'Respect' and 'Self-Determination' women entrepreneurs' identities and entrepreneurial discourses

Introduction

In order to understand how women entrepreneurs enact or challenge gender discrimination, research on entrepreneurship has focussed on the concept of identity (Bruni *et al.*, 2004; Lewis, 2013; Orser *et al.*, 2011; Patterson *et al.*, 2012). Here, Identity is conceptualized as a dynamic effect of the gender constrains with which women entrepreneurs deal in their particular contexts (Bruni *et al.*, 2004).

However, this line of research (e.g. Díaz- García and Welter, 2010; Pettersson and Cassel, 2014; Maden, 2015; Lewis, 2013) has not explored the distinctions of women's identities according to their business backgrounds, and how women with identical backgrounds collectively construct their entrepreneurial identities, when they have the opportunity to interact with each other and share their experiences.

Aiming to address this research gap, this exploratory study aims to compare how Portuguese women entrepreneurs with different bounds to their businesses jointly negotiate gender and their entrepreneurial identities. By comparing the identity negotiation of women entrepreneurs according to different business backgrounds, it is possible to explore the differences and convergences in the way these women conform or resist to gender discrimination in their particular contexts. Additionally, the decision to study the identity construction in group interactions allows demonstrating how consensus and contradictions arise around an attempt to define a coherent identity (Allen, 2005) amongst women entrepreneurs with the same business background.

The choice of focus group research method is justified by the need to create an opportunity of women with identical business backgrounds to be together and share their

experiences, feelings and points of view (Wilkinson, 1999) about gender and business. Thus, this research carried out two focus groups of women entrepreneurs with two different initial bounds to their companies (although all of them own and manage them): participants directly involved in starting-up their young businesses (under 10-year-old); and participants who took over their family businesses.

In Portugal, women entrepreneurs that own and manage their companies (GEM, 2013; IAPMEI, 2008) are particularly present in two business settings: women who take over their family business (Guerreiro, 1996; IAPMEI, 2008), and women who create their own businesses (GEM, 2013). Research shows that women entrepreneurs of these two groups are subjected to different forms of gender discrimination. Women entrepreneurs in family businesses have to deal with organizational cultures inherited from a previous male leadership (Guerreiro, 1996; Howorth and Ali, 2001). On the other hand, start-uppers face other kinds of gender constraints related to financial and institutional support (GEM, 2013). The comparison of women entrepreneurs' identities with those particular business backgrounds will allow understanding whether there are differences concerning how each group collectively deals with specific gender constraints of its business contexts.

This study aims to contribute to an understanding of women entrepreneurs' identities as diversified and contextualized, and to put forward the need to adjust the policies against gender discrimination to the specific business contexts. The option for focus group as a research method intends to contribute to supporting its use in future research about identity construction and gender discrimination in entrepreneurship.

In order to compare the shared identities in the two focus groups, this article starts by giving an account of the literature about gender identity construction in entrepreneurship. Section two explains the methodology, describing the participants and clarifying how the material was collected and analysed. Based on a discourse analysis of the group interactions

findings show that different gender discourses constrained and produced particular identities in each group of women entrepreneurs. Finally, the major results are discussed and problematized, and the main conclusions and implications drawn from this study are presented.

Theoretical background

Research on gender and entrepreneurship has confirmed that women face social and institutionalized gender barriers when participating in entrepreneurial and business contexts. They are not immediately recognized as real 'entrepreneurs' (Lewis, 2006), and their professional qualities and individual attributes are not valued as highly as those of their male counterparts (Humbert and Brindley, 2015). Also, women's male business partners often take the visible leading roles in their companies (Howorth and Ali, 2001; Vera and Dean, 2005), while the women themselves are associated with lower level responsibilities.

In fact, the practice of entrepreneurship remains masculine, although arguments are produced in favour of a more feminine way of being entrepreneurial, and of defining different standards of how to do business (e.g. Orser *et al*., 2011; Patterson *et al*., 2012). Society, via the media (Krefting, 2002), public institutions and policies (Ahl and Nelson, 2015; Fernandes and Leite, 2014), and mainstream research (Ahl, 2006), continue to associate entrepreneurship with a masculine discourse linked with organizational profit and with an individualistic entrepreneur's profile. The ideal entrepreneur should have psychological and individual qualifying meanings that stress risk, competitiveness, ambition initiative taking (Bruni *et al.*, 2004; Humbert and Brindley, 2015), and professionalism (Lewis, 2013).

