businesses. The study further sought to make determinants of solutions to mitigate the barriers that continue to constrain the personal identity of woman-owners in the construction industry, which limits the ability to scale their business.

The research gap matters because existing literature currently focuses more on structural factors such as industry barriers of entry, access to funding and regulation policies (Wang et al., 2021), while neglecting the role personal identity plays in influencing the scaling of businesses. Without capsulating the role of personal identity into decision making, strategic planning and implementation, women owners in construction will continue to struggle to scale.

1.4 Research purpose

The purpose of the study was to determine the role of personal identity in shaping the scaling of women-owned construction businesses. The study further sought to determine the personal identities of women owning construction businesses, and lastly to investigate the challenges that influence the personal identity of women owned construction businesses and their ability to scale.

1.5 The significance of the study

The construction industry has always been known to be a male dominated industry, with high barriers of entry for women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs in the construction industry are still the most marginalised and continue to face challenges that limit their ability to scale.

1.5.1 Theoretical significance

The theoretical scope of the study helped to identify the role of personal identity in shaping the scaling of women-owned construction businesses. The study drew from theoretical frameworks and themes from existing literature to gain insights on how personal traits, values, and beliefs shape how women entrepreneurs in construction are able to identify and seize opportunities to scale, despite the construction sector being a male dominated industry (LI, 2024).

1.5.2 Practical significance

The practical significance of the study is to be of help to women-owners in construction, with regard to how to leverage on their personal identity for the purpose of business scaling, as opposed to seeing their personal identity as being insignificant. The study's aim was to empower women both on site as well as off-site.

Further to this, the significance of the study is to raise awareness to industry bodies and government stakeholders about the gap that exists when it comes to supporting women-owners within the construction industry as there are fundamental structural policies that need to be reviewed, in support of women-owners and their ability to scale their businesses. The study's aim was to act as a catalyst to drive those discussions, but most importantly to drive decision making.

1.6 Research scope

The research's scope was framed around women entrepreneurs in construction, within the South African Context. To draw a legitimate analysis, the study focused on women that have 10 to 30 years of entrepreneurial experience within the industry. The identity traits that women entrepreneurs possess, whether influenced by their socio-economic backgrounds or by entrepreneurial resilience, suggest that they have a role in the scaling of their businesses. The study focused on a timeframe between 2020 to 2025. The study also served a call to women entrepreneurs in construction to empower themselves beyond institutional barriers that limit their personal identity and ability to scale, by utilising industry channels centred around strategic partnerships, and leadership development to rise above limitations that the literature explores.

1.7 Overview of the research report

The research report has seven chapters:

Chapter 1: Defines the research problem, covering the theoretical and business views.

Chapter 2 : Details the literature review that forms an understanding of the key constructs.

Chapter 3: Includes the research questions as framed from the literature review.

Chapter 4: Features the research methodology that was used to conduct the study.

Chapter 5: Presents the findings drawn from the data analysis.

Chapter 6: Details the discussion of the research findings with the literature .

Chapter 7: Concludes the chapter, and includes the research outcomes, contributions, and recommendations pertaining to the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review which contains several themes. The first theme is personal identity which the researcher defines and further discusses its role in shaping the scaling of women-owned construction business. The second theme that is defined and defined is the scaling of women-owned construction businesses. The third theme that is covered is the interlink between personal identity and scaling. The fourth theme introduces and discusses the social and cultural norms that influence scaling. For the fifth theme, the research introduced and discussed the social affiliations as facilitators of scaling.

2.1.1 Social Identity Theory

Literature sources provided multi-dimension views of personal identity. Researchers define identity as a concept of how individuals define themselves, often shaped by their value systems, and beliefs (Drummond, 2021). Other evidence from philosophical literature described personal identity through consciousness and past events that individuals go through, maintaining that personal identity is shaped by evolving through experiences (Zixuan, 2023). While other scholars argued that personal identity remains an “open question”, alluding to the fact that it is not linear and is often framed around personal journeys (Carr, 2021). While other scholars reinforced that personal identity is formed through transformative events (Crone, 2021). Within the social identity theory, personal identity is defined by how individuals define themselves, based on group affiliations. The theory outlines three main components, social categorisation, social identification, and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social categorisation alludes to how people categorise themselves and others according to groupings, based on race, nationality, religion and even profession (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The second component alludes to when individuals adopt the identity of a group, therefore influencing their beliefs, behaviour, and self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social comparison, the third component, emphasises how individuals evaluate their group positively, by contrasting it with others, with the aim to boost self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In the context of the study, personal identity played an important role in shaping women-owned construction businesses. There have been numerous literature that reviews that the construction industry is still shaped by patriarchal norms of gender bias and exclusion of women in the industry, where women are constantly marginalised (Tlapana & Mngeni, 2021). Therefore the way these women see themselves, in terms of their inner-self, value system and social standing within the male dominated industry, determines how they

navigate the construction industry (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As a result, influencing their ability to scale their businesses. Therefore, the personal identity of the women owners, becomes instrumental in navigating the construction industry.

Existing literature has reviewed extensively the social identity theory in the context of women entrepreneurship, alluding to the fact that women entrepreneurs selected identity strategies based on legitimacy, and distinctiveness as measures to influence their entrepreneurial behaviours (Ozasir Kacar et al., 2023). However, there is still a gap when it comes to determining the forms of identity of women-owners within the construction industry, as existing literature does not provide the archetype of these identities. The study therefore sought to address the gap of the forms of identity of women-owners in construction, to enable the scaling of their businesses.

2.2 Personal identity

Scholars defined personal identity as a person's inner-core of who they are and it can develop over time as the individual continues to evolve (Branje et al., 2021). Other scholars defined personal Identity as the manner in which individuals describe and understand themselves within their social contexts (Hill et al., 2024). While several other scholars argued that personal identity is often associated with social status, for example individuals will define themselves according to their titles or their accolades –'I am a woman owner in construction' (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021), giving a clear framing of how an individual sees themselves. Considering the many definitions, this study defined identity as the characteristics that collectively articulate an individual's value system, beliefs and their role (Kelly & McAdam, 2023).

The understanding of personal identity amongst women entrepreneurs in the construction industry is essential as it plays an integral role in determining scalability and business success (Darshani & Perera, 2021). The personal identity of women-entrepreneurs is influenced by many factors both from the business environment and within their social environment. The study sought to understand how these environments have shaped the identity narrative of these women entrepreneurs (Eriksson & Frisén, 2024). It also further sought to understand the environment enablers or barriers to the personal identity of women-owners within the construction industry.

The construction industry is known to be a male dominated environment, where women often feel like they cannot be themselves fully because it is often said that they do not belong there (Wang et al., 2025). This speaks to the fact that the construction industry is

still very much influenced by socio-cultural norms and gender discrimination. Women-owners in construction have even faced identity harassment from their male counterparts who often discredit their capabilities to execute work, denying them technical authority (Lekchiri & Kamm, 2020a). The study showed that there is a lot of inferiority complexities built around women-owners in the construction industry, that are constantly targeting their self-esteem and personal confidence as businesses owners.

Despite the evidence provided by past scholars about some of the constraints that hinder the personal identity of women-owners in the construction industry (Pamidimukkala & Kermanshachi, 2022), and despite these women having to navigate spaces that do not allow them to fully show up as themselves, but instead forces them to suppress their identity to belong and to be accepted by their male counterparts (Turner et al., 2021), there is a rise of women-owners who are going against all odds to enter and to stay within the construction industry (Tapia et al., 2020). Even though these women often say that construction is hard, alluding to the constraints that they often have to navigate, many of them have chosen to stay and preserve (Turner et al., 2021). As a result, women-owners are starting to embrace who they are and what makes them unique in terms of identity. As a result, many women-owners in the construction industry now use their personal identity as a competitive advantage, as they navigate the construction industry (Davis & Kim, 2025). Women-owners in construction continue to evolve who they are, as they are more bold, more assertive, and more confident and are claiming the title to be referred to as women-owners within the construction industry (McLean & Whelton, 2023).

2.2.1 Identities expressed by women entrepreneurs

Existing literature talks about identity broadly but does not provide us with the archetype of the identities. Even within value-based identities people do not know the forms. Based on the exiting literature, there is value-based identities, personal resilience, and social-responsibility identity

2.2.1.1 Value-based identities

There are identities that are based on the values that women entrepreneurs possess. Existing scholarly work defined value systems as principles one lives by and gave an orientation in how they make decisions, how they interact with others and in how they carry themselves within their social context (Naguib, 2024). Other existing scholarly work alluded to the fact that value systems are largely cultivated by the environment of the individual. Environments shape the perception of individuals and influence their understanding of social phenomena (Sutherland et al., 2020). More existing scholarly work

alluded to saying value systems also influence behaviour and how one chooses to present themselves (Crecente et al., 2022).

In the context of women-owners within the construction industry, various scholars have written about how the construction environment shapes the value system of women-owners in the construction industry (Hegarty et al., 2023). Their value system is shaped by the culture of the environment and by the socio-relations within the environment (Kakar & Hasan, 2024). How these women feel included, respected, and valued by their male counterparts plays a role in the framing of their value system (Turner et al., 2021).

Existing scholarly work shows that as these women-owners navigate their entrepreneurial journeys within the construction environment; there seems to be distinct value shapers that these women-owners in construction possess. The values have been shaped by the construction environment and include honesty, integrity, and ethics (Zhang et al., 2021).

Honesty

Honesty is at the centre of everything when it comes to the construction industry, from interacting with stakeholders such as clients, community leaders, and suppliers, honesty becomes fundamental. In construction, honesty is also a form of accountability and reliability amongst stakeholders (Kuoribo et al., 2023). For women-owners in construction, honesty is a key value for them to build credibility from stakeholders and their employees. Women owners use honesty to challenge the inferiority complexities, that undermine their capabilities, therefore they use honesty as a foundation to cultivate strong stakeholder relations (Lekchiri & Kamm, 2020).

Integrity

Women-owners in construction use integrity to foster moral capital within their businesses (Nalitoela et al., 2020). Whether it is within their teams or whether they are entering contractual agreements with clients, women-owners use integrity as a tool to gain trust and credibility particularly in a male dominated industry like construction, where women leadership is often undermined (Lekchiri & Kamm, 2020). Women-owners in construction do not only use integrity to gain credibility, but also to foster industry relations with stakeholders and to gain influence (Westen & Graça, 2024).

Ethics

Ethics play a fundamental role in forming and reinforcing stakeholder relationships. In the construction industry, ethics are at the core of contract, from the inception stage until the handover stage (Iyiola & Rjoub, 2020). Women-owners value ethics and often do not

compromise, especially when it comes to contracting. Women-owners in construction believe in doing business the right way (Nalitolela et al., 2020). This alludes to their leadership and moral compass.

2.2.2 Personal resilience as identity

Scholars defined personal resilience as an enabler to achieve desired results without giving up (Bagheri et al., 2024). While other scholars argued that personal resilience should not be condoned or termed as a value practice because it often breeds stresses, and others end up over compensating some other areas of their lives to achieve the desired results (Hill et al., 2024). However, there is more existing literature that supports personal resilience not just as a coping mechanism but as an identity-based value that reflects determination and inner strength, alluding to the fact that personal resilience is a measure of success (Turner et al., 2021).

As alluded previously through existing literature, the key factors that constrain women entrepreneurs within the construction industry, are due to gender bias and inequality (Rostiyanti et al., 2020). Throughout previous literature, these two barriers are the most common challenges that are consistent and that continue to limit the personal identity of women-owners in construction. This makes emphasis on the impact and just how serious division is amongst societies, as it results in unfairness against the marginalised, because of under representation.

As a result of such factors, this has caused women entrepreneurs in the construction industry to develop a sense of resilience in how they administer business processes (Kelly & McAdam, 2023). Previous scholarly work described the resilience of these women in the context of self-belief and legitimacy building (Essers et al., 2025). There is a rise in women that are becoming more brave to enter the construction industry, considering that previously women often avoided joining the industry as it was known to be a male dominated (Wen & Gheisari, n.d.). There are more women who are entering the industry and are becoming active participants (Suresh et al., 2025). Existing literature shows even with the existing women-owners that have been in the industry for some time, that there is an increased sense of belief within them (Suresh et al., 2025). This alludes to the fact that women-owners in construction have developed confidence and an increased sense of belief that they can take their businesses to greater strides (Turner et al., 2021). This increased self-belief alludes to how resilient women-owners in construction continue to be, looking back at how far they have come, where they often remained silent and timid in spaces where they had to compete with their male counterparts.

2.2.3 Social responsibility identity

According to the existing scholarly work, social responsibility and empowerment both interlink, as they both frame how individuals define how they make a difference in the lives of those around them (Silva et al., 2023). Existing scholar work also defines these two aspects as a form of giving back to the less fortunate (Uba et al., 2023). Other scholars argue that due to the socio backgrounds that some individuals grew up in, social responsibility and empowerment brew a sense of obligation to go back and empower one of their own, that is those that have not made it yet (James et al., 2022). Alluding to the fact that to some, social responsibility and empowerment are not just a donation or a tick box exercise, but rather create a sense of purpose (Silva et al., 2023).

Existing literature shows that women-owners in construction take social responsibility and empowerment as a token to give back (Yarram & Adapa, 2021). Women-owners use their businesses as incubators of hope through job creation, building families and by extending help to others, even beyond their means (Barkema et al., 2024). This alludes to the fact that women-owners value building communities, they value development and justice, as these are contributions that are as a result of social responsibility and empowerment (Nasirudeen & Osabo, 2024).

Other scholars argue that women-owners in construction are better givers to society compared to their male counterparts (Chege, 2020). To the women-owners in construction, social responsibility and empowerment are about restoring the social dignity of others that are least fortunate. It is about extending a part of who they are to others, whether through their businesses or personal capacity (Wang et al., 2021). In contrast, existing literature shows that to men entrepreneurs, social responsibility and empowerment are more about a strategic enabler to do business and to seize opportunities. For male counterparts social responsibility and empowerment are about networking and obtaining power and influence (Peake & Eddleston, 2021), and have very little to do with purpose and feeling a sense of interconnectedness.

Social responsibility and empowerment connected together act as core values for women-owners in construction, because to them, it is all about community stewardship and being able to maintain care within the environments they operate in (Ventura et al., 2021).

2.3 Scaling

The growth trajectory of a business is encapsulated in the business life cycle which begins as a start-up, then moves to scaling and maturing. Scaling a business can be defined as

the ability for a business to be able to grow from one level to another, growing in terms of revenue, cash flow, profitability and competitive advantage. Business growth further entails the ability for a business to be able to take advantage of new market opportunities such as technological advancement, that can enhance operational efficiency (Khattar et al., 2025). The scaling of firms can be categorised in accordance to the level the business is scaling to over a marked timeframe. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on women-owned construction businesses that are past the start-up stage, with just over ten years in existence. These businesses are referred to as high growth firms (Khattar et al., 2025).

Factors influencing the ability for a business to scale include capital, and structural capabilities. Capital is a fundamental factor which contributes to the scaling of a business. It can be framed in three categories which include financial, social and human capital (Sheng et al., 2024). Financial capital is generated through the venture, either through self-funding or through sales. It can be accumulated through crowd funding, that can come in the form of a donation. Social funding can be defined as the funding obtained from partners, associates and even from inner relationships. Human capital can be defined as acquiring skills and capabilities that provide the solid foundation for long term sustainability of the business (Sheng et al., 2024).

