This paper will make a significant contribution to the discussion on entrepreneurship in family business by examining the dynamic role that women play in the family firm, and by analysing their perspective of their own entrepreneurial contribution to the success of the business. It will also contribute to the issue of business family dynamics, in particular the interrelation between the two closely linked domains, the business and the family, and to the gender issues in family business, which to date continue to remain relatively under-researched.

INTRODUCTION

Family-owned businesses dominate most of the world’s economies and contribute to the economic wealth and output of most world countries (Morck & Yeung, 2004). They also constitute a major source of entrepreneurship, leveraging on the whole family’s entrepreneurial vision, experience and knowledge (Rogoff, 2003; Aldrich & Cliff, 2003). Most entrepreneurs in family businesses receive considerable support from other family members, and the interaction between his or her family (the business family) and the firm is intensive. However although “family permeates most business ventures […] research into entrepreneurship has generally sidestepped investigating family as a source of oxygen for the entrepreneurial fire…” (Rogoff, 2003, p559). Existing research in entrepreneurship is rooted in economics, management, or psychology and sociology, while family business theory concentrates on the ‘systems theory’ of the overlapping family and business domains (family membership, ownership and management) (Stafford et al, 1999). In family firms, the natural dynamics are influenced by the close relationship of the business with the family, particularly when they are home-based businesses (Heck et al, 1995), yet few studies explore the nature and internal dynamics of the business owning family (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008).

Most of the existing literature on family business has focussed largely on the ‘business’ side of the family-business organisation, concentrating on ownership and management issues, often comparing them to non-family firms (Steier et al, 2004), while research on individual business family members has concentrated on the role of the founder (male) and the succeeding heir (predominantly male), emphasizing the traditional attitudes on gender roles within business families. Women (wives, sisters, daughters) are generally invisible in leadership and management, and have traditionally been confined in the private sphere, thus devalued in terms of tangible and intangible resources and capital. They generally do not choose to follow a career in family business, are not ‘groomed’ to be a successor, do not aspire to eventual ownership and to date too little is known about women as founders, successors and their role in the entrepreneurial domain (Brush, 1992). Women work within the family domain and belong to the “outward division of labour” (Frishkoff & Brown, 1993, p66), taking on the traditional responsibilities for the household and child-rearing (Cole, 1997), which is attributed to the culture of family businesses in general and which tends to foster stereotypical differences. But women do more than this, as they also play an active role in the day-to-day running of the business and family, working in the background, across both boundaries of home and work (Gillis-Donovan & Moynihan-Bradt, 1990) and, for that reason, they are “vital to the functioning of the business and the family” (Marshack, 1994, p64). And yet, the important role of women remains often unacknowledged within the work
domain. In more recent times, however, an increasing number of researchers have explored the more dynamic roles that women play in family businesses by addressing the gender issues and gender-based differences in family business activities (Danes & Olson, 2003). The women in family businesses are often talented, intelligent and entrepreneurial individuals who clearly understand the economic environment, understand the industry in which the business moves, have high motivation and goals for their family business ventures. They are able to identify unique opportunities that take the business to the next level of development. However little empirical research has been conducted on this aspect of women’s entrepreneurial participation in family firms.

This paper will make a significant contribution to the discussion on entrepreneurship by examining the dynamic role that women play in the family firm, and by analysing their perspective of their own entrepreneurial contribution, through the process of opportunity recognition, to the success of the business. Our paper will firstly review the existing literature, elaborate on the theoretical definition of family business, in particular in relation to the issue of the ‘absence’ of women. Next, we will underpin our analysis with empirical data extracted from interviews conducted during the past two years with a number of women involved in successful family businesses in Victoria, Australia. The interviews conducted as part of an ongoing larger project reveal that women actively work in both work-family domains and provide a more humanistic working environment. The interviews will specifically concentrate on the way in which women ‘perceive’ themselves; the women’s awareness of how the public ‘perceives’ the business, and finally on how this reflective approach on behalf of women enables them to ‘perceive’ opportunities for the firm which will increase the chances of a successful business (de Bruin et al 2006). In the interviews the women are vocal about their innovative contribution to the business and about their entrepreneurial vision and spirit.