Some studies show the particular discriminatory experiences of women entrepreneurs in family businesses, namely their continuous struggles to be recognized by relatives (Dumas,

1998; Vera and Dean, 2005). A paternalist discourse (Vera and Dean, 2005) keeps women entrepreneurs that take over the family business trapped in their family roles, as they tend to be seen primarily as family members (e.g. daughters, sisters), and only secondly as entrepreneurial subjects. Women who create their own businesses also face several difficulties in the access to financial and symbolic resources, when compared to men entrepreneurs in the same conditions (Fenwick, 2002; Marlow and Patton, 2005). In fact, a marginal gender condition is shared by women entrepreneurs from different status positions (Díaz-García and Welter, 2010), types of businesses (Pettersson and Cassel, 2014) and geographical locations (Maden, 2015).

To understand how women entrepreneurs deal with discrimination, several feminist studies have focused on how these women negotiate their gender and entrepreneur identities (Díaz-García and Welter, 2011; Lewis, 2013; Pettersson and Cassel, 2014). This line of research was particularly important since it allowed the conceptualization of women entrepreneurs' identities as potentially deconstructive of the gender norms that constitute the entrepreneurial contexts. In this sense, the concept of identity is understood as a dynamic relational and social construction, produced and constrained by gender discourses (Butler, 1990; Deutsch, 2007), which can be defined as cultural ways of producing knowledge about what it means to be a woman/man and feminine/masculine. In this sense, gender discourses regulate what must (not) be expected and (un)acceptable when performing one's gender identities (Butler, 1990; Deutsch, 2007). Studying how gender identity is constructed and negotiated allows to explore the "mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized", and, by exposing such mechanism, "the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized" (Butler, 2004: 42). In gender and entrepreneurship this means to explore how women entrepreneurs negotiate their identities by conforming and/or resisting gender discrimination (Bruni *et al.,* 2004; Díaz-García and

Welter, 2010; Lewis, 2006, 2013; Pettersson and Cassel, 2014). As an illustration, Lewis accounts for how women entrepreneurs make entrepreneurial practice gender-neutral (Lewis, 2006), or negotiate between an expressive femininity and a professional masculinity (Lewis, 2013). Pettersson and Cassel (2014) analyse how women entrepreneurs construct their identities by moving between a position of family and domestic tasks and one of public and instrumental business responsibilities.

However, none of these studies explores the similarities and differences of women entrepreneurs' identities with different business backgrounds, which imply particular gender constrains. Such comparison would allow one to understand the distinct ways in which women deal with particular gender disadvantages. Moreover, research about women entrepreneurs' identities has not studied how women with identical business backgrounds collectively construct their identities (Allen, 2005).

The preference for the interview as a research method in several studies (e.g. Díaz-García and Welter, 2010; Fenwick, 2002; Lewis, 2013) emphasises the individual process of identity construction. However, the study of the identity construction in group interactions permits to demonstrate the consensus and contradictions that emerge amongst women in the attempt to achieve a shared and coherent version of themselves as entrepreneurs, and gives an account of which gender constraints they highlight when they are together and share their work experiences. Moreover, when women entrepreneurs have the opportunity to share their experiences amongst themselves, it is them who become the agents in defining what is a consensual identity (Munday, 2006; Wilkinson, 1999) in their specific business context.

This exploratory study aims to compare how Portuguese women entrepreneurs with different bounds to their businesses collectively negotiate gender and their entrepreneurial identities. We believe that this study will allow us to initiate a discussion of the ways in which women entrepreneurs with identical business backgrounds share and manage their

identities together in order to deal with gender discrimination in business contexts in a quest for legitimation.

