Through her eyes: How daughter successors perceive their fathers in shaping their entrepreneurial identity

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how daughter successors perceive that their entrepreneurial identities have been influenced by their fathers. Drawing on narrative identity and identity work theories and adopting an inductive and interpretive approach, we analysed interviews with 21 daughters. The findings reveal that their perceptions of their fathers can influence their entrepreneurial identities in multiple ways, concerning both why daughters become family business successors and how their entrepreneurial identities are shaped. To examine this variety of experiences, this study proposes a typology of four processes through which daughters' entrepreneurial identities were formed (submission, self-empowerment, enhancement, and idealisation) and how they perceive their fathers' role (commander, patriarch, mentor, and myth) in influencing these processes. This study contributes to the family business and entrepreneurial identity fields of research by showing that daughters' perceptions of the role they ascribe to their fathers can be powerful mental representations that exert a great influence on their entrepreneurial identity.

1. Introduction

Diversity is in the spotlight of many business and management scholars (Yadav & Lenka, 2020). In family business studies, particular attention has been devoted to gender diversity, given the increasing number of women involved in family business governance and management (Campopiano et al., 2017; Chadwick & Dawson, 2018). Studies on this topic have shown that family and business are far from being gender-neutral (Nelson & Constantinidis, 2017), especially succession is highly gendered (Byrne et al., 2019) and preference in favour of male heirs is likely to have a major influence in the selection of the successor (Ahrens et al., 2015; Akhmedova et al., 2020; Overbeke et al., 2013).

Although the landscape is changing, male-driven family businesses still prevail (Family Business Index, 2023) and daughters who aspire to take over family business leadership have most likely to relate to their fathers. Previous studies have shown that fathers are the 'gatekeepers to succession' (Overbeke et al., 2013: 204), and often consider their daughters as ill-equipped to lead the family business (Ahrens, 2020). Fathers also play a crucial role in influencing their daughters' education

and career choices (Jacobs et al., 2006; Li & Kerpelman, 2007; Schröder et al., 2011), decision to join the family business and adopt the leadership role (Barrett & Moores, 2009; Dumas, 1992; Smythe & Sardeshmukh, 2013). For this reason, several scholars have explored how fathers' beliefs and expectations can foster or hinder their daughters' ability to become successors (Byrne et al., 2019). By contrast, whether and how daughter successors who have already taken the helm in family business feel influenced by their predecessor fathers in expressing their entrepreneurial identity is still unclear.

Entrepreneurial identity refers to the individual set of meanings and behaviours that define an individual acting in an entrepreneurial role (Hoang & Gimeno, 2010; Murnieks et al., 2014; Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). The importance of fathers' influence on daughters' entrepreneurial identity has emerged in some studies (Bjursell & Melin, 2011; Hytti et al., 2017; McAdam et al., 2021; Mussolino et al., 2019). However, the daughters' perspective in the post-succession phase has not been widely investigated and little is known about how they perceive their fathers' role in the development of their entrepreneurial identity. Gaining more insight into how daughters' entrepreneurial identities

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develop is essential as increasing numbers of women are taking the lead in family businesses (Campopiano et al., 2017). Therefore, identifying factors that influence daughters' entrepreneurial identity is important because it is closely linked to entrepreneurial behaviour, which in turn affects both business performance and personal fulfilment (Akhmedova et al., 2020).

This study aims to enrich the knowledge of daughters' entrepreneurial identity by answering the following research questions: How do daughter successors perceive the role of their fathers in the formation and development of their entrepreneurial identity? Do they feel free to express their entrepreneurial identity or do they feel influenced by their fathers?

To answer these questions, this study draws on narrative identity theory (Ricoeur, 1984) and identity work theory (Snow & Anderson, 1987) to analyse the interview responses of daughters who have succeeded their fathers in their family businesses. These theoretical models allow the investigation of how daughter successors' entrepreneurial identities were shaped and how they perceive the role played by their fathers in this process. In particular, the analysis of the daughters' narratives provides insight into the importance they attach to their fathers in relation to their entrepreneurial identity, whereas identity work theory helps understand how they shaped their entrepreneurial identities and the role they assigned to their fathers in this process.

The analysis reveals that how daughters perceive their fathers can have a compelling influence on the formation of their entrepreneurial identities. These perceptions prove to be powerful mental representations (Krueger, 2003) of the role daughters attribute to their fathers. They generate subjective interpretations (Arenius & Minniti, 2005) but determine a strong real influence, affecting both reasons behind daughters' decisions to take over the family business and how their entrepreneurial identities are shaped and expressed. The research output is a typology of four identity work processes and fathers' roles based on daughters' perceptions.

The findings offer the following four contributions to the academic debate. First, this study responds to the call (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021) for further analysis of the role of others (Watson, 2008) in the formation of entrepreneurial identity. Prior scholars have underlined the relevance of the relationships fathers-daughters in family business (Byrne et al., 2019; Mussolino et al., 2019; Nielsen, 2006; Overbeke et al., 2015; Zellweger et al., 2011). This study adds further knowledge to this line of research by showing that daughters' mental representations of their fathers, that is, how they felt and experienced their fathers' role and their relationship with them, can play a crucial role in shaping their entrepreneurial identity.

Second, this study provides meaningful insights into the shaping of entrepreneurial identity. In particular, scholars such as Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2021) and Welter (2011) note that contexts that are closer to the entrepreneur, such as families, have been poorly explored in favour of analyses addressing wider contexts, such as countries or sectors. This study contributes to enriching this field of research in family firms context (Bettinelli et al., 2022) by examining complex interpersonal relationships within the family—such as the father-daughter relationship—that can have not only positive but also negative implications for daughters' entrepreneurial identity.

Third, previous studies have mainly investigated how daughters form their identities as successors during the selection phase and/or during succession (Gherardi & Perrotta, 2016; Hytti et al., 2017; Xian et al., 2021) and the post-succession phase remains largely unexplored (Mussolino et al., 2019). This study enriches our knowledge on this topic by exploring in depth how a daughter successor's entrepreneurial identity is shaped and evolves.

Finally, this study's results contribute to an understanding of factors that may influence family firms' gender diversity. Recent attempt to promote gender diversity in family businesses has emphasised paying more attention to the conditions and contextual factors that allow women to express their entrepreneurial identity freely and fully (Byrne et al., 2019; Bjursell & Melin, 2011; Gherardi & Perrotta, 2016; Hytti et al., 2017; McAdam et al., 2021; Xian et al., 2021). This study is in line with this approach and investigates the conditions under which daughters leading family businesses can enhance their entrepreneurial identity, thus contributing to creating more gender diversity.

The next section introduces the study's theoretical background and framework. Section three covers the research design, methodological approach, and criteria adopted for case selection, data collection, and data analysis. Section four illustrates how daughters' entrepreneurial identities are formed, along with the role of their fathers. The results are summarised in four propositions and a 2 × 2 matrix presents the research output. Finally, section five discusses the findings and presents the theoretical and practical contributions of our study, its limitations, and avenues for future research.

2. Theoretical framework and background

2.1. Entrepreneurial identity: narrative identity theory and identity work theory

The concept of entrepreneurial identity is crucial to understanding entrepreneurship (Mmbaga et al., 2020; Navis & Glynn, 2011). Strongly related to the flourishing interdisciplinary field of studies about identity, research revolves around two different conceptualisations of entrepreneurial identity: as 'property' or 'process' (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021: 3).

Studies that conceptualise entrepreneurial identity as an individual's 'property', refer to a relatively stable and distinctive set of attributes that an entrepreneur can possess, acquire, enhance, or lose. These studies are mainly grounded in positivism (Leitch & Harrison, 2016) and refer primarily to identity theory (Stryker, 1968; 1987), social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974; 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and role identity theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Identity theory considers the self as a multifaceted construct composed of the meanings that people attach to their multiple roles in societies (Stryker & Burke, 2000), social identity theory focuses on intergroup relations and postulates that when people perceive themselves as belonging to a group, they define themselves, and allow others to define them, based on the group's characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 2010). Role identity theory, finally, argues that everyone has multiple social roles and that each role is associated with multiple expectations that others have of them in that role (McCall & Simmons, 1978).