Structural limitations also play a contribution when it comes to factors influencing the scalability of a business. The ability of a venture to scale may be influenced by the industry nature of the businesses. With some industries it is more challenging than others. For example, scaling may be more rapid in industries that are impacted by innovation and design. While in the more technical industries such as construction, and manufacturing, scaling a venture may take longer, due to some of the factors that affect scaling, such as the industry culture, gender inequality, institutionalised sexism, work-life balance, access to networks, and mentorship (Khattar et al., 2025a).

2.3.1 Industry Culture

Culture can be defined as how individuals in a group or industry relate in how they do things and behave. It is not tangible but rather experienced as one enters these spaces. Often than not, culture is hard to change as it is often encountered with resistance by stakeholders (Rostiyanti et al., 2020). The construction industry culture is one that is very hierarchical with strong male domination networks. The culture is fast paced and requires long hours of dedication in very harsh environments that are often located away from residence. The culture is very masculine, and it is still influenced by male energy, so

women often encounter sexism. It is not inclusive, and it is still ridged towards women-owned construction businesses. There are still strong allies of gatekeepers, with the majority of them being men (Rostiyanti et al., 2020). Although there has been attempts to include women entrepreneurs in construction through policy structures, that enable them to obtain work (Talukdar, 2024), the actual work environments are still very challenging to navigate. The identified challenges give evidence that the construction industry culture is not inclusive of women-owned businesses. The culture of the industry has an impact on the personal identity of women entrepreneurs in the construction industry as the industry culture is currently a barrier to the scaling of their businesses (Darshani & Perera, 2021) .

2.3.2 Gender inequality

Gender inequality in the construction industry remains one of the most dominant challenges for women entrepreneurs. It has an impact on their personal identity, how they show up and how these environments perceive them (Dwiri & Okatan, 2021). This has an impact on their business operations and ability to scale (Khattar et al., 2025b). The complexity of gender inequality varies from country to country as gender inequality is often influenced by the socio-culture of the environment. In New Zealand, research shows that gender inequality is still a major challenge for female entrepreneurs in construction (Rotimi et al., 2024). Furthermore, Indonesia also identified gender inequality as one of the most dominant contributing factors in the personal identity of women entrepreneurs in construction (Rostiyanti et al., 2020b). In New Zealand studies show that women entrepreneurs in construction are still viewed as a misfit (Rotimi et al., 2024). They struggle with being accepted for the role and contribution they can play in the industry (Rotimi et al., 2024). They are often categorised to be expected to provide services that are more accommodating to women, such as health and safety, environmental control services or administrative service.

Institutionalised Sexism

This segregation already limits the ability for women entrepreneurs to scale, as there are already high barriers of entry (Norberg & Johansson, 2021). Bias discrimination towards women entrepreneurs in construction also affects performance and business growth within their businesses (LI, 2024). Men will get preferential credibility, even before they can prove their professional expertise, simply by their personal identity of being men, and trust towards them is more favourable (Liñán et al., 2022). Discrimination can be experienced in different forms. For women entrepreneurs in the construction industry, it is often in terms of their capabilities to run successful, scalable businesses (Khattar et al.,

2025b). The impact of discrimination has a psychological impact, often leading to women entrepreneurs quitting the construction industry. Sexual discrimination can also be a hindrance for women entrepreneurs in construction. It manifests itself in different forms. From the unwanted touching to sexual commentary and sometimes to being targeted, to enhance vulnerability so that women can be taken advantage of. Many women entrepreneurs in construction face these obstacles, because of their identity as women (Rotimi et al., 2024).

Work-life-balance

Having reviewed the work life-balance literature, certainly women entrepreneurs in construction are impacted and therefore influences their ability to scale their businesses. Research shows that more than men, women often have to compensate more, as care givers in their households and therefore moving them away from their business environments (Lekchiri & Kamm, 2020). The construction environment is strenuous. Women entrepreneurs in the industry are often always away from home and have to work long hours. This takes them away from family responsibilities and often than not these women entrepreneurs in construction have to consider which aspect of their lives takes more precedence than the other, and in most cases, they consider family first. This means that the focus on scaling their business is strained (Darshani & Perera, 2021).

Mentorship

Having access to industry mentorship is one of the key personal identity factors that have an impact in determining the scaling of women-owned construction businesses (Shahriar & Jalili, 2025). The nature of the construction environment is technical and requires skills to be successful. Many of the challenges that women-owned construction businesses face, seem to be in the area of technical expertise (Bullough et al., 2022). There is a lack of knowledge of the technicalities that are required to grow and succeed within the industry (Darshani & Perera, 2021). It is therefore important for women entrepreneurs in construction to have mentors that have industry experience. However, this is often not the case. Identifying a credible technically experienced mentor is challenging, as often many of the perceived mentors have their own personal interests and are not invested in the success of other people's businesses. Mentorship in this regard is often more successful when cultivated by association (Darshani & Perera, 2021).

Networks and Association

Research evidence proves that networks have influence on organisational performance and the organisation's ability to scale (Darshani & Perera, 2021). According to the

stakeholder theory, stakeholders are persons that can influence the ability of a business to achieve its business objectives (Ma et al., 2022). Stakeholder networks can be cultivated externally or within the organisation (Mahajan et al., 2023). For the purpose of the study, the researcher drew focus on external networks and their impact on the scaling of women-owned construction businesses. In the construction industry these networks include but are not limited to industry bodies (Council for the Built Environment, 2024), regulators (Construction Industry Development Board, 2024), investors, and suppliers. Studies, however, show that many networks are often constrained by social standards such as capital and the division between the elite and upcoming entrepreneurs (Darshani & Perera, 2021). Women entrepreneurs in the construction industry have often been constrained by these limitations as there seems to be a high barrier to entry in terms of accessing stakeholder networks that are able to channel the growth of their businesses. Stakeholder networks are key as they harness opportunities, knowledge sharing and resources.

2.4 Personal identity and scaling

Personal identity plays a crucial role in the scaling of a business, particularly when it comes to women-owned construction businesses (Khattar et al., 2025). The researcher explored how the personal identity of women-owned construction businesses influences opportunity and risk within their business. In terms of the scaling stage of the life cycle of a business, research proves that, the ability for women-owned businesses to scale from one level to the other is seldom (Bullough et al., 2022). Furthermore, research proved that even though women-owned businesses struggle to scale, this is not always the case for their male counterparts (Talukdar, 2024). This suggests that the barriers that contribute to these limitations lean towards the personal identity of women.

Existing literature focused on the business-related factors such as access to capital and networks, as well as industry-related factors such as sexism, gender inequality, and the patriarchal roles associated with a work-life balance, while paying limited attention to the personal factors (Wang et al., 2025). This represents a significant gap that the study sought to address by focusing on the individual factors since existing studies have primarily focused on business factors rather than personal identity influences.

Personal identity is significant in the scaling context because it frames how individuals view themselves within the business space and from a social context. For women-owners in construction, personal identity shapes how they navigate perspective roles, in leadership, in businesses and in their personal roles (Crone, 2021). Personal identity

further shapes how women owners are able to navigate external environment factors such as but not limited to male dominance, gender bias, and exclusion (Arshed et al., 2023). It is also able to influence business decisions, that are often shaped by a moral campus such as values and ethics. In existing literature, personal identity is largely covered from a psycho-social domain (Crone, 2021), however, in this study, personal identity is presented as a fresh phenomenon that serves as an influence on the scaling of businesses.

2.5 Conclusion

Personal identity emerges itself as a strong phenomenon in the context of women-entrepreneurship, moreover in the role of shaping the scaling of businesses. Recognising personal identity as a lever for business scaling will help unlock more growth paths for women entrepreneurship.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The previous chapter identified the literature gaps for the scaling of women-owned construction businesses. Chapter 3 examines the research questions that sought to address the identified gap in the literature review as outlined in Chapter 1.

Existing literature largely focuses on the dimensions that influence the personal identity of women owners within the construction industry. These dimensions allude to the male dominance within the construction industry, where women are often unaccepted for who they are (Amponsah-Asante et al., 2025), and are often stereotyped (Kunene & Msimango-Galawe, 2025). These dimensions have often shaped how women-owners in construction see themselves, with many women having to overcome inferiority complexities (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021).

Therefore, existing literature remains under developed in the area of determining the forms of personal identity for women owners in the construction industry. The actual details of the forms of personal identity for women owners in the construction industry remains unknown.

The study therefore sought to identify the personal identities of women-owners within the construction industry by answering the below research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the personal identities of women owning construction businesses?

Existing research focused on how business factors such as capital, industry factors such as networks, and patriarchal factors such as a work-life balance influence the scaling of women entrepreneurs in the construction industry (Khattar et al., 2025). However, limited research has focused on personal factors such as identity (Amponsah-Asante et al., 2025).

Business scaling is one of the most common strategic pillars, whether scaling is a current need within the business or a future strategic goal, it remains at the heart of any business. The ability of a business to be able to scale is imperative for the business to remain sustainable (Sallah & Caesar, 2020).

Women-owners in the construction industry face day to day complexities within the industry that either open up opportunities for them to scale or hinder them from scaling (Amponsah-Asante et al., 2025). The study therefore sought to explore the impact of

personal identity on the ability of women-owners in the construction industry to scale their businesses.

RQ2: How does personal identity impact the scaling of women owned businesses in construction?

Scaling a business can be challenging, due to the unpredictable environment businesses operate in (Tarba et al., 2023). Women-owned construction businesses, find scaling even more challenging, as they find themselves navigating institutional complexities such as gender bias, and navigating exclusion from decision-making spaces, further limiting visibility and access in spaces of influence (Khattar et al., 2025). Women-owners in construction continue to be marginalised, as a result, their ability to scale is implicated.

Women entrepreneurs in the construction industry have to navigate challenges that are not of similar nature to their male counterparts. simply because of their personal identity as women (Talukdar, 2024). These challenges are what set them apart from their male counterparts. The significant difference means women-owners are at a competitive disadvantage when it comes to scaling their businesses (Khattar et al., 2025).

Existing studies have focused on the challenges broadly but the gap is in understanding the specific challenges to scaling and personal the identities for women owners in the construction industry (Hasan et al., 2021).

The study therefore sought to identify these challenges by confronting women-owners in the construction industry and drawing the root causes of these challenges. The study further sought to investigate the limitations these challenges cause when it comes to the scaling of women-owners in the construction industry. The study concludes by mapping out the solutions in response to the challenges that limit the personal identity and scaling of women-owners within the construction industry.

This study therefore revealed that there is still a great gap in the literature, which the research questions sought to address.

RQ3: What are the challenges that influence the personal identity of women owned construction businesses and their ability to scale?

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 Population

The population of the study can be defined as an entire group of people or institutions with the same characteristic traits, relative to a particular study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The context of the study was to seek how personal identity shapes the scaling of women owned construction businesses. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the researcher selected women-owners of businesses within the construction industry.

4.2 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis can be defined as the phenomenon that is being studied by the researcher to draw conclusions, based on the collected data (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher selected women entrepreneurs within the construction industry as the unit of analysis. The reason for the selection was because of their experience within the industry as they were able to share their experiences with the researcher, which assisted in addressing the research problem (Martinsuo & Huemann, 2021).

4.3 Sampling method and size

Sampling can be defined as the process utilised to narrow down the population, with a purpose of drawing focus to more relevant data, to meet the research objectives (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The researcher drew the sampling strategy from the non-probability sampling technique. Purposive sampling was used as a sampling approach (Campbell et al., 2020). The researcher selected this sample strategy because of its appropriateness for the qualitative methodology, which the researcher had selected.

The researcher used sound discretion to select the most suitable candidates to participate in the sampling. It is important to note that not everyone was selected from the population but only those candidates that were able effectively contribute towards answering the research questions. The sample criteria was therefore:

- Women entrepreneurs who owned businesses and were operating within the construction industry at the time of the study, with a focus on general building, civil construction, electrical works, plumbing works and mechanical works.

- Businesses that were in the process of scaling or had scaled, with an experience of just over ten years.
- Businesses must have been registered with the CIDB.

The interviewer conducted a total of 18 interviews. The sample size was considered sufficient for the nature of the study. Generally, qualitative studies are based on the depth and quality of the data and not the quantity size of the data. However, 18 interviews were conducted to enable the researcher to achieve data saturation, where no new themes were drawn. The sample size also gave a diverse representation of the participants which enabled the researcher to capture unique experiences from the participants (Wutich et al., 2024) .

4.4 Measurement instrument

The measurement instrument can be defined as a tool the research uses to collect data from the participants (Creswell, 2018). The researcher used the qualitative methodology approach and therefore, was able to develop and use the interview guide to draw up the interview questions.

The Interview guide was used as an instrument to ask the participants in-depth questions which assisted in answering the three research three as outlined in chapter 3 (McGrath et al., 2019). The interview guide had a list of questions as sub questions, under each research question. This was done to draw in-depth context and assist the researcher in answering the research questions. The researcher used Microsoft Teams as a means to record the interviews and to transcribe the transcripts (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The researcher created a consent form, which is a binding document that was used to protect both parties, in terms of agreeing to take part in a recorded interview, and to protect organisational as well as personal information that was shared (Lykken, 2022).

4.5 Data gathering process

The data gathering process can be defined as the process used to collect information from the selected sample, and the objective at the end is to is to draw patterns, clues and answers that address the research questions. What is key is to ensure that all data has been collected within ethical standards (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The researcher prepared and submitted the ethical clearance in alignment with the regulations of the university. The process took seven working days for the university to review and approve ethical submission. Upon obtaining the ethical clearance, the

researcher began the process of recruiting the participants and setting up interviews with them, in accordance with their availability. The participants were recruited in accordance to the sample method. Before the interviews, the researcher took the participants through the consent process. The researcher read the consent form to the participants to outline the regulatory process the interviews were going to be conducted under. The researcher then requested the participants to give consent, which all participants did verbally before the interviews. However, not all the participants returned the consent forms that were circulated to them by the researcher to sign. The interviews were conducted on an online platform called Microsoft Teams. For a more natural flow of conversations with the participant, the interviews were conducted in an area where the participants were most comfortable and where there was low noise levels. The interviews were also recorded and transcribed on the Microsoft Teams portal.

The researcher had to conduct the interviews with openness so that the participants had different values and beliefs about the study. The researcher also had to manage the expectations of the participants, and not reveal their points of view, so that they felt comfortable to express their views from their experiences, to draw a true reflection from the interviews.

The researcher was also able to draw consistent data from all 18 participants, regardless of the online platform that was used. All the data that was collected was a true reflection of the participants' views and experiences. At the end of the interviews, the audios, videos, and transcripts were downloaded from Microsoft Teams. The downloaded transcripts were cleaned, omitting defects like the space fillers such as "uhm, hmm" which had no significance to the data. In accordance to the ethical clearance, the researcher also made the participants' personal details such as their names, and company names anonymous. The collected data was summarised on a table format for ease of analysis. All data was stored on a google drive.

4.6 Analysis approach

Since the phenomenological approach that was used by the researcher was descriptive, the researcher used the thematic analysis to analyse the data. Prior to conducting the thematic analysis, the researcher had to ensure that all the data was collected, as the themes had to be drawn from its analysis.

Achieving Familiarity of the Data

The researcher began the analysis process by reading through the data, with the objective to gain familiarity. The researcher particularly searched for unique concepts rather than what was already known.