Methodology

Context and Portuguese women entrepreneurs

In recent years, and especially since the beginning of the economic crisis, the Portuguese government, alongside entrepreneurial associations and universities, has promoted entrepreneurship and business initiatives as key elements for economic growth (Lusa – Portuguese News Agency, 2012; Mendes, 2014). Despite these national initiatives and the efforts of EU funding to support women's entrepreneurship access to the business context, only 36 per cent of women entrepreneurs are employers (ILO, 2015), and the average entrepreneur is a man (GEM, 2013). In fact, men are twice as likely as women to be entrepreneurs, and only around 5.8 per cent of the Portuguese population are women entrepreneurs at an *early-stage*, while 10.8 per cent are men (GEM Portugal, 2013).

As in other countries (Maden, 2015), entrepreneurship in Portugal is a masculine domain, where an entrepreneurial-mentality (Bruni *et al.*, 2004) stills pervades, emphasising a masculine psychological profile related with ambition, initiative and the ability to take risks (Fernandes and Leite, 2014; Palma and Cunha, 2006). In Portugal, women entrepreneurs that own and manage companies are mainly present in two types of business settings. One is the family business (Guerreiro, 1996; IAPMEI, 2008), despite the fact that women are less likely to enter the family firm than men (Howorth and Ali, 2001). The other setting concerns new or recent businesses created by women, although some statistics show a decrease in the creation of this sort of company (GEM 2013).

These two particular business settings may imply different gender arrangements and constraints. Research shows (Guerreiro, 1996; Howorth and Ali, 2001) that women entrepreneurs in family businesses often have to deal with organizational cultures inherited from a previous male leadership (e.g. their father or grandfather). Moreover, they may have to manage older workers that they did not choose and are part of that older culture. On the other hand, female start-uppers also face specific difficulties, including, crucially, access to investment (GEM, 2013).

It can be argued that such different gender constraints will demand from women particular ways of defining themselves in order to be recognized and legitimized as entrepreneurial subjects in their particular contexts (Bruni *et al.,* 2004; Lewis, 2013). In this sense, it is of most relevance to explore the differences and convergences in the identity construction of women with different bounds to their businesses.

Method and participants

The study was conducted with two focus groups of women entrepreneurs with different initial bounds to their businesses: start-up and family businesses. The focus group research method is used to analyse the social interaction in small groups (Allen, 2005; Hollander 2004; Puchta and Potter 2004), and to allow participants to express and share their stories and experiences (Wilkinson, 1999). This method can then be useful for providing insights about how entrepreneurial identity is co-constructed and managed between women entrepreneurs with similar bounds to their companies. In contrast with the identity produced individually, the study of the identity constructed within the group allows to demonstrate how the consensus and contradictions are generated in interaction and around an attempt to produce an identity that is shared by the group members. Such interactional process permits to understand the

gender pressures and conformations that emerge around an identity in result of the group influence.

Following an invitation made to several of 52 women entrepreneurs that had previously participated in a larger study, 14 volunteered to take part in the focus groups. However only 12 were able to be included in the study, since two gave up due to health/professional reasons. The two focus groups were evenly divided between (a) participants who started their own businesses and managed them since the beginning, and (b) participants who entered the family businesses that they currently run. In Portugal, studies conducted with women that own and manage their companies (Guerreiro, 1992; Howorth and Ali, 2001) are rare, and have been mainly undertaken based on samples from these two types of initial bounds to the business. These two distinct types were also the most frequent in the former larger study that was already mentioned.

The participants were very diverse in terms of their business areas, ages, academic qualifications, and family situation, as it is illustrated in table 1.

Insert table 1 about here

The participants in the study owned and managed small and medium-sized businesses that employed a varying number of workers (from four to 144), in services (education and accounting), manufacturing (textile, food processing, and plastic components), or retail (bookshop and chemists) sectors.

The family business group (focus group I) consisted of five women entrepreneurs who worked in companies existing for one or more generations. Additionally, all women had only family members as their business partners, and the father was one of these family members for all five women entrepreneurs. The start-up business group (focus group II) consisted of

seven participants who owned young businesses, up to ten years old. This group included 'newcomers' to the business community, who had no business background. Regarding business partners, three participants had no partners at all, and the other four had one or two partners, either male or female.

Focus groups were conducted at the university where the two researchers work, and the first author conducted both focus groups. When the discussion in the focus groups began, women entrepreneurs were informed of the research aims and the rules for interaction: all participants could freely express their opinions, and any opinion should be considered worth listening to; interruptions to ask questions or to agree or disagree with one another's statements were welcomed; and, participants should address the entire group and avoid any side conversations.