Studies that conceptualise entrepreneurial identity as 'process' conceive it as dynamic and fluid and are mainly located in social constructivism (Leitch & Harrison, 2016). In this perspective entrepreneurial identity is 'a socially negotiated, ongoing accomplishment' (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021: 3): it is not something one 'is' or 'has' that is relatively stable over time, but rather a social construct one creates through interactions with others and through an active negotiation between oneself and the social contexts in which one acts (Watson, 2008; Hytti et al., 2017; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Following this perspective, entrepreneurial identity draws mainly on narrative identity theory (Ricoeur, 1984) and identity work theory (Snow & Anderson, 1987). Narrative identity theory suggests that people come to know and give meaning to themselves through telling their stories (Ricoeur, 1984). Consistently, personal identity—including entrepreneurial identity—follows the structure of a narrative that represents the means through which an identity is expressed and takes shape (Polkinghorne, 1991). From this perspective, an identity is the product of, and realised in, narrative accounts of individuals' past, present, and future (Hytti, 2005: 598). Therefore, entrepreneurial identity does not result from plans and deeds, but from the complex interweaving of events, circumstances, and interactions with others over time. Narratives configure and reconfigure entrepreneurial identity over time as a result of interactions with others (Hamilton, 2014). Identity work theory, finally, focuses on the dynamism and fluidity of shaping personal

identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Petriglieri & Peshkam, 2022) and refers to a wide range of activities that people engage in to create and re-create their own identities consistent with their self-concept (Snow & Anderson, 1987). People not only form, but also repair, maintain, strengthen, and revise their identities to meet the demands of various social roles (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This is true especially when they encounter events or circumstances that threaten who they are (Petriglieri, 2011) or when they interact and work with someone influential (Bruni et al., 2004). According to identity work theory, entrepreneurial identity is 'produced through dialogues with clients, suppliers, employees, and family in a processual fashion' (Essers & Benschop, 2007: 52) and entrepreneurs identify 'who they are' through self-related accounts (Navis & Glynn, 2011: 479).

Rooted in this range of theoretical perspectives, studies on entrepreneurial identity have gained momentum over the last decade. The entrepreneurial identity concept has emerged as an 'umbrella construct' that 'has opened avenues for diverse and rich theorising' using different approaches and several levels of analysis such as individual, venture, or sociocultural (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021: 2).

This research is framed under this 'umbrella construct' and can be positioned among studies that focus on the individual level and consider entrepreneurial identity as a process of identity formation over time. Accordingly, the narrative identity theory and identity work theory are used here to explore the experience of daughter successors. In both these theoretical approaches, the role of other individuals is crucial in shaping entrepreneurial identity (Johansson, 2004; Nielsen & Gartner, 2017).

2.2. Daughters' entrepreneurial identity as family business successors: the role of fathers

Several studies on family business have investigated different aspects related to daughters' identity as successors (Bettinelli et al., 2022). Specifically, some authors have analysed how daughters form their identity as entrepreneurs during succession (Bjursell & Melin, 2011; Hytti et al., 2017) or once they have taken over the family business (Fernandes & Mota-Ribeiro, 2017). These studies have highlighted that daughters, as family business leaders, need to form an entrepreneurial identity that is legitimate to them and confirmed by others. Although many studies have pointed out the relevance of interactions with others in shaping such identity, not many have focused on the role of the father.

Recent studies by McAdam et al. (2021) and Mussolino et al. (2019) are initiatives in this direction. McAdam et al. (2021) explored the role of the father-daughter relationship in building a legitimate entrepreneurial identity during succession. Mussolino et al. (2019) focused on the post-succession phase to analyse how daughter successors describe their self-positioning in male-dominated family businesses in terms of closeness to or distance from the father's leadership style. Nonetheless, how daughters perceive their fathers' influence on their entrepreneurial identity after they have taken over the family business needs further exploration. Perceptions are a cognitive process that act as a lens through which individuals apprehend, represent, and interpret reality around them (Krueger, 2003). Perceptions are subjective, that is, they may differ among individuals and do not necessarily correspond to reality (Arenius & Minniti, 2005). However, they are at least as important as reality because they can have a great influence on an individual's behaviour. In this vein, daughter successors' perceptions of their fathers could be essential in shaping their entrepreneurial identity. Fathers are crucial influencers in their daughters' lives, affecting their self-esteem, self-image, and self-confidence (Nielsen, 2006). Hence, it is pertinent to study how their perception of their fathers can influence daughters' entrepreneurial identity as family business leaders. Fathers are not the only subjects who can influence daughters' entrepreneurial identities and, remaining within the family context, mothers can also have a relevant role (Cesaroni et al., 2021; Cosson & Gilding, 2021). However, when fathers are predecessors in family firms (as in most cases), they can be the main subjects with whom daughters relate and confront

themselves in relation to being entrepreneurs and successors.

In the wake of the conceptualisation proposed by Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2021), this study focuses on the peculiar 'whys' and 'hows' that influence daughter successors' entrepreneurial identity. These refer to the wide range of antecedents (i.e. motivations, events, circumstances, interactions with others, etc.) that influence entrepreneurial identity in specific 'wheres' (namely, contexts in which the entrepreneurial identity is formed by entrepreneurs and/or observed by scholars) (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). The peculiar context of family businesses is the 'where' of this study. Concerning the 'whys', that is, factors that shape an individual's decision to become an entrepreneur, fathers can serve as primary triggers of daughters' entrepreneurial identity by being possible role models (Zellweger et al., 2011), expressing their expectations (Overbeke et al., 2015), enforcing gender beliefs (Byrne et al., 2019; Overbeke et al., 2013), encouraging daughters to join the family businesses (Cesaroni & Sentuti, 2018), and gendering the formation of the successor role (Byrne et al., 2019). Moreover, especially when there are no other aspiring successors, fathers can push daughters to take on the successor role, leveraging on their moral obligation and normative commitment (Constantinidis & Nelson, 2017; Dawson et al., 2015; Sharma & Irving, 2005). However, this influence could not only be exerted directly by fathers in explicitly shaping daughters' decisions to take over the family business but also indirectly, in how daughters perceive their fathers as role models, as well as their expectations and beliefs about themselves.

People's perceptions about what others expect from them greatly influence their decisions, behaviours, and judgements (Ridgeway, 2009; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), and consequently their personal identity. Personal identity is determined by appraisals made by oneself and by others, similar to a mirror in which each person sees themself in the judgments of others (Strauss, 1959).

In this line of thought, this study asks how, in their role as family business leaders, daughters' entrepreneurial identity has been—to a greater or lesser extent, positively or negatively, consciously or unconsciously—influenced by their perception of their fathers. Specifically, through the narrative perspective, this study investigates how daughters perceive that their entrepreneurial identities were influenced by their fathers and, using the identity work theory, analyses the process through which daughter successors formed their entrepreneurial identity and the role they assigned to their fathers in this process.

3. Methodology

3.1. Method

This study's research questions and theoretical framework led to the adoption of an inductive and interpretive approach that is appropriate for theory building (Nordqvist et al., 2009) and has been widely used by family business scholars (e.g. Kandade et al., 2021). We combined the narrative and case study approaches (Hytti et al., 2017), which are considered particularly appropriate to examine women entrepreneurs' stories (Diaz-Garcia & Welter, 2013), paying attention to the meaning they give to their experiences in the context in which they live and act (Henry et al., 2016).

Specifically, narratives are essential to analyse entrepreneurial identity in line with the narrative identity theory and identity work theory. They are considered the 'cognitive process that gives meaning to temporal events by identifying them as part of a plot' (Polkinghorne, 1991: 136), and can include other individuals, who are considered 'indispensable partners' and part of one's identity (Polkinghorne, 1991: 146). Narratives are the means through which personal identity—entrepreneurial identity included—is expressed and takes shape (Hamilton, 2014). They are considered an effective way to conceptualise the self and self-perception (Polkinghorne, 1991). Moreover, narrative-based approaches to family business studies are growing in popularity (De Massis & Kammerlander, 2020) and offer new insights

into family firms (Dawson & Hjorth, 2012; Floris et al., 2020). They are specifically applied to examine how stories may influence family business succession (Dalpiaz et al., 2014), how they can be used to build family business identity (Parada & Dawson, 2017), and how daughters form their identities as successors (Bjursell & Melin, 2011; Hytti et al., 2017; McAdam et al., 2021; Mussolino et al., 2019). Combining narrative and case study is recommended to contextualise the investigation by acquiring information about the family and business in which the daughters' experiences took place and developed (Hytti et al., 2017).

3.2. Case selection and data collection

Among the purposeful sampling strategies suggested by Patton (1990: 169), criterion sampling was employed to select 'information-rich cases for study in depth'. The logic of this strategy is to investigate cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance consistent with the research purpose. As this study aimed to analyse the influence of fathers on daughters' entrepreneurial identity once succession was complete, the inclusion criterion was daughter successors of family firms who had been at the helm for at least five years.