By positioning our research as a theoretical discussion of the real contribution that women bring to entrepreneurship and underpinning it with original empirical data, we will highlight the interrelation between the two closely linked domains, the business and the family, and to the gender issues in family business, which to date remain relatively under-researched. It is hoped that our qualitative study resulting from direct interaction with the family business practitioners, in particular with the women, will create and inspire more dialogue and research on the embeddedness of women’s entrepreneurship within family business, a context which is too often lacking. (Zahra & Sharma, 2004, p338).

FAMILY BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

It is widely accepted that over two-thirds of businesses around the world are family businesses (Gersick et al, 1997) and in Australia, family firms account for approximately half of the existing businesses (Getz and Carlson, 2000). Most researchers in this area agree that the unique resources of family business (‘familiness’) have a positive effect on family firm performance and output, contributing to the economic wealth and output of most world countries as well as providing valuable non-economic benefits. (Gomez-Mejia et al, 2001; Astrachan & Shanker, 2003; Habbershon, Williams & MacMillan, 2003; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). The low survival rate of these types of businesses is also a well known fact: “Every successful business is, in a way, a small miracle. Family companies that are successfully passed down from one generation to another and continue to thrive represent an even greater achievement.” Lansberg (1999). Researchers have traditionally concentrated on issues of management such as leadership (Chrisman et al, 2005), stewardship (Davis et al, 1997; Zahra et al, 2008) as well as issues related to kin involvement in the family business such as succession (Chua et al, 2003), intra-family conflict (Ward & Aronoff, 1994; Jehn, 1997; Kellermanns & Eddleston, 2004) ‘complexity’ in the business family (Gimeno Sandig et al, 2006). More recently the literature has studied the role of family culture in influencing performance in family business (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006; Eddleston et al, 2008), as well as the attitudes and commitment of the family members towards the business as a powerful important element associated with the success of a family firm (Zahra et al, 2008). Family businesses are a dominant form of economic organisation in the world, and are one of the major outcomes of entrepreneurial activity, yet this still remains an under-researched topic.

Entrepreneurship and family business have been widely studied as two separate fields. Since the early research of Schumpeter, theories of entrepreneurship have concentrated on the characteristics of the entrepreneur and the emerging opportunities that support the creation and growth of the business organizations, whilst family business has traditionally concentrated on governance, management,
succession and family culture. Occasionally however, the connection between these two domains has been explored by researchers identifying how founders of family businesses create and establish enduring family legacies (Selznick, 1957), how the family influences an entrepreneur’s career (Dyer & Handler, 1994), how family involvement contributes to the development and performance of the business venture and how entrepreneurial leaders contribute to successful succession in family business (Tan and Fock, 2001). Gartner (2001) raised the issue of the need to identify a theoretical link between family business research and entrepreneurship research. More recently, in 2003, there were serious attempts to bring the two fields closer together with special issues of top entrepreneurship journals devoted to family business (ETP, 27(4) and JBV, 18 (4.5), concluding that family ownership and involvement promote entrepreneurial activities and behaviour.(Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Rogoff & Heck, 2003). For a more in-depth discussion of the overlap between entrepreneurship and family business literature, Dyer & Handler (1994) explored how the family influences and entrepreneur’s career, having identified four “career nexuses” (p72), or points in time when family and entrepreneurial dynamics intersect.

WOMEN AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Scholarly research has largely ignored the topic of women as small business owners and/or entrepreneurs. In the period 1977-1991, Brush (1992) found that only 57 articles had been published about women small business owners in entrepreneurship journals and conference proceedings. In 2001, a survey of entrepreneurship journals published over a 20 year span (1980-2000) revealed only 79 articles (4.9%) that discussed the gender/minority issue (Meeks et al, 2001), with an emphasis predominantly on the patriarchy line (succession of father-son). Mothers, daughters, wives and sisters appear only on the periphery of the family business domain. However, when considering a research framework for female entrepreneurship, we concur with Gartner’s perspective that “…entrepreneurship research espouses a diverse range of theories applied to various kinds of phenomena… There is no elephant in entrepreneurship. The various topics in the entrepreneurship field do not constitute a congruous whole…” (Gartner, 2001, p34). Carter, Anderson and Shaw (2001) argue that rather than a lack of literature on this topic, the problem “is a clear lack of cumulative knowledge and a failure to date to adequately conceptualise and build theories”(p22).