A topic list of questions was used to initiate the conversation about the meanings associated with being an entrepreneur, in what way these meanings were related to their own business lives, and in what way being a woman affected their business practice and the way others saw them. The general nature of the topic list of questions allowed emphasising an active involvement of the interviewees in conducting the conversations and managing by their own initiative the meanings co-produced in the focus groups. In fact, in both focus groups, all participants spoke several times, sharing their daily work experiences, and creating different consensus and contradictory views of the research issues. The focus groups duration ranged from two hours (focus group I) to two and a half hours (focus group II), and they were recorded using audio recorders and a video camera, which allowed for the identification of overlapping voices.

Analysis Procedures

Discourse analysis was considered a suitable methodological framework for treating focus

groups qualitative data. We maintain that reality is socially constructed, and that it is the discourses that allow us to give meaning one's experiences and feelings (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Based on Kelan's work (2008), we explore the talk interactions of women entrepreneurs, in a group, to understand how participants co-produce meanings about what it means to be a entrepreneur, and to analyse what constructions are accessible to them and in what way these are related to gender.

In order to do this, the focus groups were transcribed verbatim and then translated [1]. Pseudonyms were used to identify participants. At this stage, the second author of this article joined the study and had access to the written material, which was read and re-read. The qualitative data software Nvivo was used to assist the organisation of data and its coding process.

To begin with, the coding process consisted of analysing the transcription of each group separately and was based on the interview's guide questions. Then, for each group, authors explored the masculine and feminine meanings associated by participants with their constructions of themselves as business subjects, and their positions in relation to those meanings. Identity construction presupposes occupying different positions in the discourses, which we are able and allowed to access (Davies and Harré, 1990). After analysing each group, the authors agreed upon the following main themes, which were used to compare the groups: man or masculine meanings related to the entrepreneur construction; woman or femininity meanings related to the entrepreneur construction; and gender meanings related to the self-construction as 'woman entrepreneur'. For each of the themes, attention was paid to what participants intended to do with the meanings that they had brought about in conversation with each other. These themes were used to compare and identify the similarities and differences between the two groups in relation to each theme. Table 2 summarizes the data coding process, by showing the themes and the main findings, according

to each group.

Insert table 2 about here

The data presented in the next section illustrates the complex weavings undertaken by women entrepreneurs to negotiate a consensual business identity in group interactions.

Findings

Enacting masculinities: professionalism, authority and self-determination
Each focus group started with a question about how participants perceive an entrepreneur and in what way that perception was related to their own lives. In the family businesses group, a predominant discourse used to signify the entrepreneur goes hand in hand with the development of competence.

Catarina: I always tried to gain my place, to achieve my position, based on my work, based on the quality of my work and the quality of my decisions.

(Focus group I)

Catarina's investment in doing her work and making good decisions gives her the right to occupy the position of entrepreneur in her plastic components company, and to be recognized as such by her family and workers. These meanings highlight a competent performance related to professionalism that, although not explicitly taken as masculine, implies nonetheless that Catarina had to give up of a feminine way of being. In this sense, in this

group, women particularly emphasize their effort to show others their competence in order to gain their recognition.

In this group, participants also make use of an authoritarian and self-confident entrepreneur discourse. Maria, who runs a family business involved in food processing, describes her interaction with workers and suppliers by arguing that it is important to be authoritarian in order to get things done, and to be recognized as one who has the power to give orders. Francisca, who manages a textile company founded by her father, shares this opinion.

Maria: Sometimes we have to give orders. We can't say: 'Please, can you do this or that for me?' No. Sometimes we have to say: 'This is what I want, period'. I mean people will then automatically respect us because we know what we're doing.

Francisca: But we have to be self-confident, really.

Maria: You have to be self-confident. You might be wrong, but it does not matter.

(Focus group I)

This second discourse is embedded in the idea that women entrepreneurs need to impose themselves on others (co-workers, family) to be accepted as an entrepreneurial subject. Such discourse entails an unquestionable obedience from those who receive the given orders.