Searching for codes and themes

The researcher then searched for the meanings of the lived experiences by the participants and marked the meanings accordingly. The researcher then had to describe the meanings using brief words and notes, and these were referred to as codes. Checking of the correlation of the codes was done by making comparisons, to identify the similarities and differences between the codes. The researcher then organised the codes according to group categories. From the group categories, themes began to emerge.

Organizing themes to align with the research questions

In the process of organising the codes, the researcher had to write and re-write the findings, wherever applicable. The researcher also ensured that the themes were described according to their meaning. The themes were written in accordance to the lived experiences and within context. The researcher conducted this analysis process through a software called ATLAS.ti.

4.7 Quality controls

The researcher used a trustworthy criterion as a framework for quality assurance for the collected data. This concept was measured using four criteria, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the accuracy of the collected data and its interpretation (Wood et al., 2020). The researcher ensured credibility by ensuring that all primary data was a true reflection of the participants' personal reflections.

The interviews were recorded clearly and then transcribed accurately by the researcher. The researcher also ensured that the collected data addressed the research questions, to ensure that there was no data deviation from the research study (Wood et al., 2020). Transferability is the second criteria the researcher adopted to ensure that quality controls were maintained throughout the research paper. Transferability tests if the research study can be applied in another context of study outside of its current purpose (Kyngäs et al., 2020), for example if it could be applied in a different population. To achieve transferability, the researcher used strategic methods such as ensuring the application of thick descriptions was maintained throughout the study. The purpose of thick description

application is to ensure that the researcher is able to give the reader an in-depth context of the study. The researcher achieved this by giving context of the participants' details, and why the reason they were selected for the study. This included the participants' occupation, and their experience in the field. This therefore enhanced the credibility of the study (Younas et al., 2023).

To achieve transferability, the researcher used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to provide a rich context of the participants' characteristics, occupation, and experiences (Campbell et al., 2020). This will enable other readers to go through the study with ease and evaluate if the study can be utilised in other areas of study.

The researcher used dependability as the third criteria to ensure that quality checks were achieved. Dependability refers to the consistency of the process of which data is collected to ensure that the quality of the research is reliable for other researchers to use even in the future. Dependability was achieved by the researcher by creating a trail of audit notes. This process was to ensure that the research process was documented and that all this information pertaining to the study is transparent (Janis, 2022).

Document recording included recording all the data collection and the data analysis process. This is therefore evidence of how the researcher administered the research process. This will also help other researchers to be able use the data to draw up similar conclusions. The researcher also used peer review assessments from fellow researchers. This criticism was able to expose blind spots from the researcher and eliminate biased data, and therefore contributing to the credibility of the study (Johnson et al., 2020). The researcher also used triangulation as a strategy to maintain consistency and transparency of the data. Lastly the writer used confirmability as a criteria for quality checks, enabling the research study to be validated by other researchers, and therefore to be deemed as creditable (Johnson et al., 2020). The study was validated through a number of strategies which included the recording and transcribing of data. This keep a track record of the documentation of the collected data, the data analysis process, and any other relevant information concerning the data. This will enable other researchers to verify the work, even for future purposes (Johnson et al., 2020).

Researcher reflexivity was also be implemented by the researcher to ensure validity of the research paper. This process allowed the researcher to conduct a personal evaluation of the role they have played towards collecting the research data, analysing the data as

well as establishing a theory (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). This was a self-reflection by the researcher which assisted with eliminating any biased data. This practice also enhanced ethical administration by the researcher, thus promoting credibility of the study (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). The researcher also relied on triangulation as a strategy to ensure quality controls are achieved.

4.8 Limitations

Due to the fact that the researcher adopted a qualitative methodology to carry out this study, one of the limitations about this approach was that it was subjective, and the collected data was based on the participants' personal experience and the analysis of the data was mostly based on the interviewer's intuition, drawn from the interviews with the participants.

The data collection process was a complex exercise, in terms of reaching the target of the number of participants to interview as outlined under the sample size. The researcher had to attend women in construction seminars, where there was a high chance of meeting women-owners within the construction industry who met the sampling requirements. The study focused on a single industry, being the construction industry. Therefore the findings can only be used only within this industry and cannot be used for other industries.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings obtained from the data collected by the researcher, as outlined in the research methodology chapter. Throughout the section, the researcher seeks to present in-depth evidence that was derived from the data to answer the three research questions outlined in Chapter 3. The researcher begins by giving an overview of the data collection which details the steps taken to obtain the data. This section reveals details about the participants and outlines the themes that were covered. The researcher will then move to the central part of this chapter to present the themes within the context of each research question.

5.2 Sample Description

Table 1 provides an overview of the interviews participant list. From the table, there was a group of five women-owners that came from Soweto, Gauteng. However, the majority of the women-owners resided in Johannesburg Gauteng, with a total of nine participants. Only two participants came from Durban, Kwa-Zulu- Natal. There was one participant that came from Johannesburg, Gauteng and one came from East London, Eastern Cape. The table further outlines the number of years each participant had been in business, with years spanning between seven and 33 years.

For the purpose of the study, it was important for each participant to be registered with CIDB, a regulator body for construction companies within South Africa. Their main function is to measure compliance and growth of operating construction companies. All interviews were recorded in full, and all participants gave consent to participate, within the regulations of the University of Pretoria.

Table 5.1: Summary of the research sample

GIBS MBA - Qualitative Interviews									
Research Topic : The Role of Personal Identity in Shaping The Scaling of Women-Owned Construction Businesses									
No.	Candidate ID	COMPANY SPECIALIZATION	Number Of Years In Business	CIDB LEVEL	Geographical Area	INTERVIEW DATE	INTERVIEW TIME	INTERVIEW COMPLETION	interview duration
1	Participant 1	General Building	33 Years	4 GB	Durban,KZN	27-Aug-25	6:52am	Yes	37:46s
2	Participant 2	General Building	10 Years	3 GB	Pretoria, GP	27-Aug-25	16:00pm	Yes	53:39
3	Participant 3	General Building+ Electrical Engineering	10 Years	6 GB,EP	Johannesburg, GP	07-Aug-25	11:00am	Yes	52:17
4	Participant 4	General Building + Civil Engineering+Mechanical Engineering+ Electrical Engineering	19 Years	6GB, CE,ME,EP	Johannesburg, GP	13-Aug-25	9:00am	Yes	1h 15m 31s
5	Participant 5	General Building + Civil Engineering+Mechanical Engineering+ Electrical Engineering	24 Years	9 GB,CE,ME,EP	Johannesburg, GP	12-Aug-25	7:59am	Yes	1h 21m 9s
6	Participant 6	General Building + Civil Engineering	9 Years	6 GB,CE	Johannesburg, GP	26-Aug-25	11:00am	Yes	42m 37s
7	Participant 7	General Building	9 Years	3GB	East London,EC	29-Aug-25	7:15am	Yes	59m 54s
8	Participant 8	General Building	7 Years	1GB	Johannesburg, GP	13-Aug-25	11:03 am	Yes	1h 5m 19s
9	Participant 9	General Building+Civil Engineering	20 Years	6 CE, GB,	Johannesburg, GP	12-Aug-25	12:39pm	Yes	1h 30m 14s
10	Participant 10	General Building + Civil Engineering+Mechanical Engineering+ Electrical Engineering	28 Years	9 GB,CE,ME,EP	Johannesburg, GP	27-Aug-25	07:32am	Yes	1h 5m 10s
11	Participant 11	General Building + Civil Engineering+Electrical Engineering	20 Years	8GB,CE, EP	Soweto, GP	26-Aug-25	5:48 pm	Yes	1h 38m 36s
12	Participant 12	General Building	23 Years	1 GB	Johannesburg, GP	07-Aug-25	6:12pm	Yes	49m 14s
13	Participant 13	General Building + Civil Engineering+Mechanical Engineering	20 Years	9 GB,CE,ME,EP	Durban,KZN	05-Aug-25	07:00am	Yes	52m44s
14	Participant 14	General Building + Civil Engineering+ Electrical Engineering	22 Years	5 GB,CE,EP	Soweto, GP	13-Aug-25	9:00am	Yes	1h 7m 42s
15	Participant 15	General Building + Civil Engineering+ Electrical Engineering	16 years	5GB,CE,EP	Soweto, GP	14-Aug-25	7:35am	Yes	51m 1s
16	Participant 16	General Building + Civil Engineering+ Electrical Engineering	22 Years	3 GB,CE,EP	Soweto, GP	26-Aug-25	2:34pm	Yes	1h 07m 42s
17	Participant 17	General Building + Civil Engineering+Electrical Engineering	22 Years	7 GB,CE,EP	Soweto, GP	12-Aug-25	23:00pm	Yes	60m 9s
18	Participant 18	General Building + Civil Engineering+ Electrical Engineering	19 Years	3 GB,CE,EP	Johannesburg, GP	06-Aug-25	7:35am	Yes	47m 52s

5.3 Results presentation

The researcher presents the results of the data obtained through the implementation of a thematic analysis. The cleaned transcripts were uploaded on the ATLAS.ti system and the researcher generated the codes. On average, a script had +68 codes. The writer grouped the codes into various categories based on similarities. The categories were then grouped into themes. The themes were framed by the three research questions outlined in Chapter 3.

The researcher came up with six themes on conclusion of the analysis. From the six themes, two, namely “personal identity disciplines as enablers of institutional scaling be classified as additional” as well as “Institutionalised and collective pathways to empowerment” were identified as new themes. For the purpose of the study, the researcher kept the themes as they strengthened the insights.

5.4 Research Question 1 : What are the personal identities of women owning construction businesses?

Research question one was formulated to determine the personal identities associated with women-owners within the male dominated construction industry. Women face discrimination and exclusion by their male counterparts in the construction industry. The researcher wanted to understand the character of these women-owners in construction, their value systems, beliefs, and the roles they frame themselves in. By establishing this data, the researcher was able to gain insights on how these women-owners were able to exist in a male dominated environment.

From the research question, three interview questions were generated, under the interview guide. The research questions were formulated to help the researcher unpack in-depth underlining information, that would not have been obtained from a single research question. This helped the researcher to generate more insights, as the participants responded to the questions.

From the obtained findings, the themes that were identified included “identity through spiritual and socially rounded dimensions for women-owners in construction” as well as “entrepreneurial resilience and an adaptive mindset”, as the identity forces for women owners in construction.

5.4.1 Theme 1 : Identity through spiritual and socially rounded dimensions for women-owners in construction

From the first theme, the findings presented that the participants embodied personal identities eliminating from three group categories namely, faith and spiritual identity, socially-rounded identity, as well as assertive and self-reliant identity.

Faith and Spiritual Identity

From the results presented, over 50% of the participants identified themselves as individuals whose identity is embedded in faith and spirituality. For example, Participant 3 identified herself as a Christian and further explained how she used her religious identity to achieve what she has today, referring to the context of her business. Another participant shared some interesting facts about how she used her religious identity as a guiding tool to make decisions.

*"The first point of consultation before people would be my Bible to say I've faced this situation. How? What does the Bible say about it? And what I found is that."
P...*

The same sentiments were shared by Participant 11 who said,

"I have a tendency of waking up between 2:00 and 3:00 for my prayer, 95% of the decisions that I take at that time, especially after prayer, has worked for me".

Furthermore, the data showed how her religious identity shaped her way of doing business ethically, which strengthened the understanding of her identity even in ethical values.

All the participants acknowledged other personal identity traits during the interviews, however, what came out evidently in the findings was their strong belief that their true identity is embedded in their faith, spiritual walks, and practices. A table below provides additional quotations supporting the religious and faith identity.

5.4.1.1 Evidence of Faith and Spiritual Identity

Table 5.2: Evidence of faith and spiritual identity

Participant 3	"I am one person that believe in prayer, the Holy Spirit, the blood, and the name of Jesus. So those are my weapons to go through and achieve what I have today" 3:62 ¶ 102 .
Participant 4	"Lighting my path because I do not know everything, but I know that God can see everything that is happening around me and he's through his word I am able to" 4:51¶58. "Whatever opportunity that I get, it doesn't come from another person. It is a gift from God to say this is what I want to give" 4:60 ¶ 66. "The first point of consultation before people would be my Bible to say I've faced this situation. How? What does the Bible say about it? And what I found is that"4:52 ¶ 59.
Participant 8	"Sometimes I have that spirit of giving up ."8:98¶9 "I'm a believer. I am a Christian. I do believe in God. With everything I wake up, I just pray and thank God for the day and pray for the workers and pray for a good working environment" 8:23 ¶ 37.
Participant 9	"I grew up in a religious family. Being ethical was instilled at in at a very young age" 9:37 ¶ 50.
Participant 10	"My strategy is to first get my spiritual well-being to be healthy and once that one is healthy then I can deal with the other normal strategies" 11:135 ¶ 110.
Participant 11	"Sometimes you make business decisions without that consultation. And a lot of times for me, whatever that turns out fails if I did not pray about something" 12:132¶179 . "I have a tendency of waking up between 2:00 and 3:00 for my prayer, 95% of the decisions that I take at that time, especially after prayer, has worked for me" 12:128¶175 "I always say, God, I'm going to try you with this now. And you know, God always shows up for me honestly" 12:104 ¶ 132.
Participant 13	"God grants you the wisdom and ideas to always identify new opportunities" 14:61¶60.
Participant 15	"I'm a pastor" 16:6 ¶ 17.
Participant 16	"I am a Christian" 18:9 ¶ 25.
Participant 18	"Maybe God has blessed me with the understanding husband" 23:27 ¶ 29.

Socially Rounded Identity

Findings showed that over 60% of the participants embedded their identity in their social setting. Socially rounded identities refer to, but are not limited to cultural background, socio-background, and the household background. Participants 1 and 14 both shared strongly about their impoverished backgrounds. They both shared that humble beginnings were a part of who they are, and that those humble beginning still informed some of the decisions they made today, even in their businesses. They both alluded that it is one of the reasons they started businesses in construction.

"It was through sheer hard work that we have managed to build what we have. So, we do not have generational wealth. None of that".

"When I could not go to school anymore, I then decided to start my own business".

Out of the 18 Participants, 11 participants identified themselves as mothers. All the participants alluded that they had to improvise with their children to maintain relationships with their children, because of business commitments. The findings showed that motherhood is an identity that comes out strongly in the participants' identity, for example, for Participant 11, motherhood goes beyond her own biological children. The findings also showed that, the identity of being a mother motivated the way some of the participants made decisions. Participant 4 expressed this very strongly,

"I'm a mom to a 14-year-old boy. We video call each other. And then I have got my sister because we are staying together. So, when I am not around, I know that he is in good hands. So, whatever actions and decisions that I am making now, definitely they're going to impact on my children and their children and my generation, my line of generation. So, I want to be conscious of that in every time I engage in anything".

Both the identity of being a mother and humble beginnings enhanced the desire for the participants to give back to their communities and employees. Most of the participants alluded that they felt like it is their purpose to empower and to give back. Participant 10 shared very strongly about empowering others to move to the next level.

From the findings, there is strong evidence that the socially rounded identity plays a huge role in how the participants see themselves within their social group, and in the business environment. The table below provides additional quotations supporting the evidence of the socially rounded identity theme.