Through the authors' personal networks, contacts from previous studies, and local newspapers, a number of daughter successors of small and medium-sized Italian family businesses were selected for the study. The focus was on small and medium-sized family firms because they represent the majority of Italian firms (ISTAT, 2021) and are prominent globally (Zellweger, 2017). We used Recommendation 2003/361/EC to define small and medium-sized enterprises. Selected daughter successors were contacted by email and phone, and the research interest was outlined for their information. Next, daughters willing to share their thoughts and experiences as family business successors were shortlisted. Our purposeful sampling resulted in 21 narratives, which were heterogeneous in terms of daughters and business' characteristics (Table 1).

There are no guidelines for determining the specific number of cases

to collect (Eisenhardt, 2021). Moreover, in the narrative approach, the number of units of analysis to be included in the sample is considered 'less important than the meaning' of each case (Floris et al., 2020: 242). In light of this, data collection and data analysis are necessarily simultaneous processes (Bowen, 2008) because the sample can be deemed adequate only when 'sufficient data to account for all aspects of the phenomenon have been obtained' (Morse et al., 2002: 12). Sampling therefore took place in sequential steps. The research began with the analysis of four cases, which made it possible to identify some initial concepts and themes in the data. Subsequently, four cases were added, which allowed for a better definition of the themes that emerged and possible relationships among them. However, in the process of expanding and refining the sample, the need to deepen certain themes and clarify some relationships arose. The collection of a further eight cases allowed us to refine the analysis, 'flesh out' identified themes (Bowen, 2008: 147), determine that no themes were contradicted by the empirical evidence, and outline patterns among themes. Thus, a satisfactory level of 'theoretical saturation' (Eisenhardt, 1989)—the point at which no new hunches are gained—was reached at around the 16th interview. No new themes emerged, those already identified were thoroughly explored and no issues arose in them. Five other successor daughters were interviewed in the interest of further data collection and theoretical saturation was confirmed. The new narratives brought minimal incremental learning because only phenomena recorded in prior interviews were observed.

All interviews ranged from one to two hours and were recorded by the authors. The respondents were invited to introduce themselves and talk freely about themselves, their family firm, and their relationship with their father. Five main areas were covered in the interviews: a) an overview of the family and business, b) the reasons and circumstances that led to their involvement in the family business, c) their succession experience, d) their interactions with their fathers during the succession process, and e) their current role and experience as head of the family

Table 1
Daughters' and firms' profiles.

ID	Name	Age	Interviewees' role in the FB	Brothers/Sisters	Brothers/Sisters' role in the FB	Firm size	Generation in control	Industry
D1	Claudia	56	CEO	An older sister and an older brother	Minor roles	Medium	2nd	Manufacturing
D2	Sara	41	CEO and Sales manager	Two younger sisters	Marketing manager/ Production manager	Medium	2nd	Footwear
D3	Vera	37	CEO and Marketing manager	An older sister and a younger sister	Sales manager/Fashion designer	Medium	2nd	Clothing
D4	Giulia	49	CEO	A younger sister	HR manager	Small	2nd	Engineering
D5	Marianna	35	CEO	No brother or sister	—	Small	2nd	Footwear
D6	Lucrezia	42	Co-CEO and Marketing manager	A younger brother	Co-CEO and Production manager	Small	2nd	Production of religious items
D7	Monica	40	CEO	A younger sister	Minor roles	Medium	2nd	Office furniture
D8	Romana	38	Co-CEO	A younger brother	Co-CEO	Small	2nd	Furniture
D9	Chiara	36	Chair	One sister	No roles	Medium	2nd	Building sector
D10	Francesca	38	CEO	An older sister	Marketing manager	Small	2nd	Mechanical industry
D11	Elisa	67	CEO	A younger sister	Production manager	Medium	4th	Pharmaceutics
D12	Milena	56	CEO	An older sister	Co-owner	Small	3rd	Stone extraction and processing
D13	Rebecca	54	Co-CEO	A younger brother	Co-CEO and Production manager	Small	2nd	Food Industry
D14	Bianca	50	CEO	One older brother and a younger brother and younger sister	Minor roles	Small	2nd	Hospitality industry
D15	Lucia	42	Co-CEO and Marketing manager	A younger sister	Co-CEO	Small	2nd	Mechanical industry
D16	Federica	59	CEO	A younger sister	Co-owner without roles	Small	3rd	Winery
D17	Laura	53	CEO	Two older sisters	Co-owners without roles	Small	5th	Food industry
D18	Maria	41	CEO	A younger brother	CEO of another company in the family business	Small	2nd	Mechanical industry
D19	Flora	65	CEO	No brother or sister	—	Small	2nd	Accounting and Consulting firm
D20	Clara	63	Co-CEO	4 younger sisters and one brother	Only the brother is Co-CEO	Small	3rd	Catering
D21	Angela	46	Co-CEO	2 younger brothers	The oldest brother is co-CEO	Small	3rd	Winery

business. The respondents were encouraged to express their thoughts as much as possible without suggestions from the interviewers.

For a better understanding of the context of the narratives, secondary data were collected from business documents, websites, newspaper articles, social networks, and online news (Miles et al., 2014). Where possible, field notes were gathered to record interviewees' behaviours and interview contexts. In some cases, family members were interviewed (including two fathers, two mothers, three siblings and two non-family members for a total of nine interviews) to gain more information about the family and business context.

The research priority was to deeply analyse the daughters' perspectives and specifically understand how their perception of their fathers influenced their entrepreneurial identity as family business leaders. In this study, it was not important to know whether this perception truly corresponded to the fathers' 'true' behaviour or attitude, nor the father's perspective on his daughter's entrepreneurial identity or his actual role in co-creation her entrepreneurial identity. Consequently, interviews with the fathers were only carried out occasionally and were only used to collect more data about the family and business context. The same applied to the other secondary interviews with mothers, siblings, or other key figures within the family and the company.

3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted by adopting an inductive and interpretative approach and combining a narrative (Hytti et al., 2017) and case study analysis (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Miles et al., 2014). A four-step process was applied. First, all the interviews were transcribed verbatim and carefully read individually by authors. Second, a description of each case was created to combine and triangulate data from different sources (Hytti et al., 2017; McAdam et al., 2021). Primary and secondary data were combined to describe the daughters' experiences and the family and business contexts in which they took place. Next, the material was read independently to gain familiarity with the cases and then they were jointly analysed. Third, in line with the research aim, the study focused only on primary data (daughters' interviews) and developed a second round of reading. In each narrative, relevant excerpts and the most meaningful textual phrases were selected and highlighted to identify key points, events, and decisions. Particular attention was paid to all phrases concerning daughters' self-descriptions, descriptions of their fathers as well as their interactions with them, and how they spoke about their fathers. Finally, the cases were compared to identify differences and similarities in the daughters' narratives.

Throughout the analysis, the interviews were hand-coded following the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013) and iteratively switched between data, extant theory, and prior research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kammerlander et al., 2015). To ensure that the coding was rigorous and robust, two authors coded each narrative independently to compare with a third author's support several times. In cases of coder disagreement, additional information (e.g. collected secondary data) was used and possible solutions were discussed among the authors (Gioia et al., 2013) to determine the final codes. Specifically, according to literature on entrepreneurial identity (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021), the narratives were coded based on how daughters perceived the role played by their fathers— in relation to: a) reasons that led them to succeed their fathers at the helm of family businesses (i.e. why daughters' entrepreneurial identity manifests itself); and b) daughters' entrepreneurial identity (i.e. how daughters formed their entrepreneurial identity). The initial concepts in the raw data were grouped into 'first order concepts' described using the interviewees' language or simple descriptive phrases. At this stage, data analysis of the reasons focused on how daughters perceived their fathers' role in influencing their education, motivation, ambitions, and consequently, their career choices. Data analysis of daughters' entrepreneurial identity focused on their descriptions of themselves as

family business leaders with regard to their personality traits, competence, skills, and their perception of their fathers as parents and predecessors. Next, possible relationships between these descriptive concepts were examined and higher-order categories labelled 'second-order themes' were identified. The codes about reasons were grouped under two themes: 'pressure', to include codes depicting fathers perceived as those who forced their daughters to take on the leadership of the family business; and 'attraction', to group codes related to fathers perceived as those who encouraged their daughters to join the family business or simply let their daughters follow their interest towards the family business. Next, the 'first order concepts' concerning daughters' entrepreneurial identity expressed in relation to their fathers were aggregated in two 'second-order themes': 'fathers as a benchmark', which labels parents who played a key role in shaping their daughters' entrepreneurial identities because they were perceived as binding role models, and 'non-binding fathers', referring to parents perceived as those who did not influence their daughters, who felt free to express their own entrepreneurial identity. Finally, the first pair of 'second-order themes' was combined with the second pair of 'second-order themes' in four 'aggregate dimensions' to describe processes by which daughters formed and expressed their entrepreneurial identity in relation to their how they perceived their fathers: submission, idealisation, self-empowerment, enhancement (Fig. 1).