In the start-up group, a discourse focused on self-determination is predominantly enacted and shared. Leonor, owner of a textile company, shows this point of view when she emphasises the relevance of individual willpower to start a company.

Leonor: Because those who want to be an entrepreneur from the outset say the first

action does not depend on anybody else; it depends on oneself who has the decision

to build a company.

(Focus group II)

In this discourse, gender neutrality is achieved by making use of an abstract and technical language, and meanings related to risk and success. Helena, owner and manager of bookshop, uses these meanings to define the business practice.

Helena: I would like to recall the word 'risk'. There is a scale and risk…First, the risk

of the project, knowing if it's going to be a success or a failure.

(Focus group II)

As she continues, Helena goes on referring to '(…) an industry of risk, which is currently focused on high technologies'. Although her business is not at all related to the IT industry, her comment may very well partly emerge from an increasingly general opinion in Portuguese society that the 'good way' of doing business must be linked to innovation and technology (Coleman, 2015; Mendes, 2014) following events in other countries that have undergone severe financial crises (Kenny and Scriver, 2012). What is interesting, though, is that this discourse also pervades mainstream research on entrepreneurship (e.g. Davidsson, 2004).

Despite several attempts to maintain a gender-neutral position about the meanings and experiences of entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs, in their conversations, end up revealing the masculinity that permeates their business contexts. In the start-up group, gender discrimination was openly discussed and the masculinity of entrepreneurship was clearly acknowledged, as women entrepreneurs exposed the male networks and masculine interests from which they are excluded.

Fátima: I think that women entrepreneurs, often, they do not go out for lunch, to

football, or go out together; and further these contacts generate to…

Camila: … to generate business.

(Focus group II)

In their conversation, both Fátima, owner of an accounting company, and Camila, owner of

an English language private school, talk about the masculine norms concerning doing

business, and additionally they expose their otherness as women in this male-type

professional context. The discussion about gender discrimination always produced some

tension between participants and sometimes even extreme positions, as it is the case of

Leonor that refuses women inequality in entrepreneurship by naturalizing gender differences.

Leonor: If I was born a woman and the other person was born a man, this, if we want

to think like that, is a form of discrimination; but to me, what is natural is not

discrimination because it is natural to be different... That is, I am a woman, and he is a

man, so...(…).

Marta: In terms of men and women, in my opinion, in entrepreneurship,

[opportunities] are exactly the same (…).

Alexandra: But, I mean, women have in fact been placed on a different level.

(Focus group II)

Naturalising male and female differences allows Leonor to deny gender discrimination and to

expose her condition as a woman and entrepreneur without having to deal with the

consequences of doing that. Marta, manager of a large textile company, reinforces this

naturalisation, and adds a similar argument by stating that men and women are equal in what

concerns the social opportunities to become an entrepreneur. This attempt of women

entrepreneurs to deny gender discrimination, gender-neutralize entrepreneurship, and individualize their identities as entrepreneurs is also reported in other studies (Díaz-García and Welter, 2011; Lewis, 2006).

Concealing and enacting femininities: refusing feminine fragilities and reclaiming self-determination as part of being a woman

In the family businesses group, there is a convergent effort to fit in a masculine identity, apparently without a critical view or questioning of their need to do so. However, making use of business masculine discourses implies that the women entrepreneurs overcome a perceived feminine inadequacy. The resort to a discourse of professionalism comes as a response to a gender double constraint related to the daughter family role that all participants share. Catarina and Ana bring forward the same feelings about their experiences in family businesses.

> Catarina: The boss's daughter, and a woman on top of that (…), was a big stigma.
>
> Ana: In the beginning, I sensed, in fact, a certain (long pause), a certain surprise from those I worked more directly with. Because, in fact, one of the issues was that of being a woman, perhaps embedded in a role that is expected more from a man than from a woman. That has gone by, and I went on conquering my own environment and my place.
>
> (Focus group I)

Along with Catarina, Ana makes her gender otherness visible, as she recognizes that being an entrepreneur is more of a masculine than a feminine role. By making use of different temporalities (before and after), Ana is able to detach herself from a past feminine condition that is inadequate to her work context. In fact, both Catarina and Ana make an

effort to leave behind a past femininity (as a woman and as a daughter) that must be rendered invisible since it is perceived as inadequate for work and professional relations. In this sense, they recognize the need to overcome that feminine "fault" and to learn and fit in a professional masculine performativity. In a similar way, Maria's intervention above illustrates her attempt to distance herself from a powerless femininity, as it entails a powerless relational practice supposed to be inadequate for business ('we (…) can't say 'Please[2], can you do this or that for me?' No.'). In her view, an unquestionable power masculine authority must then replace this restrictive femininity.