5.4.1.2 Evidence of Socially Rounded Identity

Table 5.3: Evidence of socially rounded identity

Participant 1	<p>"So, it is not easy. It is a lot of work. Believe me, it is a lot of work. But I think the motivation behind learning it (construction) was I had three kids. Two were still in university. No, one was in university, one was in matric, and one was 11 years old when I became a widow" 1:49 ¶ 108.</p> <p>"It was through sheer hard work that we have managed to build what we have. So, we do not have generational wealth. None of that" 1:84 ¶ 35 – 37.</p>
Participant 2	<p>“.I have got kids and yet I am the nurturer, and he is not” 2:34 ¶ 48.</p>
Participant 4	<p>"So, whatever actions and decisions that I am making now, definitely they're going to impact on my children and their children and my generation, my line of generation. So, I want to be conscious of that in every time I engage in anything" 4:93 ¶ 82.</p>
Participant 5	<p>"You still drive your-car, your old car. So, we do not show off" 5:91 ¶ 85.</p> <p>"I never gave them that opportunity to have a mother like me. I relied on my nannies" 5:73 ¶ 70 – 71.</p> <p>"It was difficult because I had three boys, and they were still young. I had to take them to boarding school, all of them. They went to boarding school so that I can work for them" 5:60 ¶ 62.</p> <p>"So, for me being on site and leaving my family. It was like difficult. I am now having this relationship with my boys like they I am."5:72 ¶ 68 – 69</p> <p>"So they have so many mothers" 5:75 ¶ 73.</p>
Participant 6	<p>"So, when I'm not working and I'm not at school, I'm with my family like all the time" 6:86 ¶ 104.</p>
Participant 7	<p>"I'm a mom to a 14-year-old boy. We video call each other. And then I have got my sister because we are staying together. So, when I am not around, I know that he is in good hands" 7:80 ¶ 145 – 146.</p>

Participant 10	<p>"So, in my mind, it's clear that my life is about making an impact. It is about giving back" 11:25 ¶ 15.</p> <p>"I become the voice for the voiceless. I make sure that the people that are relying on me for them to move from one stage to the next level, I make sure that I allow that platform to be conducive for them to grow, because that is why I'm there" 11:40 ¶ 25.</p>
Participant 11	<p>"And also, whenever we made a good profit, I always identify a family that does not qualify for RDP maybe and go build a house and donate. Sometimes I do it when I lack" 12:102 ¶ 131.</p> <p>"17 of my employees. I paid lobolas for them because I encourage them to have a stable family life" 12:101 ¶ 130.</p> <p>"And also. I have a lot of kids that I was teaching back then who are still looking up at me and for everything that I do, I know how proud they are to see me succeeding and a lot of them" 12:88 ¶ 112.</p>
Participant 14	<p>"I started the construction business because I enjoy working and wanted to earn my own income. I did not want to depend on someone. I wanted to be independent and look after my family" 15:16 ¶ 24.</p>
Participant 15	<p>"We pushed from small with no money and I didn't believe in borrowing money from the bank. I used my Provident fund to boost the business" 16:14 ¶ 23.</p> <p>"My personality, yes, it has grown because as I told you, I never went to any. Institution to study business. I learned on the way" .16:83 ¶ 96 – 97</p>
Participant 18	<p>"Looking after a girl child, like donating to the schools, school shoes, and then I sometimes do a feeding scheme for them, maybe once in a while, twice a month, you see, even those homeless, homeless kids, because I have a brother who is on streets" 23:11 ¶ 22 – 23.</p> <p>"I just donated for soccer so that I can balance the equation that I am not only giving to the girls only because even the boys have their problems at home" 23:13 ¶ 24.</p>

5.4.2 Theme 2 : Entrepreneurial resilience and an adaptive mindset, as identity forces for women owners in construction

From the second theme, the findings presented that the participants embodied personal identities eliminating from three group categories namely, opportunity orientated identity, adaptive identity, and resilient entrepreneurial identity.

Opportunity Orientated Identity

The findings showed that most of the participants embedded an opportunity orientated identity. Interestingly, the findings also revealed that most of the participants entered the construction industry as entrepreneurs by chance or by association. Furthermore, the findings revealed that initially none of the participants had a construction related qualification. They learned on the field on how to be women entrepreneurs in construction.

"I got introduced into the construction industry by a family friend".

"We were mentored. We did not just go into this industry without any mentorship".

The findings showed that all the participants expressed that they found the construction industry challenging as they did not have the background knowledge. Results further showed that to close the gap of not having experience, the participants sought for mentorship from close associates who were already in the construction industry, this alluding to the opportunity orientated identity all the participants possessed. The table below provides additional quotations supporting the evidence of opportunity orientated identity.

5.4.2.1 Evidence of Opportunity Orientated Identity

Table 5.4: Opportunity orientated identity

Participant 1	"I notice and I come across this a lot on my other profession as being an attorney as well" 1:90 ¶ 71.
Participant 3	"I worked with Eskom for 15 years at management positions. I started working with Company X in 2017 for construction as a subcontractor. By that time, I had already resigned in Eskom in 2015" 3:4 ¶ 20.
Participant 4	"I was working in a financial institution. I was working there in the international trade division, in the Forex division. So, I was a consultant in that space. So, my shift was taking a leap of faith because it was a financial institution. I had no prior background on construction. So, it is something that I learned as I go" 4:9 ¶ 12 – 13.
Participant 5	<p>"So, I had to learn fast" 5:77 ¶ 76".</p> <p>"I went and did a course, yeah, construction management systems for the whole year. I wanted to learn. And that has helped us a lot in the company" 5:98 ¶ 96 – 97.</p> <p>"We were mentored. We did not just go into this industry without any mentorship" 5:4 ¶ 9.</p> <p>"I was in business, and I had a small boutique in town Place X. But this day I was watching a television and Minister of X, then and Mam X was talking about a shortage of women in construction industry, and I did not sleep that night. In the morning, I drove from place A to Place B just to go and register my company because she said she will make sure that Government Department X empower those women" 5:1 ¶ 6 – 7.</p>
Participant 7	<p>"Profession qualification, I am in hospitality. I did food and Bev in Place X and then I did not really work in the hospitality space. I worked for just a little bit and then I moved" 7:1 ¶ 14.</p> <p>"And my mom was already running a guest house in X Town, so I helped her out with that, did her marketing and so forth" 7:4 ¶ 15.</p> <p>"Because prior to me registering, I used to use my mom's business to do my own private businesses" 7:6 ¶ 17.</p>
Participant 8	"Sometimes if they don't even understand what they are doing, I sometimes teach them and show them who how. As a leader" 8:37 ¶ 43 – 44.

	"I am in business because I've first done this. I've first been a bricklayer. I first dig a trench" 8:40 ¶ 44.
Participant 9	"I can learn something from anybody" 9:114 ¶ 193. "We started the company in 2000, both our background in engineering. She's an industrial engineer. I am a mechanical engineer, but our first project. Was in civil construction" 9:3 ¶ 12-13.
Participant 10	"In my case, for instance, I had a wonderful woman like the late Doctor T may his soul continue to rest in peace, who identified me from a very early stage of my life. I mean, when I joined, I was very young, I was 23 years old, but at that stage she already identified" 11:31 ¶ 19.
Participant 11	"I was also studying in the interim. I we have done a lot of short courses from project management, bricklaying, plastering, painting, tiling, any anything that involves construction" 12:20 ¶ 27. " I am A retired teacher" 12:2 ¶ 13.
Participant 12	"I was actually from the retail industry before construction" 13:3 ¶ 12.
Participant 13	"So, I come from an architectural background, secondly, I did project management" 14:27 ¶ 44.
Participant 14	"Then I went and worked in a factory, under dispatch. I worked for 4 years then I decided to leave 15:10 22.
Participant 15	"Like you learn on the way, you didn't come with the skill, you didn't come with the knowledge" 16:97 ¶ 122. "I am a pastor 16:6 ¶ 17". "As I said, most of the things I learned them on the way, but eventually I am mastered that 16:35 ¶ 32.
Participant 16	"I was working in the shop as a sales lady. So, when I get retrenched. I tried many things before starting the construction industry. I tried. I was a sales Rep. I was doing sewing. I was selling these curtains but the people do not like to pay" 18:49 ¶ 86.
Participant 18	"I become an all in one" 23:3 ¶ 12.

Adaptive Identity

The findings showed that the participants embodied an adaptive identity. Participant explained that their nature to adaptive identity was because construction is known to be a male dominated industry. Participant 4 alluded to this, "You are now playing in their space".

The findings showed that the participants were adaptive, because they wanted to learn and therefore reserved challenging the men. Participant 11 expressed this notion,

"Sometimes know that I'm not tolerating this, but I don't say anything. I still go out and show respect, but we are clear. This is not what I will succumb to, but. I don't say much".

However, Participant 4 expressed a different view, and the findings showed that while other participants demonstrated a submissive approach of adaptability, other participants felt the need to level up to their male counterparts. Participant 4 expressed that as a women in construction, one needs to have an adaptable personal identity and be a fiercer person.

"As a woman you need to adapt. To be a fiercer person that can handle, that can level up to the men. Because now you are playing in their in their space".

However, the findings showed that most participants adopted a more submissive approach towards their male counterparts. This alludes to the patriarchal systems that still govern the construction industry. The table below provides additional quotations supporting the evidence of adaptive identity.

5.4.2.2 Evidence of Adaptive Identity

Resilient Entrepreneurial Identity

The findings showed that all the participants embody a resilient entrepreneurial identity And the need to succeed. Across all the participants, succeeding did not seem to be a choice. Participant 3 echoed that one needs to be very strong, while participant 12 echoed that one needs to be not weak. Both participants used a very strong and descriptive choice of words, alluding to the fact that as a women owner in a male dominated industry, one, cannot afford to fail.

Table 5.5: Adaptive identity

Participant 3	"And you find even the level of understanding of the situation is not the same because most of the people that will be on site, most of them even at school, they never went and so you need to balance, you know, so that at least you have the very same understanding with them" 3:17 ¶ 31.
Participant 4	"As a woman you need to adapt. To be a fiercer person that can handle, that can level up to the men. Because now you are playing in their in their space" 4:24 ¶ 36 – 37.
Participant 5	"I wanted to learn. And I've learned a lot" 5:69 ¶ 67.
Participant 6	"One's personal identity has to evolve. That is one thing. And evolving means that. You need to be open minded, sometimes shift perspectives "6:88 ¶ 107 – 108.
Participant 8	"I have to come down and talk to them in a good way, in a good spirit" 8:33 ¶ 42.
Participant 9	"I can learn something from anybody" 9:114 ¶.
Participant 11	"Sometimes know that I'm not tolerating this, but I don't say anything. I still go out and show respect, but we are clear. This is not what I will succumb to, but. I don't say much" 12:162 ¶ 254..
Participant 12	"I was. I was easily teachable" 13:65 ¶ 110
Participant 15	"So surely my personality in construction have changed" 16:86 ¶ 100.
Participant 18	"What I do is just be polite to a person" 23:70 ¶ 93. "I become an all in one" 23:3 ¶ 12.

"So, you need to be very strong. You need to stick to your decision. You need to have the skills of problem solving".

"You need to be double of a woman. You need to be. You need not to be weak".

The findings further showed that ethical leadership and practices reinforced the resilient entrepreneurial identity that the participants possess. Participant 9 echoed that they do not compromise on their ethics. While participant 17 had expressions of compliance and also echoed on the ethics.

The findings also demonstrated a highly motivated group of women, who were aiming to attain high levels of doing well for their businesses. The results showed that none of these participants played small, or accepted defeat. Participant 15 echoed the same sentiments to keep trying .

"Something in you it will push you, to give it a try".

Findings also showed that some of the participants mirrored their abilities to succeed to those of their male counterparts. Resilience and ability were measured against their male counterparts. Participant 7 referred to the “male dominated industry as “the lion’s den” while participant 14 alluded that construction execution is perceived to be only attainable if done by males. The table below provides additional quotations supporting the evidence of resilient entrepreneurial identity.

5.4.2.3 Evidence of Resilient Entrepreneurial Identity

Table 5.6: Resilient entrepreneurial identity

Participant 1	"So, discipline is extremely important, staying focused and staying motivated" 1:6 ¶ 31.
Participant 2	"...because I am not a person who says woe is me, I wanted to prove myself and that is at the core of my personality. It can sometimes be at my detriment but sometimes it serves me because when that fire is lit under me, I will go through a lot of lengths to ensure I achieve what I need to achieve" 2:11 ¶ 31.
Participant 3	"So, you need to be very strong. You need to stick to your decision. You need to have the skills of problem solving" 3:14 ¶ 30.
Participant 4	"There is a way of working without having to go through the unethical process" 4:64 ¶ 70. "So, you find yourself having to work 50 times harder. To first be accepted and understood before you can even start interacting at a business level" 4:36 ¶ 41.
Participant 5	"Make sure that you don't succumb to any pressure" 5:15 ¶ 14. "Your integrity and accountability, it's important in this industry because if you don't have those things, you will just fall" 5:27 ¶ 24.
Participant 6	"And also, just sticking to ^[SEP] To your guns and just being, you" 6:18 ¶ 30. "doors shut in your face is that you it gives you a thick skin. So, I never dwell on disappointments anymore. I always believe that what is meant for my business and what is meant for me is mine. And what is not meant for me is not going to come to me" 6:80 ¶ 96.
Participant 7	"So, I think some of the things that I went through shaped the kind of character I possess today and for the mere fact that I'm not scared to go ^[SEP] Go into a lion's den, so to speak, which is the industry that I'm in in construction because number one, it is a male dominated field and when a female comes in. .We are met with a lot of judgment" 7:17 ¶ 38 – 39.
Participant 8	"I'm also pushing to have that big business that I want " 8:109 ¶ 102.
Participant 9	"When I get a project, I will not compromise my ethics " 9:42 ¶ 51.

Participant 10	"So, you need to then make sure that you provide excellent work at all times" 11:53 ¶ 34.
Participant 11	"There is not one project that I have done and not completed, I would rather not make profits but complete whatever that I was supposed to complete so" 12:69 ¶ 90. "I said I want to grow myself and I want to survive" 12:57 ¶ 78.
Participant 12	"You need to be double of a woman. You need to be. You need not to be weak" 13:21 ¶ 60.
Participant 13	"So, yeah, I will say it is a very interesting career. It is definitely doable. If I have been in the industry for 22 Years. But it requires a lot of resilience and focus and dedication sometimes. You can do it" 14:40 ¶ 46.
Participant 14	"To them, construction can only be executed by men. But we do not back down. We continue to do the work, as we are also able to add value" 15:27 ¶ 34.
Participant 15	"Something in you it will push you, to give it a try" 16:100 ¶ 126.
Participant 16	"I'm a person that striving to achieve the best results if I'm doing things" 18:14 ¶ 29.
Participant 17	"It is being compliant" 20:27 ¶ 45.
Participant 18	"I am a hand on, even at work, I am a hands-on mom. Even at home, I am a hand on" 23:18 ¶ 27.

5.4.3 Conclusion on Research Question 1

Based on the researcher's analysis of evidence, women-owners within the construction industry present personal identities shaped by spiritual and socially rounded dimensions. These dimensions include socially-rounded identity, faith and spiritual identity as well as assertive and self-reliant identity. What came out strongly from the participants was how their faith and spirituality shaped their decision makings. The participants presented strongly how their previous backgrounds shaped their identity, and this alluded to the findings on socially-rounded identities, where the participants expressed that their upbringing and background influenced them to start their own construction companies, while to some participants, it was all about legacy building for their families.