By attempting to combine part-time work together with family duties, women are often perceived as being less professional and less successful entrepreneurs than men (Bock, 1999; Warren-Smith et al, 2001; Watson, 2002). Women’s difficulty with accessing resources may be one explanation for their cautious behaviour in taking risks (Cliff, 1998). Research has also identified women’s lack of professional experience (Ashwin, 2000), in particular business and financial training (Hisrich and Brush, 1983), and diverse social networks (Aldrich, 1989) which are generally required to access information, support and resources.

Theoretical research from social psychology and social cognitive theory underlines this approach, and concludes that the different socialisation experiences of men and women will shape their strategic choices, their behaviour and performance (Carter, Williams and Reynolds, 1997). Fisher et al. (1993) provide a social feminist approach where “women and men have different experiential backgrounds and different ways of thinking… and neither form is a less valid representation of human experience” (Carter and Williams, 2003, p30). One other impediment for women in achieving what is generally regarded as ‘successful’ entrepreneurship is that the criteria used to evaluate ‘success’ focuses on masculine processes, behaviours and desired outcomes, such as financial success, profit maximization and innovation (De Martino and Barbato, 2003), whilst women appear, instead, to be driven by different motives, motivations and goals, thus assuming a different mode of entrepreneurial behaviour to men. This argument is linked to feminist theory which underlines the importance of choice in motives and entrepreneurial behaviour (Cliff, 1998). Oldrup (1999, p346) supports the need to focus on “how women themselves understand and experience their situation” and how they become agents of change “albeit in a constraining context”. Goffee and Scase (1985) examine how entrepreneurial women adjust their careers in relation to their obligations to their family, by maintaining the necessary flexibility which allows them to combine work and family duties, overcome time and space constraints, whilst at the same time, realising change and innovation (Brush, 1992; Brandth, 2002; Bock, 2004), although too often disadvantaged by their disability to access the necessary resources due to their lack of credibility (Marlow, 2002). Thus women’s performance and achievements, both in entrepreneurial activity and in terms of their position in a business, need to be evaluated using a different perspective to men’s.
Recent entrepreneurship literature has concentrated on women’s different approaches to venture creation, and different expectancies that women have in the growth and development of their business. Women tend to have businesses (in the service or retail industry) that are generally smaller, less profitable and slower in growing and expanding (Carter, Anderson and Shaw, 2001) - this in turn reinforces the stereotypical images of women and men in business (Carter and Williams, 2003). More research needs to be undertaken in the multiple realities of women’s entrepreneurship, in particular in the context of the development and success of family firms and how they articulate their various approaches in family businesses. Women’s involvement and entrepreneurial contribution to family business has been researched since the mid-1990s in particular by feminist writers (Kritzinger and Voster, 1996; Brandth and Haugen, 1997) with a focus on rural contexts. More recent literature has confirmed the previous studies by pointing to barriers to women achieving their full potential in entrepreneurship, the auxiliary and invisible role played by women (O’Toole and MacGarvey, 2003) but also their adherence to discourses which exclude them from the core business (Reed 2003; Alston, 2006). The most recent studies of women in business continue to recognize persisting difficulties in their entrepreneurial experiences in that they still seem to be confined into volunteer and/or social activities (Bryant and Pini, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

This study is part of a larger ongoing project that consists of interviews with members of family businesses in Victoria, Australia. As part of this research, we conducted a pilot study with a small number of women, wives and sisters of ‘successful’ entrepreneurs who had been interviewed, primarily in order to gain a deeper and more encompassing understanding of the workings of the family business, as well as identifying the motivating forces of those individuals who start such a business. The women were randomly selected according to their availability, and participation was voluntary. A qualitative research methodology related to life history was used, involving a variety of methodologies such as ethnography (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004) and life history narrative through semi-structured interviews. Life history aims to provide issues with representation, voice and context (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995), and is a “linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p7). This type of approach revealed a deep insight into the interviewees’ thoughts, personal aspirations, motivations and opinions. The issues that were discussed centred on the family business structure, the dual role (family/business) that women play in this type of business setting, as well as the women’s priorities in life and business, a topic that led to discussions about their perceptions of their contribution to the family and to the family business.

The questions that underpinned our research were: ‘What is the women’s perception of their contribution to the family business?’ And, ‘In what terms do the women identify with the success of the family business?’