Table 2 shows the representative excerpts extracted from the 21 interviews. They provide an example of the raw data grouped in 'first order concepts' and then coded in 'second-order themes.' Thus, the interested reader can deepen the empirical evidence for the latter, 'listen' to the voices of all respondents, and compare similar patterns. Finally, to further support our findings, a brief description of the cases is offered in the Online Appendix.

In the final step, a thorough analysis of the four processes of formation of daughters' entrepreneurial identity was conducted to identify the role daughters assigned to their fathers in each process. This led to an empirically formulated typology of how fathers influenced the daughters' entrepreneurial identity, as felt and experienced by daughter successors.

To explain the four processes, the next section presents the four most emblematic cases in detail and uses the most meaningful 'power quotes' (Pratt, 2008: 501) from interviews to gain a vivid understanding of the daughter successors' experiences and how they perceive their fathers' role. This approach allowed the analysis of daughters' identity work in greater depth and the role that they assigned to their fathers in shaping their entrepreneurial identities as family business leaders in the post-succession phase. The outcomes are summarised in four propositions to theorise emerging insights.

4. Daughter successors' narratives and identity work: a typology of processes and fathers

4.1. The submission process and the commander father

4.1.1. 'I became what he wanted me to be' [D1, Claudia]

When she was young, Claudia wanted to study archaeology, but her father persuaded her to study business and economics: '*He would say: "Where are you going?" I was very, very influenced by my father'*. After graduating, she aspired to follow a completely different career, but once again, she resigned herself to the will of her father— '*At that point, I desired to become a professional accountant or lawyer but I didn't because my father dragged me by my ear. Then we had a big problem with the Italian Tax Police. and my father forced me: 'You have to come here! You have to come here!' And that's when my 'famous' temper came out. There were very important decisions to be made, and my father was not in good health, and he demanded that I manage the business'*. Then, she became the leader of their family business. Her father knew she had a strong character, and he thought she was most capable of leading the company, even though she was the only woman in their family's second generation: '*Everyone*
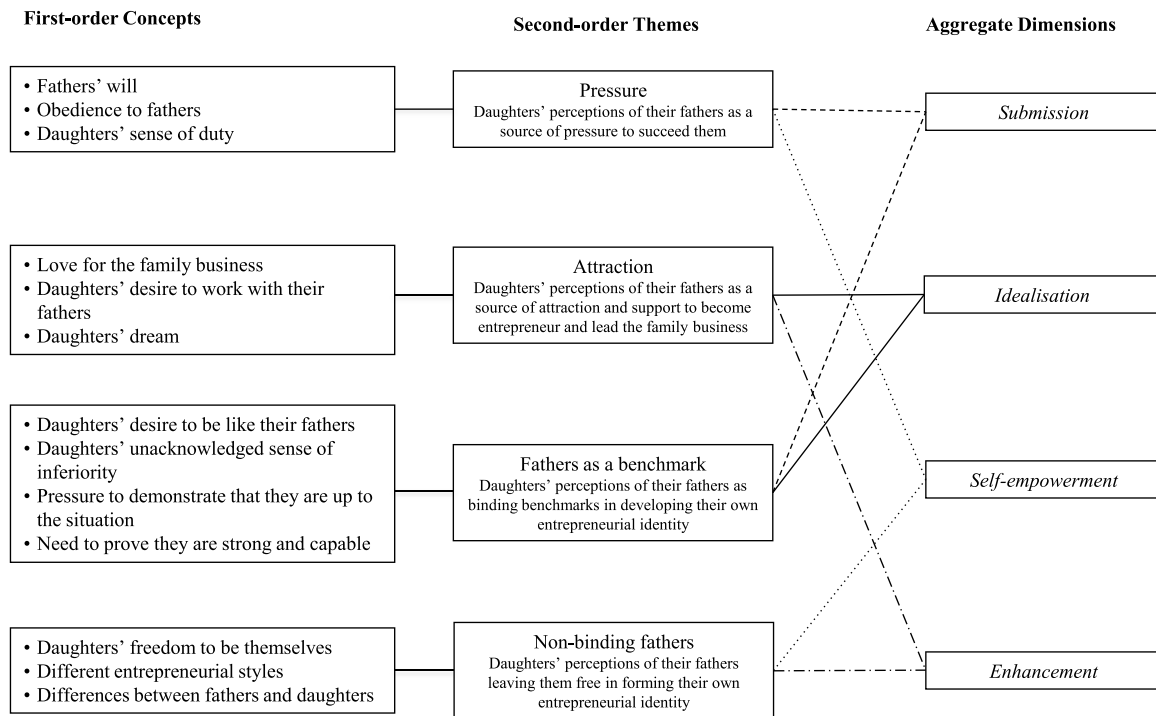
Fig. 1. Data structure.

wanted to be the CEO, but no one was able to do it'. Once at the helm of the company, she fully devoted herself to the job: '*I did it with the spirit of defending my family and the company'*. It required a lot of willpower, resolution, self-discipline, and forced her to give up some important things: '*I tried not to shake things up with my family or the company, but I sacrificed a lot, especially with my children and husband. Of course, my children are still suffering from this situation, but what should I do? This is my life'*.

There was anger and regret in Claudia's words because she never felt free. '*I have always lived with my father. I was his shadow. I was very, very conditioned by him and the upbringing I received'*. She oriented her behaviour towards her father's expectations and over time she realised that this has also led her to give up her feminine side to adhere to the masculine idea of an entrepreneur: '*I am a woman, but they [employees] speak to me as if I were a man'*. She sadly admits: '*Then I pay the consequences. … I know my body will pay for it'*. Till now, she feels trapped. '*I could change. but my change would also involve the change of so many other people, not just my own. Right now there's no one in my family who can do what I do, because it's so heavy. It takes character. It's not preparation or ability, it's character. Because I'm suffering things that are unimaginable. I'm suffering them, and it takes character. I'm going to pay for it, on a physical level I'm going to pay for it. So how I became what I became. it was eventually inevitable'*.

In conclusion, Claudia's father strongly influenced her entrepreneurial identity. He forced her to give up her professional ambitions to take over their family business; she also felt forced to strengthen her character, assume responsibilities beyond her capabilities, and fulfil her father's expectations. Even after becoming the family business leader, Claudia continued to feel influenced by her father. Her perceptions of her father's expectations have shaped her entrepreneurial identity. She committed to adhering to the masculine model of an entrepreneur that her father expected from her. She knew that her father appreciated and encouraged her strong character, which in turn became a cage, where she has remained since. All her efforts were directed towards her father's will to be strong, competent, capable, and combative, like a man. Claudia formed her entrepreneurial identity through *a submission process towards a commander father* that influenced both her reasons for

succeeding him at the helm of her family business and how she expressed her entrepreneurial role as successor over time.

On this basis, the following proposition is advanced:

Proposition 1. When a daughter perceives her father as a *commander* (i.e. as a source of pressure to succeed him and a binding benchmark), her entrepreneurial identity is formed through a process of *submission*.

4.2. The self-empowerment process and the patriarch father

4.2.1. 'We have very different entrepreneurial styles' [D2, Sara]

When Sara was young, her father insisted that she study foreign languages. He established the company in the 1970 s and realised that only speaking Italian was a major handicap, which limited the company's growth opportunities. So, he pushed his daughter to study abroad and learn many languages, and she followed his directions. Afterwards, Sara got a degree in business and economics, which was not what she aimed to study, but even then, she was unable to escape her father's insistence. '*I've felt a lot of pressure from my father. When I was deciding on what to study at university, I was much more fond of culture. I'd have chosen a different subject, a totally different subject, indeed—foreign languages or literature. Instead, I remember him saying: Okay, you can still read your novels, but you will study economics now!'*.