5.5 Research Question 2 : How does personal identity impact the scaling of women owned businesses in construction?

The findings in this session sought to answer research question 2, which sought to find out how the personal identity of women construction-owners impacts their ability to scale businesses.

From the research question, three interview questions were generated, under the interview guide. The research questions were formulated to help the researcher unpack in-depth underlining information, that would have not been obtained from a single research question. This helped the researcher to be able to generate more insights, as the participants responded to the questions.

From the findings obtained, the themes were identified, namely as “socio-relational identity as a catalyst to harnesses scaling of women-owners in the construction business and “personal identity disciplines as enables of scaling for women-owned construction businesses”.

5.5.1 Theme 1 : Socio-relational Identity as a catalyst to enhance scaling

Findings showed that the participants did embody socio-relational identity. The results of the findings also showed that the participants that have been able to scale their businesses, have strong relations either by associate or by client relations.

The results also showed that that participants use this identity personality as a strategy to obtain more skills and credibility to obtain work, which is another enabler for scaling. Participant 6 expressed that she had to get a male shareholder to join her company to obtain funding.

"Now look at having another shareholder in the business who was male in order for me to prove competence ,so that I could get this funding and. That was quite a defining experience".

Alluding to the fact that she was not seen as credible without her male shareholder, hence she only received funding once the partnership had been formed. Participant 7 expressed that instead of competing with her male counterparts, she decided to rather partner with them as a strategy to strengthen her network, which had a ripple effect on her scaling, as a business.

"I've basically partnered with most of these male owned companies, and it has made my life so much easier because they are able to introduce me to even bigger companies or to competitors".

Results also showed that some participants partnered with their husbands to overcome gender bias. Participant 4 alluded that partnership with her husband helped her business journey to where her business is now.

"Earlier in the business, my husband, which I also met at while I was working in corporate, became a partner to the business. One of the things then that also was part of my journey and also that helped me".

Results also showed that participants form partnerships with other women contractors to access work at a bigger scale. Participant 11 alluded to this, as a strategy to grow her business. The findings further showed that participants with mentors, or sponsorship within their business journey are able to scale. Participant alluded 8 to this as she expressed how her sponsor helped her with cash flow.

"There are people who now who are who are helping me towards when I want to buy some tools and then they are busy helping me to buy some tools".

Findings also showed that participants valued client relations and went through strides to maintain a good relationship with their partnerships which was also a trait to enable scaling. The participants shared strong sentiments about being reliable when it comes to client relations. Participants still believed in integrity and ethics played a huge role when it came to establishing partnerships and other relations.

"So, we will... People know they can rely on us. If we say we are going to get it done, we will get it done. Whether it is rain, sunshine or we have to work night shift, give our staff food, do whatever, arrange late transport. But if we say we can do it, we will do it. If we cannot do it, we will tell you, sorry, we cannot do".

A table below provides additional quotations supporting the Evidence of Socio-relational Identity as a catalyst to enhance scaling.

5.5.1.1 Evidence of Socio-relational Identity as a catalyst to enhance scaling

Table 5.7: Socio-relational Identity as a catalyst to enhance scaling

Participant 1	"So, we will. People know they can rely on us. If we say we are going to get it done, we will get it done. Whether it is rain, sunshine or we have to work night shift, give our staff food, do whatever, arrange late transport. But if we say we can do it, we will do it. If we cannot do it, we will tell you, sorry, we cannot do it.1:60 ¶ 123
Participant 2	So, I think it also depends because some of the relationships that I have built over time, some of the male cards that I can go to are more than receptive and there is they've I've come across ones that are willing to work with women that are not going to. Take underestimate you because simply you are a woman, or you speak a certain way.2:99 ¶ 131 – 132 " we ended up getting the opportunity and Baldwin agreed to incubate us as well. And our initial growth came because of the business we did with them" 2:69 ¶ 131 – 132
Participant 3	"Number 3, every person, whether it's a security, is a driver, whoever, is an admin, engineer they play an important role in the business. So they all need to be respected the same.3:57 ¶ 96 – 97
Participant 4	"Earlier in the business, my husband, which I also met at while I was working in corporate, became a partner to the business. One of the things then that also was part of my journey and also that helped me."4:78 ¶ 76
Participant 5	"My integrity brought some partners into my life." 5:101 ¶ 98
Participant 6	"Now look at having another shareholder in the business who was male in order for me to prove competence ,so that I could get this funding and. That was quite a defining experience.6:59 ¶ 71 – 72
Participant 7	"I've basically partnered with most of these Male owned companies, and it has made my life so much easier because they are able to introduce me to even bigger companies or to competitors" 7:50 ¶ 79 – 80 "I still I get phone calls from even as far as KZN and Johannesburg of people wanting to work or partner with me in in their own. Business ventures.7:52 ¶ 81 – 82 "Fast forward, I then got into construction through my bigger sister.7:5 ¶ 16
Participant 8	"There are people who now who are who are helping me towards when I want to buy some tools and then they are busy helping me to buy some tools and then. [SEP] 160 ¶ 182
Participant 9	"But I've learned over the years that networking is very important 9:82 ¶ 109 "Been an enterprise development beneficiary" 9:52 ¶ 64

Participant 10	"We were selected to be a participant on the X program, which is the program that was introduced by government where they requested the listed companies to empower black companies or make some of the equity available for black players to come in. In and participate in your companies. So, we were then partnered with company W11:97 ¶ 65
Participant 11	"The requirement was a grade nine. I partnered with another company, and we successfully executed that city, converted the hostel into family units." 12:7 ¶ 17
Participant 13	"Because we executed government projects successfully on behalf of the state." 14:13 ¶ 38
Participant 14	"Because really, if I was not assertive to to go straight to them, I think we were going to be their puppets.16:91 ¶ 115 "My previous partner was in the tendering departments in Government. His the one who taught me how to tender and that is how I won my jobs. As time went by, we separated, however I continued with my business."15:37 ¶ 49 "What also contributed to me scaling as a business was the work I obtained from government to do renovations for clinic, schools, and hospitals. This was based on the tendering"15:49 ¶ 68
Participant 15	"We had been working at institution X since. With the skill of my husband. Me as an administrator, we are both directors because I registered him as a director and me as a director. 16:13 ¶ 22 – 23
Participant 16	"I also got a client in civil who gave me lots of work.18:67 ¶ 109
Participant 18	"Read the fine lines in black and white to be in all projects, to submit tenders, to submit a refuse, to be alert. We are more vigilant for the industry."22:36 ¶ 62 "back there, I managed to upgrade to Level 4. "Having great tools, the project was the requirement was a great four. So, we were four women with great tools. We partnered and then we started with that project."12:5 ¶ 13 – 15

5.5.2 Theme 2 : Jack-of-all-trades identity for shaping scaling processes

From the second theme, Findings present the jack-of -all trades identity emulating from four groups group categories namely: Confidence and Identity, Risk Management Foresight, Strategic Planning and Foresight and Financial Prudence and Discipline. Jack of all trades identity refers to the participants diverse skills sets, obtained from prior experience in their previous professions and in their current roles as entrepreneurs

Confidence Identity

Findings show that participants used confidence and professional identity as a personal identity disciplines to scale their businesses. Findings show that when participants first

enter the construction industry, they do not have the confidence and there is a gap in terms of professional identity .

"Before that, my husband did all of that, so I did not know about attending site meetings and you know, the take on meetings and all of that. And as I said before, it is helped make me more confident."

Findings further show that as soon as participants entered the industry, they had to find ways of building their confidence and professional identity, in order to be able to stay and scale their businesses. Findings show that participants worked on their confidence by gaining on-site exposure. Participant 13 expressed that her exposure to different projects made her business scale.

"So, I think that I have grown a lot because I have done a number of different projects."

Findings show participants worked on their confidence by obtaining mentorship from industry associates. Participant 17 expressed that government mentorships gave her robust industry experience. While participant 15 expressed that her relationship with an industry mentor helped her to ask questions as means of empowering herself.

"I go to another woman who's doing a project in X Park , someone whom maybe I met at the workshop. They go and look, how do you do things? How do you improve your things."

Findings show that by participants investing in their confidence and professional growth, they have been able to scale their businesses. Prior experience in various fields gave them a broader skills set. A table below provides additional quotations supporting the Evidence of Confidence Identity

5.5.2.1 Evidence of Confidence Identity

Table 5.8: Confidence Identity

Participant 1	"Before that, my husband did all of that, so I did not know about attending site meetings and you know, the take on meetings and all of that. And as I said before, it is helped make me more confident."1:41 ¶ 96
Participant 2	"I think at the beginning, you know the excitement of starting a business, you are all excited. You never really know what is involved, just what people tell you at the time and when you are still in the working space, employment space, then you sort of think you know."2:49 ¶ 71
Participant 3	"Getting into a construction industry where you don't know much in term of the experience." 3:30¶45 "If there is something that I am doing wrong ^[L] _[SEP] it will come out.4:134 ¶ 122
Participant 4	" The journey has taught me so many lessons. The people that I have met have taught me so many things and I have grown to also learn to be more attentive when a person talks, not to just listen, but to be more attentive because there's always a message in. Every situation or in every engagement with stakeholders," 4:116 ¶ 106-109
Participant 5	" I can stand proudly today and say I've been able to build a business genuinely. And with or without certain people or the business is not dependent on certain relationships or certain people that are in my circle for the business to continue to scale and be sustainable." 6:77 ¶ 91
Participant 6	"When you say you're a grade 6 and grade 6 as opposed to a level one or grade one supplier, there's a certain level of confidence that that gives you when you've been able to serve. Top tier clients for years and they have been happy with your work." 6:49¶55 – 56 "It's more about the capabilities of the business and how you've been able to add value to that."6:52 ¶ 56
Participant 8	"When I started, I started as playing name. I was not even encouraged to go find myself in five years. I will be having a company or leading or being a boss."8:122 ¶ 115 "Before I can even have to be on my own, I think I've gained a lot of experience by being volunteering, by being working under people."8:143 ¶ 145

Participant 10	"You need to continuously upgrade, develop yourself so that you can have that. You can have the understanding of how to run your business. I think for me, personal development is not something that is optional, it is something that you need. ^[SEP] You need to seriously consider because it is it opens up your mind so that you stay relevant."11:70 ¶ 47
Participant 11	" Need to be open minded and to understand that every day. ^[SEP] It is an opportunity for you to learn new things, and you must be open to learn"11:96 ¶ 60
Participant 12	"Me let me start by saying when I started the business, I did not have any knowledge."13:2 ¶ 12
Participant 13	"Have the attitude to learn, ask the questions,"14:81 ¶ 110 "So I think that I have grown a lot because I have done a number of different projects."14:89 ¶ 65
Participant 14	"But since then, with exposure, I have become independent ,"15:42 ¶ 60
Participant 15	"I go to another woman who's doing a project in X Park , someone whom maybe I met at the workshop. They go and look, how do you do things? How do you improve your things."16:75 ¶ 8
Participant 16	"I learned to be proud of how far I have come. I must be proud that I have mentored women, at the time when I still had money, I was someone's role model."18:71 ¶ 119
Participant 17	"More mentorships. Were taken to all the MO ES of Department of Housing were taken to. So that gave us, that gave me a very, very robust and easy access into knowledge of construction." 20:15 ¶ 19 – 20
Participant 18	"Yes, over the years you build yourself with more. You open your you opened to more opportunities. You participate in most of the things, more in different departments. ^[SEP] So that you can gather more experience for departments to be easy for them to be easier to identify you so that you they know that this company has more experience. ^[SEP] You build yourself like I can say by attending like those workshops and stuff,23:46 ¶ 56

Risk Management

Findings show that risk management is a skill that participants use to ensure scaling within their business. Results show that participants mitigate risk through compliance. Participant 4 alluded to this by emphasizing the importance of being compliant before the job is awarded.

"As we're implementing the project, you know, we ensure that we comply. We do all the requirements before they award the project"

Results show that participants, do a detailed study on the client they are going to work with, in terms of reputation and in terms of their payment cycles. Results show that some participants have become prone to taking risk, as they seek more ways to scale, as alluded by participant 6, however there are still participants that still more conservative and analyse the size of the risk and how it will impact their scaling, as alluded by participant 2.

"I am conservative. Also, I do look at risks."

Further to this, results show that another participant does not make decisions without consulting her male associates alluding to the fact that participant 7 does not trust her own risk management capabilities.

"Oh, my decision-making. I think because I am surrounded with a lot of male figures, I do not just make decisions on the spot, I consult. So, I think I am also fortunate enough because I also have my brother-in-law."

Results show that some participants are bold about contracting within their contractual rights. As expressed by participant 13.

"It is your right to fight for your contractual rights. "

Participants also expressed that in order to mitigate risk, she ensures she sticks to her guns, alluding to the fact that deviations within the contract a risk when it comes to scaling. A table below provides additional quotations supporting the Evidence of Confidence Identity

5.5.2.2 Evidence of Risk Management

Table 5.9: Risk Management

Participant 2	"I am conservative. Also, I do look at risks." 2:43 ¶ 58
Participant 3	"For you to make money, you need to be hands on."3:33 ¶ 48 – 50 "You need to stick on your ground. You need to stick on your rules to say, listen-me as Company Y construction and supply."3:40 ¶ 71
Participant 4	"As we're implementing the project, you know, we ensure that we comply. We do all the requirements before they award the project"4:126 ¶ 114
Participant 5	"And then in terms of conduct and compromise integrity. I walk away. I walk away. I do not even compromise."5:109 ¶ 109 – 110 "I interrogate the scope, risk, payment security, partner quality, risk and allocation upfront."5:103 ¶ 106
Participant 6	"What I want and what I want to achieve and not allow fear to determine whether or not I go for those opportunities or not. So now I am I am actually more prone to taking risks."6:46 ¶ 51
Participant 7	"Oh, my decision-making. I think because I am surrounded with a lot of male figures, I do not just make decisions on the spot, I consult. So, I think I am also fortunate enough because I also have my brother-in-law.7:58 ¶ 99
Participant 8	"So, I'm open to work with any. Any company, but first I do research with a company to check. Well, this company, is it legit? 8:117 ¶ 106"
Participant 9	"You need to do a risk analysis. The client, you must check how they pay, but also their reputation. Because when you've been in a company for so many years, you don't want your brand or your name to be associated with. Companies that are running their business in a not so ethical way. So, you do look at that, but you also look at do they pay well, you know, do they pay well? How do they treat their contractors? How do they treat their suppliers?" 9:79 ¶ 102 – 104
Participant 10	"Mitigate the risk when it comes to the delayed payments and other challenges that comes with government work." 11:79 ¶ 51
Participant 13	"It is your right to fight for your contractual rights. "14:109 ¶ 79

Strategic Planning and Foresight

Results show that participants use strategic planning and foresight as skills to impact scaling. Results show that participants are shaped by legacy building when it comes to their strategic planning and foresight. Participants allude to this, giving evidence that women-owners want to own businesses that will be sustainable for years to come, not for themselves but for the people they leave behind.

"we're building this legacy,"

Results also show that participants are becoming less reliant on one stream of revenue, being government related project, but have now moved to exploring opportunities in the private sector. As Expressed by participant 16.

"Yes, I do not focus on government only."

"I work with any client, both in government department and private sector."