In unstructured and open-ended interviews, the women were asked to speak about their role in the family business, and how they perceived their contribution to the family business. The interviews were then analysed in order to identify firstly those aspects that facilitate or impede an understanding of women’s work as an entrepreneurial contribution to the family business, and secondly, to understand the women’s perception of their own role in the family business. In this paper we will present two of the interviews conducted with business women involved in family businesses in Victoria, one in rural Victoria and one in urban Melbourne. They are both of second generation, successful business families. Although the contexts in which the women live and work are very different, their perception of their own roles is a common linking element that supports our methodological approach.

WOMEN’S ENTREPRENEURIAL CONTRIBUTION TO FAMILY BUSINESS – TWO CASE STUDIES

The data analysed as part of our research revealed some main elements related to the women’s entrepreneurial contribution to family business. While most entrepreneurship research focuses on the male founder and his male heirs, our study revealed that the woman (wife, daughter or sister), usually ‘invisible’ and working in the periphery, tends to play some important roles in the family business, such as supporting the creation of the...
business foundations (including the values and attitudes that hold the family members, and thus the business, together) and providing a supportive environment for the family and the business as they grow. Women tend to work part-time, often full-time, fulfilling the domestic responsibilities of wife and mother as well as supporting the husband in the family business, and may be present in the business on a daily basis, allocating her mental and physical energies to both areas of responsibility.

**Kristen** (pseudonym) lives and works on the three-generational family farm that produces wine, in eastern regional Victoria (Australia). She married young into a large traditional hard working ethnic family which produced initially tobacco, and later switched to wine production

“[…] for me to marry into the P. family or to marry ‘John’ (pseudonym), it was not just marrying John, it was marrying into a whole family…. which was wonderful on one side, but really quite difficult on the other […] we worked seven days a week….for twelve, sometimes fourteen hours a day.”

Her work is demanding, sometimes exhaustive, providing support to both the business and the family which comprises her four children, now grown up with children of their own, as well as her elderly parents-in-law. The two domains, work and family, overlap constantly in her life as even her home is located on the family farm “…and even now our life is our business, our office is there [in the house] and another bedroom is being made into an office…” Thus the resources and the skills that are generated in one domain, support and contribute to the other domain, continually impacting on, as well as enriching, both. This creates “a context in which all decisions are made and the glue that holds the family business together.” (Hollander & Bukowitz, 1990, p140). Kristen’s dual role as a worker and mother is sometimes difficult to harmonize and sometimes causes conflict and stress:

“I think we really do have to be very careful with the amount of work, and the amount of stress that each individual carries, you know, none of us really talks about how we cope with the amount of work and the amount of stress, which is probably wrong…”

Kristen is the invisible woman behind the successful family business who contributes to both the business and family spheres, largely through the family culture and dynamics. However, “Visibility and influence are not the same thing” (Gillis-Donovan & Moynihan-Bradt, 1990, p157) – It seems that Kristen’s ideas, ingenuity and intuition help to expand, strengthen and promote the family business.

**Helen** (pseudonym) came back into the family firm after spending numerous years away from Australia. She resettled in Melbourne a couple of years ago and now works and participates in the successful family firm that deals in coffee. Her business partners include her two brothers and her nephew, all married with children of various ages. In her youth, Helen was involved in the family business by providing support in the office:

“Answering the phone and taking messages […] Back then it was just the way it was…. My father made all the decisions. We didn’t make any decisions.” Nowadays Helen wants to take a more prominent role “It’s very hard especially if it’s all boys. Women are always seen as a ‘woman’… If women can achieve, get past that, and stamp it out and prove to the boys that we are not just baby carriers and house cleaners, that’s great.”

Although Helen is attempting to fulfil the dual responsibilities of family and work, she is committed to her current role as a single mother raising two young boys, and accepts it as her main responsibility for the time being.