Sara perceived that her father was more concerned about the continuity of the family business than about his daughter's ambitions and desires. '*He told me that he needs me in the company…perhaps it was the moment when I felt more forced to join the business… I felt the weight of being waited on here very much, honestly.*' She has been strongly oriented towards the leadership of the family business, even to the detriment of her real goals. In the beginning, she lacked the passion that comes from pursuing a dream: '*I was caught up in it all. It's all right now, but I wasn't keen on it at first'*.

Over the years, Sara has shaped her own entrepreneurial identity, identifying progressively more with the role of family business leader, and conducting business with outstanding commitment, dedication, and satisfaction: '*Currently, I'm happy doing my job, I feel it's mine now. But if I really had the choice, I would certainly have chosen a more academic path. But then, over time, I've come to like my job here, my role today suits me just

Table 2

Representative excerpts and second-order themes.

Representative excerpts	Second-order themes
Reasons that led daughters to become entrepreneurs at the helm of family businesses (i.e. why daughters' entrepreneurial identities manifest themselves)	
D1: 'When I was young, I wanted to study archaeology [.] But my dad would say: "Where are you going?" I was very, very influenced by my father. '	**Pressure**
D2: 'I've felt a lot of pressure from my father.'	
D8: '[.] my father needed someone to take care of the accounting. So, he said: "Either you join the company, or I will get someone else" […] I responded to a request. Maybe I thought it was my duty, but it wasn't even a duty; it was more of a logical consequence. It had to be done.'	
D8: 'I […] felt obliged to continue what my father had started. If the succession had only been in my brother's favour, I would have been relieved and, above all, now I would have less responsibility!'	
D8: 'When I say that my choice was involuntary, that doesn't mean that I don't like my job. But sometimes there are so many things, responsibilities, duties and situations that make you feel like a "little fish in a net". Anyway, the "duty" to continue what my father started was too strong to ignore.'	
D11: 'I graduated at 23 years old and then I joined the company. Working in the family business was the norm then. Normal people didn't ask themselves whether they should or not […]. I was not a troublemaker.'	
D13: 'Many times I thought: "I could do other things"; however, I decided to continue on the original path I had started [working in the family business]… with such a strong father, from a character and energetic point of view, spaces that could be created were truly minimal.'	
D14: 'I would have studied archaeology. maybe if I had stuck it out, he [her father] would have made me do it, but he would have blamed me a lot… In the end, I stayed here. […] For a year, I tried to say: "I'm looking for a job elsewhere", but the concept was "If you want to work, you have to work here".'	
D14: 'I became an entrepreneur because my father forced me to [.] Dad [.] didn't ask us, he practically forced us. […] I found myself there without knowing whether I wanted it or not.'	
D15: 'I started when I was 14 years old and I was an apprentice at the drilling machine and then an apprentice at the milling machine, and so on. Let's say, the hardest apprenticeship […] I joined the company because the guy responsible for purchasing became seriously ill and clearly, what better person for that role of extreme delicacy, if not the owner's daughter?'	
D16: 'I didn't always know that wine would be my destiny [.] for years, I had been thinking about a career in the world of art. However, my father had a dream to produce high-quality wine and build a modern and sustainable winery. That dream overwhelmed and trapped me.'	
D17: 'I joined the company out of respect for my grandparents. This fatigue of all previous generations [.] I wanted to make sense of my predecessors' toil.'	
D19: 'Since I was born, my father has always thought that even though I was a woman, I would become an accountant, and he strongly wanted it. He moulded me. […] I had accepted.subliminally… this message.'	
D20: 'I wanted to study medicine but I thought it would not be compatible with working in the company. [.] In a small company, the idea is that "you have to help," as you would help the family. it is a moral duty.'	
D3: 'I've always loved this company [.] Working here has always been my dream.'	**Attraction**
D4: 'Since I was very young, my desire was "to work with Dad." And I made all my choices based on the idea of working for our family firm.'	
D5: 'The profound motivation that pushed me to join the family business was growing up in this firm. I have been here ever since I was a child. [.] I found this job as a way to exploit my passion for travelling; it allows me to travel the	

Table 2 (*continued*)

Representative excerpts	Second-order themes
world, meet a lot of people and open my mind to different worlds.'	
D5: 'There were never any impositions from my father […] I joined the family firm naturally, without being forced. Conversely, many times my father told me: "Think carefully about it!" Thus, it was a natural choice. It happened slowly and easily.'	
D6: 'I never thought of a future other than the one I had in front of me since I was a child. I was going to work for our company. It was what I wanted.'	
D7: 'At the age of six, I already knew that I wanted a family, and I wanted to be an entrepreneur. I already wanted that! So, what did I do? I committed myself to the job with grit and great determination. […] My goal has only ever been to be in charge of this company and develop it.'	
D9: 'I chose to study Business Administration and specialise in Marketing, which interested me a lot [.] My father gave me a lot of space. He told me: "Come here and help me renovate everything since you have studied how to do this; I have faith in you. You can do it well". As a result, I started there.'	
D10: 'I decided to enrol in management engineering. I examined the study plan with my older sister and my father and I found a correspondence with what I wanted to do when I grew up […] and I freely decided to work for the family business.'	
D12: 'My father was intelligent; he allowed me to be free, and he never obliged me to take care of the family business. [.] For me, it is an honour to carry on the family's entrepreneurial dream, and it is in my blood.'	
D18: 'My decision to join the company came naturally. The business was working well. We could only improve it and keep moving forward. It would have been a shame if I had chosen something else. It would be a wasted opportunity.'	
D21: 'My father never pushed me to go back to work in Sicily or to work for him. He always allowed us to do what we wanted with our lives… I was thunderstruck by the world of wine.'	
Daughters' entrepreneurial identities expressed in relation to their fathers (i.e. how daughters' entrepreneurial identities manifest themselves)	
D1: 'I was very, very conditioned by him [my father] and the upbringing I received.'	**Father as a benchmark**
D4: 'I would like to be like my father.' [.] 'I don't feel like a true entrepreneur.'	
D6: 'I have learned a lot from my father; I have always believed in him as an entrepreneur. Sometimes I compare myself to him, his characteristics to mine, his skills to mine. and I have to admit that I don't have his optimism or courage to take risks.'	
D6: 'My brother and I are both CEOs; we have the same share of ownership, and we make the most important decisions together, but, in my opinion, he is the real successor. He has the right character and the right characteristics; he's like my father […] I don't feel like an entrepreneur in the true sense of the word. I'm a bit old-fashioned in that respect. My brother is the man, the male member of the family.'	
D9: 'In my opinion, it is not true that men and women as entrepreneurs can do the same things [.] If I had wanted to carry on the company [as CEO] I would have had to completely sacrifice my life, my family […], so in agreement with my father I preferred to keep control at the corporate level [as Chair] and let managers run the company.'	
D13: 'Growing up and having such a strong entrepreneurial figure next to you is very hard, and it is very challenging. If you overcome it and you can interact with these strong figures; it is a great school.'	
D13: 'I worked with my father in a man's world for many years; it was nice, but it was also very tiring. And I think that precisely because of this type of situation, over time, I have also had to assume a behaviour that was a little more masculine than I would have assumed naturally [.] I have always tried to conform. In the professional sphere, I have a little. how can I say. toned down my more feminine side. [.] I think it was an unconscious choice on my part. […].'	

Table 2 (*continued*)