Results also showed that when it comes to planning and foresight, some participants, still feel the need to consult. This is highlighted throughout the research findings. Some participants still relied on consultation when it comes to their businesses.

"So, before I can make any decision, gripping any scaling opportunity. I always have to consult."

Results show that in a competitive environment of male dominance, participants do investigate to find out who their competition is, as alluded by participant 2. Results show that participants allude that the construction industry as an unpredictable market, prone to risk, therefore "understanding of how the game works" is important as alluded by participant 6. A table below provides additional quotations supporting the Evidence of Strategic planning and foresight

5.5.2.3 Evidence of Strategic planning and Foresight

Table 5.10: Strategic Planning and Foresight

Participant 1	"You must plan ahead. You must look to the future and ensure that your work will overlap. Yes, you will get a stage where you will have work that you overlapped your stretch for resources, but it refers a lot after a month or two and you will be fine again.1:35 ¶ 83
Participant 2	"Who our competition is and based on where we wanted, where our end goal was leading for the business." .2:56 ¶ 83
Participant 4	"we're building this legacy,"4:139 ¶ 123
Participant 6	"I realized that you need to know how the game works. And you need to play the game because you change it. " 6:62 ¶ 75
Participant 8	"An opportunity that is going to upgrade my work, even the business profile,"8:115 ¶ 105
Participant 9	"Able to put your business out there and talk about it and be proud of what you have done over the years."9:83 ¶ 109
Participant 10	"We are open to even do the homework to understand where are the real budgets sitting, you know, where are the real opportunities. 11:76 ¶ 49"
Participant 13	"And then with the proper strategy, with a proper planning and an Implementation strategy-If you have a proper one and have a strategy, that doesn't compromise you. It all boils down to your functional strategy. 14:29 ¶ 44 "
Participant 14	"I work with any client, both in government department and private sector."15:40 ¶ 57 "I use digital platforms to look for opportunity."15:35 ¶ 47 "I do a lot of research to identify scaling opportunities"15:34 ¶ 47

Participant 15	"So, before I can make any decision, gripping any scaling opportunity. I always have to consult."16:82 ¶ 91
Participant 16	"Yes, I do not focus on government only."18:39 ¶ 72

Financial Prudence and Discipline

Findings show that that participants embody Financial Prudence and Discipline for scaling their businesses. Findings show that the participants expressed that borrowing money from financial intuitions is not good for business but rather, they look for funding, to financially support their businesses. As alluded by participant 1 and 15.

"I didn't believe in borrowing money from the bank,"

Participants emphasized the importance of seeking funding to enhance scaling opportunities for their businesses. As alluded by participant 2 and 3 Findings show that participants have multiple streams of incomes and do not rely on government projects to scale. As alluded by participant 7 and 9. A table below provides additional quotations supporting the Evidence of Strategic planning and foresight.

"But the fact that we have managed to reach that highest level, it shows that we do have the ability to scale up and identify opportunities and secure those opportunities."

5.5.2.4 Evidence of Financial Prudence and Discipline

Theme 3: Ethical Identity influencing Decision to partner during scaling

Findings show that that participants embody ethical identity for scaling their businesses. Throughout the study participants alluded that they do not do business that will compromise their integrity. Some participants alluded that they would rather walk away from the business negotiation should they feel like their integrity is being compromised. A table below provides additional quotations supporting the Evidence of Ethical Identity.

"And then in terms of conduct and compromise integrity. ^[SEP] walk away. I walk away. I do not even compromise."

"You need to stick on your ground. You need to stick on your rules to say, listen-me as Company Y construction and supply."

Table 5.11: Strategic Planning and Foresight

Participant 1	<p>"Despite having two different businesses, I do not ever interchange money in between each business." 1:95 ¶ 78</p> <p>"Youngsters when they come into money, they want to now suddenly buy flashy cars, flashy homes, name brand stuff, and that is what can bring your business down. So, it is the idea of having discipline." 1:95 ¶ 73</p> <p>"We try our best to stay away from borrowing more than we can afford to repay."1:96 ¶ 80</p>
Participant 2	"Look at opportunities in financing, in funding" 2:45 ¶ 59
Participant 3	"You need to go to those grants"3:70 ¶ 113
Participant 7	"So, I've had an opportunity because I am also a facilitator, part of the multiple income streams that one is tapping into. I'm also a moderator, facilitator, and assessor".7:87 ¶ 155
Participant 9	"We want to expand our revenue streams"9:69 ¶ 87
Participant 10	"But the fact that we have managed to reach that highest level, it shows that we do have the ability to scale up and identify opportunities and secure those opportunities.11:73 ¶ 49
Participant 13	You must have a good financial management system that manages the fund,14:95 ¶ 69
Participant 15	"I didn't believe in borrowing money from the bank,"16:15 ¶ 23

5.5.2.5 *Evidence of Ethical Identity*

Table 5.12: Ethical Identity

Participant 3	"You need to stick on your ground. You need to stick on your rules to say, listen-me as Company Y construction and supply."3:40 ¶ 71
Participant 5	"And then in terms of conduct and compromise integrity. ^[L] I walk away. I walk away. I do not even compromise."5:109 ¶ 109 – 110
Participant 8	"So, I'm open to work with any. ^[L] Any company, but first I do research with a company to check. ^[L] Well, this company, is it legit? 8:117 ¶ 106"

5.5.2.6 *Conclusion*

All participants demonstrated sheer belief in protecting their company reputation. With most participants expressing they do not do business outside ethical parameters. This speaks to the ethical leadership all participants possess

Findings show that even though most participants did not have previous background experience when it comes to construction, they were still able to use their previous work skills such as , financial management, contractual management. It is through some of these skills the participants have been able to scale.

5.6 Research Question 3 : Identify and What are the challenges that influence the personal identity of women owned construction businesses and their ability to scale?

Research question 3 was formulated to investigate the challenges that influence the personal identity of women owned construction businesses and their ability to scale.

From the research question, 3 interview questions were generated , under the interview guide. The research questions were formulated to help the researcher unpack in-depth underlining information, that would have not been obtained from a single research question. This helped the researcher to be able to generate more insights, as the participants responded to the questions.

From the findings obtained, the themes were identified, namely “Structural complexities that constrain that constrain the personal Identity and scaling of women-owners in construction” and “Institutionalized and collective pathways to empowerment of women owners in construction”

5.6.1 Theme 1 : Structural complexities that constrain the personal Identity and scaling of women-owners in construction

From the first theme, findings present that the participants face structural complexities that constrain their scaling as women owners in the construction industry, which emanate from two group categories namely, Household Structure and Entrepreneurial Pressure and Structural Exclusion and Support Gaps

Household Structure and Entrepreneurial Pressure

The results show that a big number of the participants have left their marriages and divorced their husbands. As a result of the dynamics in construction. Participant 11 expressed that her marriage ended because of a job she was a part of.

“And then the Group X thing cost me my marriage because I remember my husband was saying, yeah, you are stupid. Why would you sign a document without reading”

Interestingly that the participants that got divorced, chose their construction careers over their marriages. Participant 5 expressed that she lost one of her partners, who decided to quite business over her marriage. Participant 3 shared the nature of the marriage she was in; she expressed that her male counterparts at work were a threat to her marriage as they would often spark jealousy quarrels from her husband. This therefore alludes to the fact that male dominated work environments extend themselves to become threats to the partners of women owners in construction.

“I experienced that in terms of the marriage ,you will always have that quarrel because you are not there, and jealousy you know to say you are not calling-all those things that goes with jealousy in marriages.”

Findings also show that participants battle to balance motherhood and their demanding work schedule. Participant 5 shared that she had to take her children to boarding school so she could focus on her business after her divorce. Most participants expressed that their children were raised by their nannies as they were never at home, because of the nature of construction.

“ It was difficult. As a single parent, I divorced in 1999, and I started my own company then. It was difficult because I had three boys, and they were still young. I had to take them to boarding school, all of them”

All participants admitted that their work took over their personal life and has affected their household structures. Results showed that the dysfunctional home structures were also caused by the long working hours, and so family members often felt neglected as alluded by participant 9’s daughter. Findings also show that the participants admitted to not having a social life, as a result of working in construction. A table below provides additional quotations supporting the Evidence of Evidence of Household structure and Entrepreneurial Pressure.

“I’ve got a I have only. One child, a daughter. And yes, she at some point she did say that you are here, but you are not here.”

5.6.1.1 Evidence of Household structure and Entrepreneurial Pressure

Table 5.13: Household Structure and Entrepreneurial Pressure

Participant 2	"All three areas, all three aspects of my life has been a very hard lesson and a long lesson to learn because my kids have suffered in the past because I was either doing too much of the work on weekends, then I am doing the business. And then holidays, playing catch up and it's not enough time during the holidays " 2:97 ¶ 127
Participant 3	"The kids remained with the auntie, the helper. Sometimes the helper cannot even read or assist with the homework." 3:47 ¶ 86-87 "I experienced that in terms of the marriage ,you will always have that quarrel because you are not there, and jealousy you know to say you are not calling-all those things that goes with jealousy in marriages."3:49 ¶ 87 – 88
Participant 5	"The other one left because she was married. The husband complained that she is every day out "5:153 ¶ 258 " It was difficult. As a single parent, I divorced in 1999, and I started my own company then. It was difficult because I had three boys, and they were still young. I had to take them to boarding school, all of them."5:58 ¶ 61
Participant 6	"My social life is non-existent" 6:84 ¶ 102
Participant 7	" My son is here because he is still schooling. So, I cannot just take that drastic decision because I have had a talk with him and he is quite happy here" 7:90 ¶ 162 "Marriage fell apart, came back home" 7:3 ¶ 15
Participant 8	"And another thing is a work life balance. You know, construction. It is so stressing. Imagine you're a mother; you are the wife. You come back from work. You are tired. You have to take care of the kids.8:83 ¶ 69
Participant 9	"I've got a I have only. One child, a daughter. And yes, she at some point she did say that you are here, but you are not here." 9:100 ¶ 160

Participant 11	<p>"And then the Group X thing cost me my marriage because I remember my husband was saying, yeah, you are stupid. Why would you sign a document without reading it?12:61 ¶ 79</p> <p>"Just requested to use my maiden name after my divorce. So, I'm using double barrel.12:1 ¶ 12</p>
Participant 12	<p>"I've got children that are girls. Left them with my husband while I'm not home, it was not easy. So, for him helping as he is, he would help me. 13:17 ¶ 54 – 56</p>
Participant 14	<p>"The working hours are also long. You come back home exhausted."15:54 ¶ 76</p> <p>"I once got married, but I ended up getting divorced.15:17 ¶ 24</p>
Participant 18	<p>"you're making so much money. You have to ask from your husband who has never set foot on site. And because, yes, because of we are married. I stayed in this marriage for so long. Now I am afraid that what if I divorce this man?"12:61 ¶ 79</p>

Structural Exclusion and Support Gaps

Findings show that participants are facing structural exclusion as well as support gaps framed by gender and racial bias and therefore causing serve challenges when it comes to the scaling of their businesses. Participants expressed that they lack funding support from Government, they further alluded that their Male counterparts get more government funding than women-owners do. Participant 9 expressed the gender bias they face from government departments. In her view, they are often politely dismissed, where as their male counterparts do not have to strive as hard to get funding.

“They find ways to say no, to not directly say no, but they will find all these other reasons not to give you work, but males can sit in an hour. They have got this project, it’s the perceptions.”

Participants expressed that the private sector does not want to partner with them. Alluding to the fact that there are high barriers of entry in the private sector, for emerging women owned construction companies. This therefore makes Government the main contributor

to revenue for these construction owners. Participant 4 expressed that the private sector is not opening the doors to them, alluding to exclusion.

“There is still a lot of you look at the private sector, private sector is ^{SEP}Dominated by white people, they're not opening doors.”

Findings show that the participants feel unheard by the policy makers and the industry body. They expressed they are tired from hearing empty promises to empower them, as alluded by participant 3. Results show that there is stringent accessibility to opportunities. Participant 5 expressed there is a systematic bias when it comes to opportunities. A table below provides additional quotations supporting the Evidence of Structural Exclusion and Support Gaps

5.6.1.2 Evidence of Structural Exclusion and Support Gaps

Table 12 : Structural Exclusion and Support Gaps

Participant 3	"We you find that there is a lot of talk, but there is no action."3:77 ¶ 134
Participant 4	There is still a lot of you look at the private sector, private sector is. Dominated by white people, they're not opening doors.4:173 ¶ 169 "you need to go to those grants- associate yourself with the department, the government grant,"3:70 ¶ 113
Participant 5	"Systematic bias limits access to opportunities. It's not easy. Last week we learned of ICD** , where people were employed without grading. And they were even employed without experience."5:124 ¶ 146 – 14 "The project was at 95%. Just because I don't give them what they want, they decided to cancel the contract."5:141 ¶ 196
Participant 6	"I mean we know generally that women businesses are underfunded, right? Yet the women owned businesses make a huge social impact."6:72 ¶ 86
Participant 7	"I just feel that it's for us to actually cement ourselves and fight and push the boundaries and push the barriers. Because if we do not speak out, Men are always going to be put first." 7:94 ¶ 183

Participant 8	<p>"We don't have support. We need the support to run a successful business alone. Like we can't even rely on being subcontractors always. We can delay being a subcontractor always. We must sometimes have those big tenders that me as a woman, I can run it alone." 8:89 ¶ 71 – 72</p>
Participant 9	<p>"So, women get tired of hearing of hearing about the set asides which never happen and the problems to upskill women owned companies and so yes, so those are the challenges."9:55 ¶ 70</p> <p>"They find ways to say no, to not directly say no, but they'll find all these other reasons not to give you work, but males can sit in an hour. They have got this project, it's the perceptions. They still exist. The perceptions that women cannot. Women are good in administration. You know women can do safety , but not the construction. So those challenges still exist."9:58 ¶73</p>
Participant 10	<p>"When it comes to opportunities, there will be barriers that sometimes requires the intervention of government for us to be able to to participate in the in the sector. When it comes to funding opportunities, yes, it's still a problem because you will have projects, but you find that for you to raise working capital is a challenge"11:54 ¶ 36</p>
Participant 11	<p>"When we were partners, they were, I was the only director and all the decisions that were taken for that project, they would come and address me and tell me what is going to happen. And I did not have a say because I would jump, scream and do whatever. But I knew I was not going to succeed because already I was minority."12:32 ¶ 38</p>
Participant 14	<p>"It is very hard to partner with the big construction companies. They are out of reach. There is a lack of trust with Black people, on CIDB grade 9, they don't absorb us."15:67 ¶ 95</p> <p>"Government must also please provide us with Funding and also allocate us to the big construction companies, so that we may be mentored by them and scale."15:66 ¶ 93</p>
Participant 16	<p>"These local divisions is killing us; we do not get work because you barred from marketing. And you find that in these wards there are is shortages of skills."18:84 ¶ 134</p> <p>"Obstacles. Challenges-Proper funding, with low interest"18:68 ¶ 112</p>

Participant 17	"There is still a lot of segregation into private sector. They just want that 10/20/50 years' experience. They not mellowing into emerging development, you know, so to SM ES, SM ES are struggling to get actual footing. Into the private sector."22:24 ¶ 35
Participant 18	"we have women in construction who are not educated. We have women in construction that are underprivileged and disadvantaged before. So, what we do, what I want the government to do is that they can just give us opportunities both sides."23:76 ¶ 118

5.6.2 Theme 2 : Institutionalized and collective pathways to empowerment of women owners in construction

From the second theme, findings present Institutionalized and collective pathways to empowerment of women owners in construction, emanating from one group category namely, institutional support and policy reforms.