**How women perceive themselves**

The women interviewed are involved, and generally expected to be involved, in the business organisation and some of the operational decision-making. However they generally have no definite title nor position within the organization. They work, and have worked, long hours to support both the family and the business, balancing children, housework, and parents/in-law, as well as contributing actively to the business. They remain sensitive to the daily needs of the family, as well of the business, and constantly attempt to find a balance between the two supporting, and sometimes incompatible roles.
Kristen dedicates herself to maintaining “the love and the passion that I have, wanting all of the kids to actually share in what we are doing and be part of what we are doing, only if they want to, and teaching and helping, more of the helping I suppose…” Helen is also driven by her intense commitment to her family “the family always comes first. …[…], look after the family” and to the family business “I am absolutely proud of what I bring into the business.” The family business provides an understanding and supportive environment for her, and even though she is aware that her role remains peripheral for the time being, she feels that she is appreciated in the family work environment and that her role is valuable and appreciated “…I love working with my family, it’s important to me not only as a family business. It enables me, at this point in my life, to be where I need to be, do things, certain things with my children. If I didn’t work for a family business my boss would turn around and say ‘See you later, good bye’. There are days when my children are sick and I need to stay home with them. […] Family businesses enable you to do that…we all respect each other, we all love each other and we all look after each other…”

These may be viewed as examples of stereotypical, traditional women’s roles: the nurturing, peacekeeping role, struggling with ‘invisibility’, child-care and care of the elderly. Kristen and Helen are however taking more prominent and active positions in their family enterprises and they manage dual roles, sometimes projecting a feminine image, but not because of uncertainty or lack of self-confidence. Both women are fully aware that family harmony, security and support is fundamental to the success of their business, and while they accept willingly to undertake a protective and supporting role, they do not sacrifice a more entrepreneurial role in the family business. Both Kristen and Helen may be considered peripheral to the core of the business activity, however they demonstrate a clear and proactive vision of where the business is going and what changes are necessary to improve it. They play dynamic role in it, encouraged by their wish to contribute actively to its evolving success, and participate with entrepreneurial ideas that contribute both in financial and promotional terms to the success of businesses. While maintaining their feminine and caring perspective, they are also accomplished and entrepreneurial women, and feel confident that they have the necessary skills to be an asset to the business.

**Women’s perceptions of how the public ‘perceives’ the business**

Research in the area of work organization reveals how images of one’s organization shapes the way people feel towards it. “Members vary in how much they identify with their work organization. When they identify strongly with the organization, the attributes they use to define the organization also define them.” (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994, p239). Through our interviews, our research found a very positive and close relationship between the women interviewed and their family business, and found that the positive images of their family business shape their positive self-concept, and vice versa. As the women reflected on their participation in the family business, they had the opportunity to identify what was central and fundamental to their organization and what it was that made them proud of belonging to it. Their sense of pride extends to the socially valued characteristics of their organization. Kristen talked with a great sense of satisfaction and achievement about the contribution that her family has made to their local community in regional Victoria. “…We tried to be part of the local community, and we always involved ourselves in the kids’ sports and we were leaders in that involvement as well, you know, between president and secretary, and, … and taking kids to tennis and umpiring and raising money for their clubs… We were always right up there… And at school, as well, raising money for the school, and being part of the school when our kids were there, and all those little things, you know, that were part of our life.”

The community is important for the family business as it provides support in return, such as educational institutions, employees and security, and the two are intertwined, as the family business in return brings jobs and wealth to the community (Heck et al, 2006). Kristen is pleased with their family business image, to which she has greatly contributed, and identifies positively with a family that has strong social values and positive citizenship behaviours. This family image reinforces the positive external image and reputation of the family business. Kristen values education for her children, because, apart from other reasons:

“It is important... for the perception of other people, I suppose, because it puts more of a professional look on our business”.
When asked to identify the images of her work organization (their wine family business) Kristen initially concentrates on the general image of how the business and products:

“As an Italian business in Australia...Well, that’s how other people perceive it. Because we’ve embraced the Italian [wine] varietals and that was just another opportunity in the market”.

Upon deeper reflection, however, she extends the discussion to the philosophy of the business, and the distinctive and enduring image that the family business wants to project to its clientele.

“It’s another thing to actually have a philosophy for our customers who are embracing our family business and are loyal to our business as well. So, customer service, that is our number one thing, to make sure that we give our customers what they are expecting from us.... And I suppose... when we first started developing the business of selling wine, I always said that I wanted to produce good wine, really good wine and make it accessible to the bulk of the Australian people. I didn’t want our wines to be sold at a price that the average person middle income family couldn’t afford it. I wanted them to be able to afford, to go and buy a bottle of our wine, I didn’t want it overpriced. So when I set out, because it was me that actually priced the wine or suggested the prices of our wines... So that was the philosophy that I really embraced. But now the business is more than just selling wine...[...] it has taken the business to a whole new level of customer service.”