Representative excerpts	Second-order themes
D17: 'The first person to criticise me was my father. When I was 40 he treated me like a 15-year-old [.] Now, he is 90 years old, and he calls me 20 times a day. I am "his eye on the world"; he still gives me instructions.'	
D20: 'My father had a very strong personality and as his successor, I was very influenced by him because, in my opinion, he was a successful entrepreneur. However, with his family members, he was manipulative. They didn't have the freedom to talk to each other. There was no dialogue, no confrontation, no free discussion… Against me, he exercised moral blackmail.'	
D2: 'My father and I have two very different ways of being entrepreneurs, absolutely different.'	Non-binding father
D2: 'My father was completely dedicated to the business and ignored the family. But for me and my values, this cannot be done.'	
D3: 'My father was my mentor, but I developed my own entrepreneurial style, which is very different from my father's.'	
D5: 'I gradually replaced him [my father] in foreign trade, then Italy, and now I am here. [.] To be honest, my father is a very open-minded person; he gave me "carte blanche".'	
D7: 'My father gradually gave me some clues. I would pick them up and personalise them and then start experimenting and doing. Even when he saw that I was making small mistakes, he would let me make them […] He always supported me and his support gave me energy. He gave me the charge I needed.'	
D7: 'My leadership style is different from my father's. I am more collaborative, I believe in teamwork and I have a more supportive, less authoritarian approach.'	
D8: 'My father gave us total autonomy and responsibility. He left everything in the hands of my brother and me almost "overnight". He allowed us to be completely free.'	
D10: 'The great merit of my father was being able to delegate [.] and allow me to make mistakes.'	
D10: 'My father expected me to go to work on Saturday mornings and [I told him] I'm not you. I have different aspirations and therefore you cannot expect me to run the company as if I were you. Because if it were otherwise, I would no longer like my job.'	
D11: 'I have never compared myself to my father; he taught me the right values and how to be respected in the business world. […] My role as a family business leader is to solve the problems of those who work for me. It is up to me to summarise and put things in order.'	
D12: 'My father and I have similar characters, but I do business differently; I am also a woman and I am more organised and orderly when managing things.'	
D14: '[.] my father taught me a lot, and many of those things are still useful to me, much more than what is taught in the various courses that I have attended. Even today I come up with many phrases that my father said. they have remained famous. But I have also put my stamp on many other things […] because, in the meantime, everything in the business has changed.'	
D15: 'Over the years my responsibilities within the company have become greater and also the differences with my father's style, but the company has quadrupled its turnover […] I had to work hard to create my space with such an important father who was a point of reference for that type of business.'	
D16: 'My father had his dream to produce high-quality wine. Once at the helm of the company, I followed my spirit and my passions and, in my winery, the combination of wine, art and nature reaches its maximum expression. My desire has always been to ensure that our guests have a deeply emotional experience, a full immersion in the territory.'	
D18: 'The company had to evolve, and at that moment there were two scenarios: the father/master: "I created the company" or an enlightened mind like my father who said: "now you go ahead". He passed the ball.'	
D19: 'Over time, the interpretation and direction I have given to my work have been anything but conventional and	

Table 2 (*continued*)

Representative excerpts	Second-order themes
certainly different from what my father would have expected.'	
D21: 'Working with your father could be a bit difficult because you always want to work at his pace and his level. But I must say that he has never made me feel inferior, on the contrary. I always had a wonderful relationship with him… I never had any problems with my father.'	

fine, and I put all of myself into everything I do'.

In forming her entrepreneurial identity, Sara gradually freed herself from the state of subjection to her father. She recognises her father's abilities. She said: '*My dad would have been the ideal model for a man. But I am a woman, mother and wife and I cannot and will not ignore it*'. She distanced herself from her father's model and developed a different entrepreneurial identity: '*My father and I have two very different ways of being entrepreneurs, absolutely different.*' Sara is very attentive to human resources and runs the company with a participative approach. By contrast, her father was a self-sufficient and authoritative decision-maker: '*He was a one-man show. I prefer teamwork and sharing with my collaborators. He jokes about that: "If I were you, I would have already decided on everything by myself"*'. Furthermore, Sara's attention towards others pushed her to introduce new features in the work organisation, especially to help women employees manage their work-family balance. '*All the people who work with us know that no matter the problem, anything, family or personal, they can schedule their work hours around their personal life. They know that working hours can be flexible*'. Sara also redefined the timings and organisation of her work according to her priorities to make time for her family: '*My father was completely dedicated to the business, ignoring the family. But for me and my values, this cannot be done*'.

In conclusion, Sara formed her entrepreneurial identity through *a self-empowerment process in which her father was perceived as a patriarch*. She initially submitted to her father who, as a patriarch with undisputed authority, pressured her to join the family business and take over the leadership role. However, Sara was able to emancipate herself and freely express her own entrepreneurial identity as a family business leader without constraints. Today, she has developed a personal entrepreneurial identity that is more consistent with her values and priorities.

From the above we propose that:

Proposition 2. When a daughter perceives her father as a patriarch (i. e. as a source of pressure to succeed him but leaving her free to be herself), her entrepreneurial identity is formed through a process of self-empowerment.

4.3. The enhancement process and the mentor father

4.3.1. 'I have developed my own style' [Vera, D3]

Vera is an enthusiastic daughter who loves her father and the clothing company he founded: '*I've always known that I wanted to get involved as soon as possible… Working here has always been my dream*'. She describes her father using terms such as '*amazing personality*', '*very forward-looking*', '*a very good parent, a very good educator and a very good person*'.

From an early age, she wanted to work with her father. When she graduated with a degree in marketing, he asked her to work with him. Her father's offer was a great opportunity for her, and she welcomed it with excitement and gratitude. Vera learnt a lot from her father and admits that her ability to be a good entrepreneur results from what her father taught her. '*Thanks to him I am now ready to face everything*'. Vera also remembers the frequent quarrels she had with her father, especially during their business trips abroad: '*My father and I have always argued madly, and this conflict has always been a part of our relationship*'. However, with a smile, she said: '*It's also been strange, but beautiful, even

wonderful. That was our way of communicating'. She recognises that during those trips she learnt a lot and had the opportunity to train as an entrepreneur: *'But really, he launched my career. … It was the nicest thing. Business trips with him were really precious'*. Arguments with her father were caused by their often divergent opinions about the company. Thanks to these quarrels, she has been able to develop her own entrepreneurial identity as a family business leader. *'My father was my mentor, but I developed my own entrepreneurial style, which is very different from my father's'*. She emphasised the differences between herself and her father and stated that being a man and a woman entrepreneur are not the same thing: *'There's a big difference between my father and me. My father was a man, and he could come home at nine at night because he had been in a meeting. I can't do that. He worked so hard, but leading the company as a woman creates a lot of constraints; it's not like it was for him. Having a family is a beautiful thing, but you have to learn how to manage it'*.

In conclusion, Vera formed her entrepreneurial identity through *an enhancement process in which her father was perceived as a mentor*. He encouraged Vera towards leading the family business without forcing her because it was her dream. When the succession process occurred, Vera felt free to develop and express her own entrepreneurial identity as a family business leader. She is deeply grateful to her father for his teachings and admits that he is a valuable source of inspiration and stimulation. At the same time, Vera recognises that her father has never prevented her from distancing herself from him and leading the company with her own entrepreneurial style.

Therefore, we propose the following:

Proposition 3. When a daughter perceives her father as a *mentor* (i.e. as a source of attraction to succeed him and leaving her free to be herself), her entrepreneurial identity is formed through a process of *enhancement*.

4.4. The idealisation process and the myth father

4.4.1. I'll never be a true entrepreneur' [Giulia, D4]

Giulia joined her father's company at the age of 28 after obtaining a degree in economics and business and gaining some experience in other companies. She has always desired to join the family business: *'I am linked to this company by great love. My father has transmitted this love to me since I was a child.'* So, for Giulia, entering the family business was a dream come true, also thanks to her father's support: *'He gave me security and helped me. My father is a die-hard feminist! When he was the CEO, he would have liked to hire only women because he said that women are one step above men. To be fair, he was not entirely wrong; women are more sensitive and more precise. Instead, I am the last of the feminists! There are some types of women who are not worth being feminists for'*.

Giulia has a strong admiration for her father, describing him as the *'ideal entrepreneur'*, endowed with marked creativity, intuition, skills, competencies, and courage: *'My father is an artist; my father has intuition and entrepreneurship is in his blood, and he has the ability to see beyond things and the courage to take risks'*. She thinks of him as a role model who should be imitated and sincerely admired: *'I would like to be like my father'*. However, talking about herself, she says: *'I don't feel like a true entrepreneur. I am lucky to have inherited an existing company; I just have to try to do my best to ensure that all this does not collapse because of me. My male colleagues are true entrepreneurs… But I don't feel like an entrepreneur. To date, I don't have this presumption'*. These words reveal a sense of inadequacy, accentuated by her comparison of herself with other entrepreneurs, all men, who she considers to be real entrepreneurs. Giulia perceives being a woman as a burden, and she says that to be an effective entrepreneur, she is willing to make sacrifices: *'Taking on this role, I know that one day I can't say I'll have ten kids now and stay home. In fact, I'm not even going to have one'*.

In conclusion, Giulia developed her entrepreneurial identity through *an idealisation process in which the father has been perceived as a myth*, the 'true' entrepreneur she would like to resemble with all her enthusiasm.