Institutional support and policy reforms

Findings show that the participants recommended government grants for as supports for scaling of women-owned construction businesses.

"Government grant,"

Findings show that the participants recommend ease of red tape for women to access opportunities, in support to assist women owners to scale their businesses. Findings show that participants recommend set aside work to be allocated by government as support to women-owners to close the inequality gap and as a measure to assist women owners in construction to scale.

"You know, setting aside projects. Have you ever heard of that? ^[11]_[SEP] That they are project which are set aside for women. Our government talks about the 30% towards women."

Findings show that participants recommend government intervention with the private sector, in request to partner with the " Big Companies" in order to mentor and empower women owners in construction. A table below provides additional quotations supporting the Evidence of Institutional support and policy reforms

5.6.2.1 Evidence of Institutional support and policy reforms.

Table 5.14: Institutional support and policy reforms

Participant 1	"The thing is, I feel even when they have all these seminars and women empowerment in construction, we, the people that are actually in construction, do not ever get invited to it. We do not even get an invitation. We do not know about it only when it is done and dusted 1:61 ¶ 125
Participant 2	"And if they're saying there is opportunities that are there for women, then let them be for women. There mustn't be a red tape"2:115 ¶ 158
Participant 3	"Government grant,"3:72 ¶ 113
Participant 4	"The one thing that comes to mind is goodwill, good intentions. Government has a big role to play in the industry and even private sector. Every one of us have a role to play."4:169 ¶ 166
Participant 5	"You know, setting aside projects. Have you ever heard of that? That they are project which are set aside for women. Our government talks about the 30% towards women."5:163 ¶ 302
Participant 6	"Decision makers are aware of, you know, the importance of empowering of women."6:100 ¶ 144
Participant 8	"And access to funding like you know we can't even have a run a business without funds."8:171 ¶ 217
Participant 10	"I think it's important that companies like ourselves, you know, be intentional about identifying women that we can then take under our. We grow them and be intentional that I'm taking you from Grade 2 and my intention is to get you to Grade 7, you know, so I think it needs to be measurable.11:142 ¶ 118 – 119
Participant 12	"I would say those bodies must open the doors for women more than men. Give them the chance to prove themselves, because if you compare"13:82 ¶ 172
Participant 18	"OK. In woman, I can say the industry can create more opportunities of women in construction,"23:72 ¶ 95

5.7 Conclusion

Findings show there is a gap in the industry that seeks to be addressed and requires government and industry stakeholders to come together and review as a collective, the proposed measures, to close the identified gaps in order women owners in construction to lead and own sustainable businesses with scaling prospects.

Despite the structural challenges participants demonstrated in-depth skills, which alludes to their ability of having been able to scale

Findings show that the personal identity of women-owners in construction does shape the ability of scaling their businesses. Although there is still a huge structural gap in government and industry bodies, women-owners in construction have demonstrated tremendous resilience and maintained high ethical astuteness.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the findings of the study derived from Chapter 5 and to compare it with the literature review in Chapter 2. Each section begins by restating each research question, as outlined in Chapter 3. The main focus of each section begins with a recap of the findings, and the literature review, followed by the presentation, which gives discussions of the results and the significance to the research questions.

6.2 Research question 1 : What are the personal identities of women owning construction businesses?

Recap of findings on the personal identities of women owning construction businesses.

From the collected data, the researcher made use of the thematic analysis to derive the themes which were generated from their sub-group categories. For the purpose of answering research question one, the researcher classified the data under two themes as mentioned in Chapter 5.

6.2.1 Theme 1 : Identity through spiritual and socially rounded dimensions for women-owners in construction

The findings presented that the personal identities of the participants were shaped by spiritual and socially rounded dimensions. These findings revealed that the participants largely identified their personal identities with their upbringing, and societal status, with some participants expressing that that they did not come from wealth but had to build everything from scratch to get to where they are now. The findings further revealed that most participants identified themselves as spiritual beings and used their spiritual identity to navigate their lives. Under theme 1, the results presented three identities that the participants embodied, faith and spiritual identity and socially-rounded identity,

Faith and spiritual identity surfaced frequently in the responses of the participants. What was interesting with most participants was how they strongly expressed their religious beliefs at the very start. These participants confidently expressed which religious background they come from and what role it plays in their lives. For example, most of the participants boldly shared that they practiced Christianity and referenced spiritual practices such as prayer and reading bibles as daily practices to seek guidance and to make decisions.

Socially-rounded identity revealed that participants came from improvised backgrounds with some having to be breadwinners much earlier in their lives. Their upbringing shaped their aspirations and their overall decision making, especially when it came to financial decision making.

6.2.2 Theme 2 : Entrepreneurial resilience and an adaptive mindset as identity forces for women owners in construction

More findings revealed that amongst the participants, some embodied entrepreneurial resilience, and an adaptive mindset, which emulated three identities embodied by the participants namely, opportunity orientated identity, adaptive identity and resilient entrepreneurial identity.

The findings showed that the participants entered the construction industry by association or by chance, as a result most of the participants did not have industry experience or educational background, related to construction. The participants therefore found their way into the industry by opportunity and learned the industry ropes along the way.

From entering the industry by opportunity, the results revealed that most of the participants had to adapt to construction as it was a male dominated industry, where they faced gender bias and gender discrimination. As a result, most of the participants became adaptive to the environment, by wanting to level up to their male counterparts, demonstrating boldness and aggression, while other participants expressed they would be more submissive to obtain favour from male counterparts.

The findings also showed that all the participants embodied resilient entrepreneurial identity. The results also showed that despite most of the participants not having had past construction background, they all stayed and learned the skills that led to where their businesses are now.

Recap of literature on the personal identities of women owning construction businesses

In accordance to the existing literature, the identity of women-owners in construction has been discussed broadly but does not provide the archetype of the personal identities of women-owners in construction. With the existing literature there is still limited evidence of the forms of identity.

Based on the existing literature, value-based identities, personal resilience, and social responsibility could be discussed.

Naguib (2024) notes that value-based identities are framed by the value system of the individual and defined by the principles that essential shape the person's way of living within their social context. Sutherland et al. (2020) argue that values are shaped mostly by personal experiences, and framed by the environment of the individual, and therefore are not necessarily only based on inner-personal identity.

Bagheri et al. (2024) define personal resilience as the ability to carry out desired results, without giving up. Hill et al. (2024) on the other hand argue that even though traditionally personal resilience was viewed as a positive identity dimension, it has however over the years caused harm to individuals, often leaving them in a stuck, undesirable state. However, most scholars support resilience as an identity-based value, often embodying an individual's inner strength (Turner et al., 2021).

Existing literature defines social responsibility identity as the desire to give back, often embodied by individuals who want to make a difference within their socio-environment (Silva et al., 2023). Barkema et al. (2024) state that women entrepreneurs are change makers of society as they continue to make a difference when it comes to social responsibility initiatives. Other scholars argue that there is an increase in the participation of women than their male counterparts when it comes to social responsibility participations and engagements (Chege, 2020).

6.2.3 Discussion of the findings with literature on the personal identities of women owning construction businesses.

The research findings revealed that the personal identity of women-owners in construction, goes beyond the psych-socio domain. In the findings, personal identity also manifests itself as a strategic tool that women-owners in construction use to scale their businesses. Women-owners in construction capitalise on their personal identity features such as spiritual-identity, and resilient entrepreneurial identity which embodies both ethical campus and resilience. There is limited literature that alludes to these findings; however, existing literature does make reference to resilience as an enabler to the personal identity of women-owners in construction to drive scalability in their businesses (Bagheri et al., 2024). In the findings, spiritual identity was one of the key identities the participants used to draw up courage and clarity in their decision making and to navigate the construction environment as it is known to be a male dominated industry, where women face challenges of biasness and inferiority complex (Amponsah-Asante et al., 2025). Spiritual identity also revealed to be an identity that shapes the moral campus of the women-owners in construction, as they are faced with structural barriers and institutional

complexities. But for these women, spiritual identity plays a huge role in ensuring that they “do not compromise their integrity”.

The findings further revealed other forms of personal identity that women owners in construction embodied, such as opportunity orientated identity. Opportunity orientated identity stemmed from how most of the participants expressed that they did not have prior experience and knowledge of the construction industry and therefore had to “learn along the way” how to run their construction businesses. Some women alluded that they entered the construction industry by chance, through associate “mentors” and “husbands”. The opportunity orientated identity alluded to the entrepreneurial mindset these women have and can be defined as a strategic enabler to seize opportunities for scaling their businesses. Although existing literature has a limited body of work alluding to opportunity orientated identity, there is evidence that women-owners in the construction industry have been able to scale their businesses through mentorships and networks (Shahriar & Jalili, 2025), which alludes to their identity to be able to identify and seek opportunity.

The findings further showed that most of the women embodied socially rounded identities, or an identity shaped by their backgrounds, socio- status and value system. Most of the participants shared that they joined the construction industry as means to survive post traumatic experiences of losing loved ones and some because they came from impoverished backgrounds and had to be breadwinners This identity seemed to be a motivational fact for the women. Their passion for construction goes beyond themselves. It is shaped by their families, value systems, and the ambition to go beyond circumstances, as their environment has shaped them in who they are. Sutherland et al. (2020) allude that the value-system and moral identity of an individual is often shaped by their environment.

Sutherland et al. (2020) further say that because of the changing environment, personal identity is therefore open ended and can evolve. This finding supports the adaptive identity nature that women owners in construction embody. The findings show that when these women enter the construction industry they often come from other professions, such as retail, law, as well as finance, and have to adapt to the construction environment. Interestingly, as they enter, most participants define themselves as “timid”, “just keeping quiet”, and “scared to ask questions”, however as they gained more experience and credibility within construction, their personal identities evolved, and became more assertive and courageous in their way of doing business.

6.2.4 Conclusion of Discussion of Findings for RQ1

In accordance to the findings and literature, there is evidence of similarity, that supports the research question of the personal identities of women owning construction businesses.

The research findings confirmed the literature review findings on personal resilience identity. The research findings confirmed the literature review findings on value system identity and responsibility identity. The research provides a new insight into the relationship between spiritual-identity and resilience. The research provided a new insight into the relationship between spiritual identity and scaling.

Therefore, the findings presented for RQ1 confirmed and extended to the literature review findings in Chapter 2.

6.3 Research question 2 : How does personal identity impact the scaling of women owned businesses in construction?

Recap of findings on how personal identity impacts the scaling of women-owned businesses in construction. From the research collected data, the researcher made use of thematic analysis to derive the themes, which were generated from their sub-group categories. For the purpose of answering RQ2, the researcher classified the data under three themes as outlined in Chapter 5.

6.3.1 Theme 1 : Socio -relational identity as a catalyst to enhance scaling

The findings revealed that most of the participants embodied the socio-relational identity as a catalyst to enhance the scaling of their businesses. They also presented that the participants that have been able to scale over the past ten years and beyond were able to do so through strong relations either by associates or by client relations.

The findings presented that all the participants use their socio-relations as a strategic enabler to obtain work and to overcome gender discrimination and biases, which has a ripple effect on scaling their business. These socio-relations include their husbands, associates, and clients. Interestingly, one of the participants alluded that they do not see their male counterparts as a threat, but rather as enablers to reach a wider network, through partnering with them, and also as a means to scale. The findings also revealed that the participants that had mentors and sponsorships were able to grow at a much faster scale, compared to the participants who were passive in their relations. The study also revealed that other forms of partnerships based on socio-relations included joint-ventures for the participants to enter into larger tendering pools.

Ethical boundaries presented strongly, from the participants. With all participants alluding to navigating their relations under stringent ethical conduct, they also demonstrated a great sense of value and respect for their client relations.

6.3.2 Theme 2 : Jack-of-all trades identity for shaping scaling process

The findings revealed that all the participants embodied the identity of being a “Jack-of-all-trades”. All the participants had a combination of different multiple skills sets and knowledge in multiple areas.

Results revealed that all the participants used multiple skills sets and the knowledge in multiple areas, that they obtained in previous occupations and in the industry, as a competitive advantage to scale their current construction businesses.

Interestingly, the participants all disclosed that prior to them joining the construction industry, they worked in other industries. The findings revealed that the participants had prior knowledge in various fields such as, retail, law, and finance.

The findings further revealed that the prior knowledge in various fields gave the participants a broader skills set, such as risk management, strategic planning and foresight, financial prudence, discipline as well as confidence.

6.3.3 Theme 3 : Ethical identity influencing decision to partner during scaling

Interestingly, most of the participants demonstrated strong ethical conduct towards the manner in which they run their businesses.

The results revealed that the participants used their ethical compass when it came to making decisions that influence the scaling of the businesses.

The findings further revealed that the participants distanced themselves from forming business partnerships that were unethical.

Recap of literature on how personal identity impacts the scaling of women-owned businesses in construction

In accordance with the existing literature, how the personal identity of women owners within the construction industry impacts the scaling of their businesses has been discussed broadly. With the existing literature, there is still limited evidence of the forms of identity and their ability to impact scaling.

Mamabolo and Myres (2020) define the scaling of a business as being encapsulated in a form of life cycle, starting from the start-up, scaling and maturing. Other scholars define

the scaling of a business as the ability of a business to grow from one level to another, in areas such as revenue, and profits while maintaining a competitive advantage (Coviello et al., 2024). Khattar et al. (2025) argue that the scaling of a business is in accordance to the level the business is scaling over a marked period of time. For the purpose of the study, the literature referenced high growth firms (Khattar et al., 2025).

Existing literature revealed that the scaling of a business is influenced by key structural factors such as capital and capabilities (Sheng et al., 2024). While Kiraz et al. (2020) argue that structural limitations such as the industry culture, gender inequality, work-life balance, networks and association, mentorship as well as institutionalised sexism also influence the ability for a business to scale. Existing literature revealed that these factors play a fundamental role in determining the growth trajectory of a business.

Existing literature further revealed that while there is existing literature that focuses on the outlined structural factors and limitations, there is still a gap on how identity factors influence the business to scale (Ekinici et al., 2020).

6.3.4 Discussion of the findings with literature on how personal identity impacts the scaling of women owned businesses in construction

From reviewing the findings, there is evidence that structural factors and limitations within the construction industry are not the only existing contributing factors when it comes to the scaling of women owned-construction businesses, as referenced in the existing literature. In the findings, the personal identities of the women-owners played a fundamental impact towards the scaling of their businesses. Socio-relational identity is an identity that the women-owners embodied, that they actively used to scale their businesses. Forming partnerships with their husbands as a strategy to overcome gender biases and discriminations demonstrated that these women owners possessed strong entrepreneurial astuteness when it comes to responding to threats within their business environment. This strategy also opened up doors of opportunity to obtain contracts, where they would have not been able to have access, simply because they are women. Interestingly, despite some of the structural limitations such as gender biases and exclusion, as covered in the existing literature (Rostiyanti et al., 2020) the findings showed that these women developed agile ways of scaling their businesses, by forming joint-venture partnerships with their associates to bypass stringent structural conditions. While one may argue that the socio-relation identity of these women is an enabler to possible nepotism and fronting, amongst other challenges that may be associated with relational identity, the findings showed that most of the participants embodied ethical

identities, that have played a huge role in their decision making on how they form partnerships.