The business matches Katrina’s own sense of self, and reflects not only her personal values but also the family values that she in turn has helped to shape. Her steadfast commitment to the family business makes her closely ‘attuned’ to the needs of the business as well as the family, as both are closely intertwined. “Strong identification with the organization keeps members attuned to the future viability of the organization. When people strongly identify with their work organization their sense of survival is tied to the organization survival.” (Dutton et al. p254). Katrina’s goals for a successful family business are not only financial well-being or making a profit. Her approach is to view the business as having a close and meaningful relationship with its clientele and the community. In order to achieve this, she has taken an entrepreneurial initiatives and developed a range of successful activities that complement and extend the family business image, and communicate the identity of the business symbolically and ritually through ‘degustation feasts’, special dinners accompanied by guest speakers, ‘fun nights of stories, food and wine’, ‘gnocchi fiestas with homemade food, family fun and fresh aromatic whites’. These events also ensure that the family business image projected is also in tune with the needs of the environment as well as the community and clients, as the family business newsletter states “As farmers of our land for over fifty years we have always been conscious of using far practices that will keep our land viable and sustainable.” (June, 2009). Kristen recognizes the importance of maintaining a positive relationship between the family firm, its clientele and their local community – this relationship is critical because the success of the family firm depends on it being managed in harmony with the local community (Astrachan, 1988).

Helen also shares a distinctive awareness of the projected image of her family business. “I take good pride, I mean, I take pride in representing the company.” It is her own personal initiative to provide a link between the family business and its community and clients – by doing so she demonstrates an awareness of the importance of the interconnection between the two.

“I am a bit of a networker, you know, and I try to show the public that, you know, because boys don’t have time, I go and show my face at public events, and show the customers that we are interested in what’s going out there...”

Helen demonstrates a deep awareness of the role of the company and its responsibility to its customers and community and is motivated to ask the question “What is this business about?” Her ability to be introspective helps to define the business, and to strengthen the set of beliefs and values that the (business) family members share. When asked to define the family business philosophy, she does not hesitate to provide a clear and distinctive image

“We try to provide quality and be consistent about it, and treat our customers with respect - that’s our philosophy. To give them good service and good quality.”

Her perception of how the public views the family business is very important to her:
“I’m known as the front of the house. Somebody walks in, the first person they see is me [...] I’m the first person they see, and they automatically deal with somebody from the family right away which is very important here... People come here knowing that they're going to deal with somebody from the family. They are not dealing with a sales rep who may or may not be able to give them that better deal. You know what I mean...? They’re dealing with somebody from the family who can decide yes or no. I can make decisions over my reps that my reps can’t make.”

Helen strongly identifies with her family organization, and demonstrates a strong awareness of what outsiders think about the business. When reflecting about the positive way that outsiders view their business, both women, Kristen and Helen, consciously “basked in the reflected glory” (Cialdini et al., 1976), emphasizing how important this is to them, to the family and to the business.

Women’s perception of their contribution

Women’s involvement in entrepreneurial activity is generally considered lower than men’s, partly because less attention has been paid to their achievements, simply because of their ‘invisibility’. The two case studies cited in this paper have demonstrated that women in family business make a significant entrepreneurial contribution to the family firm, but only when asked specifically to identify their contribution, they will reveal their entrepreneurial behaviour and self-confidence in their own entrepreneurial skills. Their entrepreneurial “alertness” enables them to perceive opportunities in a different way, which are “nested within a woman’s life and her experiences (Brush, 1992)

Kristen acknowledges that she is the main driving force of the business:

“I probably believe that a lot of the drive does come from me because ...umm, because without everyone embracing a concept it’s not going to work.... So if everyone knows that, everyone’s going to put their whole energy into driving an idea to make it work, well then it will work.”

Pursuing this line further she adds

“What’s been the drive?...mmm ... look, the energy that each generation has put into it and how we all embraced it and how we all work together to umm... how we work together to actually boost what the others are actually doing as well. [...] So it’s really, yeah, the energy that we all put in to make everyone else’s job easy, and how they can do it to the best of their ability. We will help the others...”

