

Leadership Excellence and Gender in Organizations

Am I an Entrepreneur? How Imposter Fears Hinder Women Entrepreneurs' Business Growth

Jamie J. Ladge
j.ladge@neu.edu

Kimberly A. Eddleston

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In this manuscript, we seek to better understand why women entrepreneurs often limit the growth of their businesses by developing a framework that takes into account the masculine domain of entrepreneurship. We first draw from gender role theory to explore how the masculine portrayal of entrepreneurship influences the way women business owners see themselves as entrepreneurs. We propose that a woman business owner's gender identity, that is, the degree to which she possesses masculine and feminine traits, influences the extent to which she sees herself as an entrepreneur. In turn, we argue that the degree to which a woman business owner possesses a salient entrepreneurial identity impacts her desire for business growth. Further, to expand our understanding of why women business owners may be less likely to possess an entrepreneurial identity than men, we extend the imposter phenomenon to women's entrepreneurship. The imposter phenomenon seems most appropriate to the study of women entrepreneurs' growth intentions since it explains why high achievers and those in leadership positions are unable to internalize their successful experiences and therefore downshift their career ambitions. Further, while research on the imposter phenomenon has focused on how personality traits contribute to imposter fears, we extend this theory by proposing that situational factors can fuel imposter fears for women entrepreneurs.