One may argue that it is a self-sabotaging risk to enter an industry without background experience and knowledge, however, this was not the case for the participants. The findings revealed that the participants embodied a 'Jack of all trades identity', that despite the limitations of not having background experience, these women capitalised, on their prior skills and knowledge by applying them into their daily business process, as a result, they were able to scale. This measures the calibre of these women entrepreneurs as being agile, resilient and adaptive. Existing literature focused on business related factors such as the access to capital, funding and revenue as enablers of scaling (Sheng et al., 2024), which alludes to the gap in literature of identity as an enabler of scaling.

6.3.5 Conclusion of Discussion of Findings for RQ2

In accordance to the findings and literature, there is evidence of similarity that supports the research question of how personal identity impacts the scaling of women owned businesses in construction.

However, there is a remaining gap in literature on personal identity and how it impacts scaling. The research provided a new insight into the relationship between the jack of all trades identity and scaling. The research provided a new insight into the relationship between socio-relational identity and scaling. The research further provided new insights into the relationship between ethical identity and scaling.

Therefore, the findings presented for RQ2 confirmed and extended to the literature review findings in Chapter 2.

6.4 Research question 3 : What are the challenges that influence the personal identity of women owned construction businesses and their ability to scale?

Recap of findings on the challenges that influence the personal identity of women owned construction businesses and their ability to scale

From the collected research data, the researcher made use of thematic analysis to derive the themes which were generated from sub-group categories. For the purpose of answering RQ3, the researcher classified the data under two themes, as outlined in Chapter 5.

6.4.1 Theme 1: Structural complexities that constrain the personal identity and scaling of women-owners in construction

The findings revealed that the participants faced structural complexities that constrained their personal identity and ability to scale businesses. The results revealed two contributors to these constraints, household structure and entrepreneurial pressure as well as structural exclusion and support gaps.

Household structure and entrepreneurial pressure were referred to as the constraints that the participants experienced in their households, as mothers, wives, and their overall social identity. These constraints revealed that a large number of the participants left their marriages and ended up getting divorced, due to their business careers. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the participants struggled with balancing motherhood and the demands that came with business commitments, such as travelling and working long hours. The results also revealed that the participants expressed that their social lives were often compromised due to their business demands, as a result most of the participants claimed that they never had time for their children.

Structural exclusion and support gaps, referred to the constraints that the participants experienced within the construction industry. The findings revealed that the structural exclusion and support gaps were catalysed by gender bias and racial biases. The participants alluded to having challenges such as obtaining funding from the government. The findings further revealed that the private sector had gatekeepers and therefore the barriers to enter the private sector were high and limiting for the participants.

All the participants exclaimed the flawed support they received from the policy makers and industry bodies, alluding to their empty promises to the women in the construction industry.

6.4.2 Theme 2 : Institutional support and policy reforms as pathways to the empowerment of women owners in construction

The findings revealed that the participants recommended institutional support from the government, policy makers, and industry bodies within the construction industry. The participants recommended that they be supported through government grants, ease of red tape and there be a re-introduction of set asides of 30% work allocation for women-owners within the construction industry, as means to empower women in construction. Inclusive partnerships between and women and the private sector also came out strongly, as means to support and empower women in construction.

Recap of literature on the challenges that influence the personal identity of women owned construction businesses and their ability to scale?

In accordance to existing literature, structural constrains such as access to funding and family-life balance remain a challenge and a threat to the overall success of women-owned businesses in the construction industry (Lekchiri & Kamm, 2020).

Kunene and Msimango-Galawe (2025) made a recommendation that since women-entrepreneurs often face discrimination and equality within their various industries, they must get business coaching and mentorships as means to empower them. Other scholars recommended access to funding as a means to support women entrepreneurs in the construction industry.

6.4.3 Discussion of the findings with literature on the challenges that influence the personal identity of women owned construction businesses and their ability to scale

Although there were extensive similarities between the findings and the literature review, there is still a gap in literature on the challenges that impact the identity of women-owners in the construction industry.

The findings revealed that the women owners in construction continue to be marginalised in terms of access to funding, gender discrimination and overall institutional exclusion. Interestingly from this, these constraints have remained barriers over the years and there have been limited changes to support women entrepreneurs in construction. This alludes to how the participants expressed that the government, decision makers, and industry bodies have turned a blind eye to these challenges.

The work-life balance has been discussed extensively in previous scholars, however how the identity of these women is constrained has not been covered extensively. Interestingly most of the participants have walked away from their marriages. While this may be a reflection of the structural constrains in the industry, such as long working hours, and the extensive travelling, it is a reflection on the identity of the women, alluding to the fact that the women-owners in construction embody self-reliant identity, as a result would not choose to stay in situations , such as a dysfunctional marriage to survive. This observation also alluded to that the women-owners in construction embodied the adaptive identity, as walking away from their marriages is a decision that they have been accustomed to, and they now embrace being single-self sustained parents.

6.5 Conclusion of discussion of findings for RQ3

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CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

The construction Industry is still a male dominated industry, and it is shaped by historical patriarchal norms and gender biases, whereby women are not seen as equals, when compared to their male counterparts (Chege, 2020). Historically, women were known for gender based roles, as for example they often carried out clerical roles or cleaning roles, and it was seldom to see a woman in a technical role, like leading a construction project (Wang et al., 2025). However, over the years things have changed, and there are more women entering the construction industry and taking on leadership roles. Moreover, there has been more women taking up entrepreneurial roles such as owning construction companies. The South African construction industry is no different, as the industry remains challenged by institutional challenges such as regulatory compliance, racial history, and inequality. This study was conducted in South Africa.

7.2 Reflections on the study's objective

Recent studies reveal a growing participation of women within the construction industry (Khattar et al., 2025), leading in sectors like civil construction, building and even in specialised works like plumbing, mechanics and plumbing. Some women in construction have been able to do tremendously well, scaling their businesses beyond measure, while other women have not been able to scale and ended up remaining at the bottom pool. Other women ended up exiting the industry to explore industries that are more inclusive to women (Fielden et al., 2001).

The question then arose, how were some of these women in construction scaling their businesses, and how were they able to compete in a male dominated industry where they were constantly made inferior when compared to their male counterparts. The research also focused on who these women were and how were they able to survive within the construction industry. The study therefore sought to investigate the role of personal identity in shaping the scaling of women-owned construction businesses.

The study intended to contribute to the body of knowledge about the relationship between women-owners in construction and scaling. The study was also intended to capture the true, authentic narratives of these women, so that other women owners within the construction industry are empowered on ways to scale their businesses, challenges to look out for and the lessons they can take from the participants to go and use in their own entities. This study was also critical to start a conversation with industry leaders,

policymakers, and the government on how best women-owners in construction can be best supported for them to scale their businesses. For the purpose of the study, the researcher answered three research questions to address the gap in the literature review

Research Question 1 (RQ1):

What are the personal identities of women owning construction businesses?

Research Question 2:

How does personal identity impact the scaling of women owned businesses in construction?

Research Question 3:

What are the challenges that influence the personal identity of women owned construction businesses and their ability to scale?

Research Methodology

For the purpose of the study, and to answer the research questions, the researcher used the qualitative methodology, based on a descriptive phenomenology to collect data. The researcher had to do conduct interviews to be able to answer the research questions. To answer the research questions, interviews were conducted with 18 participants who were all women-owners in construction, with an industry experience spanning from ten years and above. Participants were located in various parts of South Africa, which gave the data more variance.

The process began with the researcher completing ethical clearance to ensure that the process was done ethically and within the regulations of the university. On approval of the ethical clearance, the researcher proceeded with the interviews to answer the research questions. The researcher used an interview guide to structure the interviews. The interview guide was an extension of each of the research questions. Each research question had four sub-questions to draw more depth from the participants' experiences. Prior to conducting the semi-structured interviews, the researcher ensured that participants understood, agreed with, and signed the consent form. The interviews were conducted on an online platform, called Microsoft Teams. All interviews with the participants were recorded and transcribed on Microsoft Teams. On conclusion of the interviews, all transcripts were cleaned and stored on an online platform called google drive.

To establish how the research questions were conducted, the researcher used a thematic analysis to answer the research questions. The researcher familiarised with the collected data, and explored the different experiences captured in the interviews, when the participants were answering the research questions. The researcher also looked for unique experiences to determine what was known and unknown from the data. Based on the meanings of the lived experiences, the researcher marked the meanings, giving a brief description, in only a few words in the interpretation. The researcher compared the similarities and differences between the codes, and organised the codes based on patterns, to formulate the key themes to answer the research questions. The themes were described in a way that captured the lived experiences of the writer, which essentially answered the research questions.

7.3 Principal Conclusions

The findings of the study were grouped into various categories called themes, based on the meanings of the participants and their lived experiences to answer the research questions.

7.3.1 Research question 1

Theme 1 : Identity through spiritual and socially rounded dimensions for women owners in construction

Theme 1 was categorised under two sub-group categories, namely faith and spiritual identity as well as socially rounded identity. The findings revealed that most of the participants embodied faith and spiritual identities. Women used faith and spiritual identity to make decisions, draw resilience, and as an overall way to seek guidance. The findings further revealed that most of the participants embodied socially rounded identities. There was evidence that the personal identity of women-owners was shaped by their personal background and some of the participants shared that they came from improvised backgrounds. Findings further showed that women-owners identified themselves as mothers.

Theme 2: Entrepreneurial resilience and an adaptive mindset, as identity forces for women owners in construction

Theme 2 was categorised under two sub-groups, opportunity orientated identity and adaptive identity. The results of the findings showed that most of the participants entered the construction industry by chance or by association. The findings also revealed that the participants did not have prior industry experience and therefore learned along the way

about the construction industry. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the participants embodied an adaptive identity. The participants also alluded that they had to find ways to adapt to the construction industry, as it is known to be male dominated.

7.3.2 Research Question 2

Theme 1 : Socio-relational identity as a catalyst to enhance scaling

The findings revealed that the participants embodied socio relational identity as a catalyst to enhance the scaling of their businesses. It was also highlighted that the participants that have been able to scale have had strong relations by association or by client relations.

Theme 2 : Jack-of-all trades identity for shaping scaling process

The findings for theme 2 were categorised under four sub-groups, financial prudence and discipline, strategic planning and foresight, risk management foresight, as well as confidence identity. The findings revealed that despite the participants not having a previous construction background, they still had a combination of different multiple skills set and had knowledge in multiple areas, that they had acquired in their previous professions, making the participants “Jacks of all trades”. Being exposed to various industries has broadened the skills set of the participants, placing them at an advantage to scale.

Theme 3 : Ethical identity influencing decision to partner during scaling

The findings revealed that the participants had a strong ethical moral, as they strongly expressed that they would rather walk away from a situation that compromises their identity. The participants also revealed that when it came partnerships and doing business, they ensured that everything was conducted ethically, and this enabled their businesses to demonstrate integrity, winning favour, and applause from some of their clients.

7.3.3 Research question 3

Theme 1 : Structural complexities that constrain the personal identity and scaling of women-owners in construction

Theme 1 was categorised under two sub-groups, household structure and entrepreneurial pressure as well as structural exclusion and support gaps. The findings presented that the participants struggled to keep a balance with work and their private lives, alluding to the fact that most of the participants had left their marriages and divorced.

Theme 2 : Institutional support and policy reforms as pathways to empowerment of women owners in construction

The results showed that the participants recommended more support from the government, policy makers and industry bodies. The participants expressed their needs for access to funding and training. They also further expressed the need to be allocated 30% that was to be set aside specifically for women, to empower them. The findings further revealed that there are high barriers to entry when it comes to partnering with the private sector, and the participants requested government intervention to eliminate the gap.

7.4 Implications

7.4.1 Academic/Theoretical Contributions

There is evidence within existing literature of the challenges that women entrepreneurs face within the construction industry (Amponsah-Asante et al., 2025). Literature reveals that these challenges include gender biases, capital, access to funding, and past patriarchal norms that limit and undermine women. Literature continues to show, that as a result of these challenges, women entrepreneurs have struggled to scale their businesses (Arshed et al., 2023).

Existing literature also shows that there have been discovered solutions to assist women entrepreneurs within the construction industry to navigate these challenges. Kunene and Msimango-Galawe (2025) encourage women entrepreneurs to take up on coaching and mentoring, as means to navigate these challenges. While Amponsah-Asante et al. (2025) emphasize the need for more inclusive policies to help women to scale.

Existing literature has largely covered the scaling of women-owners in construction, within the context of institutional factors such as access to funding, mentorship, capital, gender biases, and gender discrimination (Wang et al., 2021). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to argue that the personal identity theory extends into the discipline of scaling. This will extend the body of knowledge within academic spheres such as women in construction, women in entrepreneurship and the scaling of women entrepreneurs.

7.4.2 Business Implications

From a business perspective, the study brings relevance by urging the need for intervention from the government, policy makers, and industry bodies to address the gaps that constrain the identity of women-owners within the construction industry. By the participation of these stakeholders to close the gap, women will be empowered both in

who they are and in their business. Further to this, the study sought to empower other women in construction through learning and the findings obtained within the study.

7.5 Limitations

The limitations of this study refer to the time horizon. The study was only scheduled to be conducted within the academic year of the research. Ideally the researcher would have conducted the study using the longitudinal approach to examine how identity evolves as the women transition from being a small size firm to scaling their businesses at a larger scale.

7.6 Suggestions for future research

Recommendations for future research include extending the study to other male dominated industries such as manufacturing and mining to magnify the challenges faced by women-entrepreneurs in male dominated industries. This could also help to raise awareness to policy makers, the government and industry bodies.

The recommendations for future research also include extending the study to other geographical areas, such as areas from other parts of Africa to expand the advocacy to support and empower women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, it would be interesting to discover if the participants on a global scale undergo the identity views when it comes to scaling their businesses.

7.7 Concluding Remarks

The study was set out to explore the role of personal identity in shaping the scaling of women-owned construction businesses. It was framed within the context of the social identity theory using a qualitative methodology. The study revealed interesting outcomes of how women-owners in construction define themselves as they navigate male dominance, and overcome institutional complexities such as gender biases, historical race challenges, and exclusion.

The findings revealed multi-dimensions of the women-owners, in terms of their identities and how they use these identities to scale businesses. The identity of women-owners in construction span across adaptive identity, where people see women using this identity to respond to the construction environment as they navigate gender discrimination and patriarchal norms. Faith and spiritual identity provided a strong moral compass, in the decision-making psyche of women-owners in construction, which alluded to their ethical leadership approach. Furthermore women-owners revealed the importance of stakeholder relations, as embodied in their socio-rational identity and how that continues to play a role

in their scaling. Despite the findings of structural limitations such as access to funding, high barriers of entry in the private sector and frustrations with institutional support gaps, the women owners in construction continue to embody entrepreneurial resilience as they navigate the harsh realities of the sector.

From a theoretical view, the study revealed a different phenomenon, about personal identity that it extends beyond the social identity theory into scaling. The study revealed that scaling is not only framed by economic prospects, but it is also deeply rooted in personal identity.

The study therefore affirmed that personal identity does shape the identity of women owners in construction, highlighting that the most successful women owners in terms of scaling their businesses have been those that embodied strong socio-relational identity, entrepreneurial resilience identity, faith and spiritual identity, ethical identity, jack of all trades identity and those that presented an adaptive mindset.

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