In the start-up group, participants refuse to assume that they - as women - are less capable than men. The discussion takes on a kind of political statement that conceals any attempt to consider women as fragile beings, who do not belong in business world.

Alexandra: We do not need any support, specifically, because we [women] are not the poor little ones.

Leonor: I believe that we all have the same opportunities.

(Focus group II)

Alexandra, the owner of a plastic components company, who deals with men only, in her work, refuses to consider women as victims and as lacking the power to be agents in their work contexts. The weakness and powerlessness associated with women is replaced by independency and the power to do things their own way. In this sense, Alexandra, although recognizing women discrimination, rejects women entrepreneurs otherness position business context. Additionally, Leonor's attempts to put men and women in social equal positions (as had already been done by Marta) allows women entrepreneurs not only to distance themselves from women who conform to gender restrictions, but also to value individual

business qualities, such as willpower and firmness of purpose. These topics are brought into the group discussion when Leonor replies to Alexandra's statement.

> Alexandra: But, I mean, women have in fact been placed on a different level
>
> Leonor: They [women] let themselves be placed (long pause). We [women] have what we want and what we fight for. I think this is the principle of entrepreneurship; it is the attitude of wanting!
>
> Camila: I agree. (…)
>
> (Focus group II)

In Leonor's opinion, which Camila supports, discrimination is constructed as women's individual responsibility, as they accept a restrictive social placement. These women are the ones that Leonor and Camila distance themselves from, by using the pronouns 'they' and 'we'. 'They' are women who passively consent discrimination; 'we' are women that refuse a feminine negative behaviour and embrace a discourse of individualism focused on self-determination. This configures a metamorphosis of the category 'women', involving the emergence of an emancipatory femininity and an understanding of masculinity as detached from men (Essers and Benschop, 2007). In this way, this women entrepreneurs group reclaims the centre of entrepreneurship/business by reclaiming a power that belongs to women and a new way of perceiving femininity.

Respect and self-determination identities

In the family business group, one can realize how participants use professional and authoritarian masculinities and reject a restrictive femininity to construct an identity of respect. The identity work is based on distancing oneself from a feminine double restrictive

position (as women and daughters), and becoming competent to achieve an unquestionable power. But it takes time.

> Ana: So, I grew to gain the respect (long pause) from those working with me and from all those surrounding me
>
> Catarina: Bit by bit, I gained respect.
>
> (Focus group I)

Nonetheless, women entrepreneurs recognise that the gender performativity to become a respectful entrepreneur entails a conscious process (Martin, 2003) of understanding which gender fiction must be performed. Ana shares this view in the group when she argues for the need to simulate "proper" ways of being in business.

> Ana: I have always tried to have that perspective of confidence because when I make a decision, even if in my mind I am not 100 per cent sure that it is the best decision…. oh! I stick to it to the end. I argue for it to the end, whatever it is, no matter what consequences might result from that decision.
>
> (Focus group I)

In the start-up group, participants value an identity of self-determination inscribed in a masculine discourse that entails risk, willpower and firmness of purpose (Humbert and Brindley, 2015). This business identity is also enacted when women entrepreneurs distance themselves from a restrictive femininity and exceed men through separating masculinity from male and by re-signifying of what it means to be a 'woman'. In this group, participants overvalue women's entrepreneurial/business abilities as compared to men's. Although men are perceived as the reference for what an entrepreneur's qualities should be and women are constantly compared to them, the power is nevertheless understood as

belonging to women. The talk between Leonor, Helena and Olívia, (owner of a chemist) illustrates this issue.