She idealises the male entrepreneur and perceives herself as inferior to her father and her self-expectations. She feels the so-called 'lack-of-fit' (Heilman, 2001) with the masculine CEO ideal. In her entrepreneurial identity process, Giulia would like to imitate her father as a role model to hide her perceived weakness. However, she remains convinced that she cannot succeed and despite being the head of the company and running it quite successfully for years, she goes so far as to say that she does not feel like an entrepreneur. Even though Giulia described her father as a *'die-hard feminist'*, she perceives his entrepreneurial figure like a mirror that reflects an image of herself that she does not appreciate because she perceives herself as inferior and of lesser value.

We can thus formulate the following proposition:

Proposition 4. When a daughter perceives her father as a *myth* (i.e. as a source of attraction to succeed him and a binding benchmark), her entrepreneurial identity is formed through a process of *idealisation*.

4.5. A typology of processes and fathers based on daughters' perceptions

These results are summarised in a 2 × 2 matrix (Fig. 2) which includes two dimensions underpinning the analysis: daughter's perception of her father's role in affecting her entrepreneurial identity and her perception of her father's role in her decision to become a family business leader. By combining both dimensions, this matrix provides a typology that presents: a) the identity work process through which daughters formed their entrepreneurial identity and b) how daughters feel their father influenced this process. Each case has been placed in one of the quadrants of the matrix and each quadrant is briefly illustrated as follows:

1. *The submission process and the commander father*. This profile refers to daughters who have suffered the will of their fathers and *submitted* to assuming the leadership role by adhering to a masculine model as expected by their fathers. The latter are perceived as authoritarian *commanders* in the process of shaping their daughter's entrepreneurial identity.

2. *The self-empowerment process and the patriarch father*. This profile refers to daughters who have suffered the pressure to join the family business but over time, they felt free to develop their own identity as the family business leader through *self-empowerment*. These daughters perceive their fathers as *patriarchs*, more concerned about the continuity of the family business than about their daughter's ambitions, but at the same time, they did not feel conditioned by them in forming their own entrepreneurial identity.

3. *The enhancement process and the mentor father*. This profile refers to daughters who chose to join the family business and have developed their own entrepreneurial identity through an *enhancement process,* appreciating what they learnt from their fathers without suffering any conditioning. In this case, the father is perceived as a *mentor* who helped and advised his daughter, boosting her entrepreneurial spirit and allowing her to develop her entrepreneurial identity.

4. *The idealisation process and the myth father*. In this case, daughters perceived their fathers as supportive and helpful during the succession process. However, when the succession ended, they were unable to fully develop their entrepreneurial identity because of an *idealisation process* of their fathers perceived as the only 'true' entrepreneurs, a *myth* who becomes an unattainable reference model. This idealised male role model leaves the daughter feeling inadequate as the family business leader.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study aimed to improve the understanding of how daughter successors form and grow their entrepreneurial identities as family

**Daughter's perception of her father's role
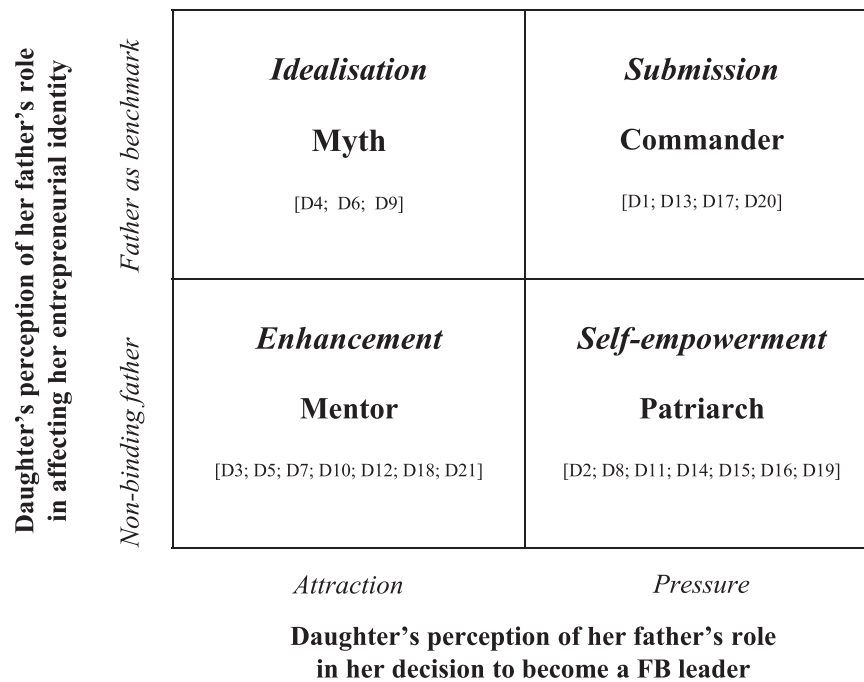in her decision to become a FB leader**

Fig. 2. A typology of processes and fathers based on daughters' perceptions.

business leaders and how they perceive the role played by their fathers in the process. Drawing on narrative identity theory (Ricoeur, 1984) and identity work theory (Snow & Anderson, 1987), the experiences of 21 daughters who assumed the leadership of their family businesses were investigated. Results were summarised in four propositions and a matrix which offers a comprehensive view of fathers seen through their daughters' eyes; that is, how fathers are perceived by their daughters in shaping their own entrepreneurial identity.

These findings advance research in the field by showing that daughters' perceptions of their fathers act as strong mental representations (Krueger, 2003). They are subjective interpretations of daughters' reality (Arenius & Minniti, 2005) and have the potential to have a powerful and lasting influence on their entrepreneurial identity. This influence can manifest itself positively or negatively. Fathers can be perceived as a valuable resource when daughters feel supported in their decision to enter the family business and inspired by their fathers in the formation and development of their entrepreneurial identity. In other cases, however, a father's influence can be perceived adversely, because daughters feel forced to enter the family business as a result of their moral obligation and normative commitment (Dawson et al., 2015; Sharma & Irving, 2005), and feel their father pressing their own entrepreneurial identity over time. This negative influence can result from daughters' self-conditioning and self-expectations (Ridgeway, 2009; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Although other scholars have shown that a fathers' influence can be exerted directly through explicit demands (Overbeke et al., 2013; 2015), this study reveals that this influence could be exerted indirectly. As in a game of mirrors (Strauss, 1959), daughters' perceptions about what their fathers expect from them can bias their self-image and self-assessment and this can also explain why some daughters express joy, satisfaction, and fulfilment when talking about their experience as family business leaders, whereas others express their anger, frustration, and inadequacy (Labaki et al., 2013; Labaki, 2020).

For all these reasons, fathers may be perceived as either 'an opportunity' or 'a threat' for daughters' entrepreneurial identities. A father is perceived as an opportunity when he feeds his daughter's passion for entrepreneurship and interest in the family business, supports her path within the company (Cesaroni & Sentuti, 2018), offers a positive role model for her entrepreneurial aspirations (Zellweger et al., 2011), but allows her to form and express her entrepreneurial identity freely. These results are consistent with prior research (Hytti et al., 2017; McAdam et al., 2021), as they confirm that daughters may not adhere to a masculine entrepreneurial style in forming their identity as successors. Additionally, this study shows that, even in the post-succession phase, daughters may develop their own entrepreneurial identities by distancing themselves from those represented by their fathers and affirming their sense of self. On the contrary, a father might represent a threat when a daughter does not feel free to express her entrepreneurial identity because she is directly or indirectly conditioned by her father. A daughter may perceive being pressurised to fit into her father's expectations and adhere to the male model of an entrepreneurship role over time. This result is consistent with previous research stating that daughters often have to align themselves to the incumbent father's entrepreneurial style to be considered as credible successors (McAdam et al., 2021). However, this study adds to existing knowledge by revealing that this constraint is sometimes only perceived in the daughter's mind and may persist over time, even years after the succession process has been completed. Daughters may not get rid of the perception of the 'ideal' male model learnt from or seen in their fathers. This invisible but powerful constraint can, over time, evoke anger or a growing sense of inadequacy at one's own inability or unwillingness to be oneself and fully develop one's personal entrepreneurial identity. These results are in line with previous research that shows that gender norms absorbed within the family and the business may play a key role in creating barriers for daughters, reducing the number of daughters who would wish to take on leadership (Byrne et al., 2019; Overbeke et al., 2013; Vera & Dean, 2005) and become successors (Hytti et al., 2017). This study adds that even when such barriers are overcome, gender norms can create uncertainties in the daughters' minds that hinder their ability to express their own identity as family business leaders and credible entrepreneurs unreservedly. All these circumstances are typical examples of what Petriglieri's (2011) theoretical article defines as a threat to the expression of identity at an individual level, that is when the threatened identity cannot be manifested spontaneously because the sense of self is called into question (Kreiner & Sheep, 2009) by the individual's subjective appraisal of an experience. This study provides empirical evidence of this concept by demonstrating how relevant a daughter's perception of her experience with her father can be in the process of entrepreneurial identity formation.