> Leonor: There might be some more scepticism on the man's attitude or on the opportunities that a man has compared to the opportunities that a woman has, but then, as Alexandra said, women, if they want, they can be better than men; there isn't that difference, so, the problem is solved! I see things this way.
>
> Helena: In fact, it demands, as Leonor was saying, from the moment the decision is made, and then it's time to fight!
>
> Olívia: It's time to fight!
>
> (Focus group II)

In this sequence, there is a shared idea among participants that willpower must be reclaimed as a quality and an attribute of womanhood. Exceeding men in this way helps women to overcome the 'fault' that is associated with their gender, to re-signify what it means to be an entrepreneur and to call upon a gender equity based on the superiority of women.

Discussion and conclusion

This exploratory study aimed to analyse and compare how entrepreneurial/business identities are constructed in two groups of women entrepreneurs with different bounds to their businesses. Moreover, although literature has thoroughly studied women entrepreneur's identity construction, we find it crucial to explore how women entrepreneurs collectively perform to co-construct a shared and consensual entrepreneurial identity. This research supports the use of focus groups for casting light on the interactional and collective nature of business identity construction.

The comparison of the family business group with the start-up group shows each group resorted to and negotiated different gender meanings to consensually construct a legitimate entrepreneurial identity. In terms of masculinities, the participants of family business group resorted to meanings related with professional (Lewis, 2013) and authoritarian masculinities, and this allows them to demonstrate to others that they do deserve their place and must therefore be accepted as entrepreneurial subjects. In the start-up business group, different masculine attributes emerged. In this case, women make use of willpower, ambition and firmness of purpose in order to construct themselves as entrepreneurs.

In terms of how identity work is related to femininity, our findings show that the participants in the family business group put an effort into fitting a masculine identity, and adopt strategies to distance themselves from a restrictive femininity that is related to their double gender constraint condition - "women" and "daughters" (Vera and Dean, 2005). Start-up women entrepreneurs presented an emancipatory project of femininity that re-appropriates the normative masculine meanings of their context and detaches those meanings from men (Essers and Benschop, 2007).

The collective negotiation around gender meanings in each group produced two separate entrepreneurial identities. The family business group jointly constructed a shared respect identity. Gaining respect in a "men's world" – with former male managements - is these women's main goal in order to be recognized by their family and workers. In the start-up business group the attempt for consensus emerged around a self-determination identity. This identity allows the participants to proclaim a superiority position in relation to men, and to reject a feminine victimization positioning.

Although group comparison results point out to different identity constructions, similarities do emerge. The participants tend to conform to the masculine discourses by reproducing them as a way to reclaim their place in their particular contexts. Moreover, both

groups share a negative image of femininity, by adopting an individualized strategy to construct themselves as business subjects. On other hand, women entrepreneurs also resist gender norms. This happens when the participants of the family business group question an essentialized and natural version of gender (Bruni *et al.*, 2004) by showing their awareness that gender is a construction that requires to be performed. Start-uppers resist gender norms by reclaiming superiority over men, and put themselves as women as the reference point for business masculine meanings. As revealed by other studies (e.g. Díaz-Garcia and Welter, 2011; Lewis, 2013; Pettersson and Cassel, 2014), women entrepreneurs both conform and resist gender norms. However, this study goes further by showing that the way gender is performed in the identity construction is different accordingly to women business background, and involving different gender discourses and positioning. This is particularly evident when the identity is constructed in-group interaction. In comparison with the study of the individual identity construction, the analysis of the identity produced in-group goes deeper in demonstrating how the influence process amongst members produces a shared and coherent identity to deal with the gender discrimination of a specific business context.

The two identities (respect and self-determination) can also be interpreted as an effect of the Portuguese business situation. The family businesses group identity reflects the absolute need to be recognized in settings where male family figures (fathers and grandfathers) are often the major social and symbolic references. On the other hand, start-uppers tend to share an identity that is characterized by what is emphasized by Portuguese media and governmental institutions as the 'proper' entrepreneur attributes (Lusa – Portuguese News Agency, 2012; Mendes, 2014). These attributes are presented in mainstream research and in other countries as the ones needed to be an ideal entrepreneur (Ahl, 2006; Bruni *et al.*, 2004). Start-up women entrepreneurs, who belong to a context free

from a symbolic masculine family past, reclaim, then, their belonging to the normative social space of what it means to be an entrepreneurial subject (Ahl, 2006).

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of women entrepreneurs identities as diversified and contextualized, and, thus, questions prevalent views that essentialize what it means to be an entrepreneur. This was achieved by highlighting the particular contours of gender discrimination that are implied in the constitution of the respect and self-determination identities, and by exploring how women entrepreneurs deal with gender discourses in their specific contexts.

Our research also contributes to questioning gender standard policies that do not consider the specific contexts and identities of women entrepreneurs. Therefore, this study may be useful in the design and implementation of specific institutional equality policies for women entrepreneurs in various circumstances. In family business contexts we suggest that gender policies should support the leadership of women entrepreneurs to have a role in redefining conservative and masculine notions of what it means to be competent. In the start-up context it would be important for institutional policies to motivate the discussion of different gender conceptions of what it means to be an entrepreneur and the 'correct' way of doing business.

The decision to use focus groups as a research method in this study may open up possibilities for its use in future research about identity construction and gender discrimination in entrepreneurship. However, there are some limitations as far as the focus group method is concerned, since it is considered particularly useful to study collective and shared constructions (Hollander, 2004), rather than for revealing personal experiences. This implies that the group perceptions prevails above the individual perceptions and that some participants can be more active and involved in giving their opinions then others, despite efforts by the researcher to facilitate general participation.

To conclude, this study reinforces the different ways in which discrimination operates in the lives of women entrepreneurs and how they collectively react to this. Future research may consider other geographical contexts and particular types of gendered businesses to study and compare the different collective ways to deal with gender discrimination. In this sense, an interesting path of research would be to compare in what ways the success, as perceived by the two groups of women entrepreneurs, might affect the collective identity construction in each group. In relation to workers and business partners, it would be relevant to compare how these two professional categories perceive the leadership of women entrepreneurs with different backgrounds. Workers who apply for jobs in a start-up led by a woman may have different perceptions of women in charge than the ones already working in a male dominated family business. Further, it would be interesting to explore how the women entrepreneurs relationship with workers and business partners is related to a respect identity and a self-determination identity.

Finally, it would be important to deepen understanding of what emerged in this study as an emancipatory femininity, by exploring how identities are now changing within the process of 'masculinizing' femininity. Within this framework, future research should further identify new emancipatory gender projects that are capable of opening up political space, in order to re-signify entrepreneurial/business identities and contexts.

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Notes

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[1] Particular attention was paid to language and culture issues to overcome the difficulties inherent to translation.

[2] In the work context, management staff do not often use 'please' when giving an order to a subordinate.

Table 1. Information about Focus Groups participants

	Fictional names	Age	Education	Marital status	Number of children	Business Activity
Focus Group I	Francisca	33	Master Degree in Accounting	Married	1	Textile Industry
	Catarina	31	Graduation in Engineering	Single	-	Plastic components
	Ana	51	Graduation in Economics	Married	2	Textile Industry
	Clara	51	Graduation in Pharmacy	Single	1	Chemist
	Maria	38	Graduation in English	Married	1	Food processing
Focus Group II	Helena	39	Master degree in Sociology	Single	-	Bookstore
	Leonor	50	Secondary education	Married	2	Textile Industry
	Olívia	47	Graduation in Pharmacy	Divorced	2	Chemist
	Alexandra	47	Secondary education	Married	2	Plastic components
	Marta	41	Secondary education	Married	2	Textile Industry
	Camila	30	Graduation in English	Married	1	Education
	Fátima	51	Graduation in Economics	Married	1	Accounting

Table 2. Discursive analysis of focus groups: summary

Themes	Group I Family business group	Group II Start-up business group
'Man' or masculine meanings related to the entrepreneur construction	**'Authoritarianism' and 'professionalism' masculinities**	**Self-determination masculinity**
'Woman' or femininity meanings related to the entrepreneur construction	**Restrictive femininity:** - The opposite of being professional (a past self that must be abandoned) - The opposite of being authoritarian (saying "please" in the relation with others)	**Restrictive femininity:** - Passivity, accepting discrimination, victimization **Emancipatory femininity:** (Being better than men- appropriation of masculine meanings and detachment those from men)
Gendered meanings related to the self-construction as 'woman entrepreneur'	'Respect'	'Self-determination'