This study's findings make four contributions to the academic debate on daughter successors in family businesses. First, it adds to the nascent stream of research on entrepreneurial identity by focusing on the role of others, and specifically on fathers, in the context of family businesses. Given that interaction with others is crucial to shaping entrepreneurial identity (Watson, 2008) and that it requires more research (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021), this study examined how daughters' perceptions of their fathers shape their entrepreneurial identities. These findings underlined the relevance of perceptions as cognitive lenses (Krueger, 2003) through which daughters apprehend, represent, and interpret their fathers' role (as commander, patriarch, mentor, or myth) in shaping their entrepreneurial identity with substantial reflections on their identity work.

Second, these findings enrich the knowledge about entrepreneurial identity by placing the analysis in the specific context of family business. Although some authors have noted that investigating contexts that are closer to entrepreneurs is crucial to understand their behaviours, to date limited attention has been devoted to family contexts, in favour of broader contexts such as country or sector (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021; Welter, 2011). However, when entrepreneurs are at the head of a family business, the family context becomes an integral part of the business (Zellweger, 2017) and cannot be ignored in analysing the formation of entrepreneurial identity. By investigating how daughter successors' perceptions of their fathers influenced their entrepreneurial identity, this study gives voice to daughters' points of view in examining the father-daughter relationship among those complex interpersonal relationships within the family. In the family business field of research, some authors have pointed out how father–daughter relationships enable (and constrain) the co-creation of a legitimate successor identity during the leadership transfer and highlighted daughters' need to develop their successor identity independently of their father to become visible and credible (McAdam et al., 2021). The present study goes beyond this and highlights that when the succession ends some daughters succeed in forming an independent entrepreneurial identity also thanks to their relationship with their fathers. However, sometimes a sound father-daughter relationship is not enough to build a solid and independent entrepreneurial identity over time because daughters themselves still do not legitimise their own identity based on their subjective perceptions of who and how a 'real' entrepreneur should be.

Third, this study advances knowledge on daughter successors and family business by investigating the processes through which their entrepreneurial identity is shaped and developed. Prior studies have investigated how daughters form their identity as family business successors during the succession process (Byrne et al., 2019; Hytti et al., 2017; McAdam et al., 2021), whereas the post-succession phase has remained largely overlooked (Mussolino et al., 2019). This study shed light on that phase and identified four processes of daughter successors' identity work (submission, self-empowerment, enhancement, and idealisation) underlining how they perceive their fathers influenced these processes. According to prior research, forming an entrepreneurial identity as a family business leader is a necessary path for both male and female successors but women need to make a greater effort in identity work as they must deal with the 'gendered expectations resulting from practices that are predominantly linked to women' (Hytti et al., 2017: 16). This study claims that great expectations (even beyond gendered ones) may arise from fathers but also from daughters' self-conditioning and self-expectation processes that do not always allow daughter successors to freely express their entrepreneurial identity.

Finally, this study provides a new perspective in analysing gender diversity in family businesses, focusing on the personal experiences of daughters who have succeeded their fathers at the helm of the company. Gender diversity within family businesses has been progressing in recent years because of the growing number of daughters taking on entrepreneurial roles (Campopiano et al., 2017). Despite the high number of daughter successors, however, few studies have investigated their state of mind once they have taken over the lead of the family business. This

study confirms that change is underway as several daughters state that they felt free to form and express their entrepreneurial identity without constraints. At the same time, however, for other daughters a perceived expectation of 'adhering to a male model' has been a burden that has weighed on their entrepreneurial identity. Hence, 'numbers mean nothing' if the male model's shadow continues to loom over daughter successors with the risk of nullifying the potential and benefits associated with the increasing gender diversity in leadership roles in the family business (Chadwick & Dawson, 2018). This suggests that daughters' inclusion in entrepreneurial roles is a necessary but insufficient condition to ensure a true gender diversity in family firms. It is essential to go beyond numbers and ensure that daughters, once they become successors, can fully enhance their entrepreneurial identity. This means going beyond the successor role formed as stereotypically masculine (Byrne et al., 2019) and making sure that daughter successors can affirm their sense of self and promote an entrepreneurial approach based on new beliefs, values, and norms.

5.2. Practical implications, limitations and future research agenda

With regard to recommendations to family businesses, this study can help daughters who aspire to lead their family business to be more aware of factors that can affect their ability to follow their own entrepreneurial styles to avoid frustration and achieve greater personal and professional fulfilment. The opportunity to form and grow their entrepreneurial identity consistent with themselves can also have important implications for family businesses since women who are free to express their entrepreneurial identity might bring new ideas, beliefs, and points of view that foster diversity and consequently benefit family businesses' performance, innovation, and competitiveness.

Although this study reveals important findings with theoretical and practical implications, it is not without limitations. First, any typology has limitations. A constructive typology is 'a heuristic expedient that serves as a means by which concrete occurrences can be compared and comprehended' and is 'selective and abstractive since one can never make a complete statement about all that is involved in everything that happens' (McKinney, 1966: 6–7). It is difficult to embed heterogeneous experiences in standardised categories and labels. In reality, daughters' perceptions of their fathers and their influence might not be so clearly and distinctly defined by interviews and interpreted by researchers; typologies might partially overlap or not fully capture what daughters feel. Therefore, all individual concrete occurrences may deviate from the four identified 'pure types' in some respect (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). Notwithstanding, the typology proposed in this study is a means of reducing the complexities of real experiences to a generally coherent level. However, more empirical research is needed to further elaborate on this typology, so as to better define fathers' roles in the formation of daughters' entrepreneurial identities and for a more nuanced representation of father-daughter relationships.

Second, this study has focused on a particular geographical context. According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Italy is a masculine society (Hofstede-Insights, 2023) with important implications for the entrepreneurial background (Mussolino et al., 2019: 76). Moreover, a high gender gap persists (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022), especially concerning women's economic participation and opportunity (WEF, 2022). Finally, women's involvement in Italian family firms remains limited (Corbetta & Quarato, 2023), especially in unlisted family businesses (Sentuti et al., 2020). Thus, Italian society is particularly suitable for gaining a thorough understanding of factors that influence daughter successors' entrepreneurial identity. However, father-daughter relationships can be conditioned by gender norms prevailing in a specific cultural context. As suggested by D'Allura (2019), a family is influenced by the institutional context in which it is embedded, and this influence is then transferred to the firm. Consequently, further analyses could investigate other institutional and cultural contexts, characterised by different conceptions of men's and women's roles in

society, families, and enterprises.

Third, the typology presented here was constructed exclusively based on daughters' perceptions as the study aimed to understand the role daughters assign to their fathers in the formation and growth of their entrepreneurial identities. Therefore, whether these perceptions truly correspond to their fathers' attitudes, and their relationship with their daughters is unknown. This opens new avenues for future research to analyse the father-daughter dyad and compare fathers' descriptions of themselves and how they are perceived by their daughters.

Fourth, this study only investigated how daughters perceive their fathers and did not consider whether daughters' perceptions of other family members may have influenced their entrepreneurial identities. Therefore, future research could investigate the role of other individuals, such as mothers, male siblings, and other family members in influencing daughters' entrepreneurial identities, and how interactions within dyads (e.g. mother-daughter, brother-daughter, and successor daughter-non successor daughter) are part of the co-creation (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021) of daughters' entrepreneurial identities.

Finally, although the role of emotions was outside the scope of the present analysis, some emotions clearly emerged from the interviews that marked the daughters' experiences (e.g. joy, anger, frustration, resignation, and gratitude) (Humphreys, 2013; Labaki et al., 2013; Labaki, 2020). Future research could be directed at investigating these emotions in greater depth and how they may affect daughters' experiences in forming their identity as family business leaders and in the subsequent post-succession phase.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Annalisa Sentuti was responsible for conceptualization; field work (data collection and curation); formal analysis; methodology; writing the original draft; reviewing and editing. Francesca Maria Cesaroni was responsible for conceptualization; data collection; further iterations in data analysis; finalising the methodology; writing the original draft; reviewing and editing; supervision and validation. Paola Demartini was responsible for data collection; further iterations in data analysis; reviewing and editing original draft.

Declarations of interest

None.

Data Availability

Data will be made available on request.

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Appendix A. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j.jfbs.2023.100562.

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