Her contribution actively helps to shape the business, because of her commitment to the success of the business.

“I want the business to succeed very much. I can’t, I wouldn’t ever sit back and if there is something going wrong, I would put my energy behind that thing that’s going wrong and find out why.”

It is not only the family driving force, but her own self-driven motivation to develop new initiatives that successfully support and expand the family enterprise

“It was my idea to set up the Cellar Door [at the winery] umm... It was probably my idea also that we go into the hotel, [...]... well, a friend gave us the opportunity to buy it, and so we did that... Then... [at the hotel] they drank our wine, so a natural progression was to come to the winery and buy wine, so we did that, we set up the Cellar Door, we set up the Bed & Breakfast here, it was my idea to do that. It was opportunities, so we did it....”

She has an excellent ability in successfully identifying and capturing valuable opportunities and this in turn supports and grows her self-confidence as an entrepreneur within the family enterprise. She enjoys the family business success and is proud that her own contribution has provided financial success and but also the success of a business that has created and developed tight links with its customers and its community
"...yeh... the success...not just the success of the family business because it’s a family business, but the success of the business as an entity, yeh, that’s what always driven me.”

Both Kristen and Helen share great loyalty to the family business. Helen appears to demonstrate a strength in networking which she considers important for the family business. Through this she gains entrepreneurial ideas which contribute positively to the development of the family business:

“We had the shop next door, a tiny little retail shop.... I was doing a little bit of retail and I started increasing the retail lines, and started networking and finding out more about competitions and things like that. And then we had this space which was sitting here empty and I said ‘That’s it, let’s move over here’ [ ...] and the shop took off and it’s growing very, very well, I can’t deny that. That’s how I started. Then I got involved in the training, trying to set up training programmes, I am the one that goes out to all the competitions you know, and does all the networking.”

Being aware of the needs of the community and the clients, she has diversified the products and the delivery of the products, making a marked contribution that has helped the family firm into a new dimension.

“This [other make of coffee] is a politically correct coffee. Doesn’t make it a better coffee, doesn’t make it a coffee that people say “You’ve just gotta have that coffee.!!” It’s just a politically correct coffee and we need to get it for the shop, because people come in and ask me for it.... So now we have all these bits and pieces that the company would never have got involved in, organic all that kind of thing, and I pushed these, we need to have them...[ ...] I started the little 50gm packets, which they never wanted to do and now I’ve got big catering companies ordering them so that’s another thing, you know. A lot of things they never wanted to do, never had the time to do, I’ve managed to put them into place.”

Her workplace is also her networking place:

“In the business over the last four years I’ve managed to increase the retail side of things and the training side of things and make us a little bit more, mmm, where people can actually come in and say hello and at see us and what we are all about.”

She is proud in her participation and contribution “Yes, as woman. I take good pride. I take pride in representing in the company […] I am absolutely proud of what I bring into the business. Absolutely.”

**CONCLUSION**

Overall, this study shows the ways in which some women work within the limitations imposed by the family needs, accept to play certain roles in family business because of their female make up or conditioning, yet participate and accomplish successful entrepreneurial activities and developments within the family enterprise. It explores the manner in which they interact and negotiate the boundaries between home (family) and work (business), and emphasizes the way in which they move between the two domains, within the area overlapping the two spheres. Most of the comments from the women interviewed reveal that they recognise that their contribution is downplayed in society, however they acknowledge proudly that their roles may be pivotal to the success of the business (often they are the entrepreneurs behind the scenes). They also acknowledge and accept that that they live and work in a different reality due to their situation and experiences (Gilligan, 1982). In our paper we suggest that in family business, women’s role and work needs to be viewed from an ‘integrated perspective’ so as to appreciate and understand the women’s contribution to the family business. Women ‘invisibly’ move and work in that sphere that overlaps between work and family, and they contribute important characteristics of the family business which are also ‘invisible’ to the business environment, yet they are proactive and entrepreneurial in helping to build a solid and successful business. They help to shape the family and business values, provide support, offer flexible working hours, are always on call, plus contribute towards the nurturing of the young/come successors, to the peacekeeping in the family (feminine characteristics), as well as having the ‘invisible’ physical, mental and emotional strength that supports the male figures. Added to this we should also acknowledge their entrepreneurial and innovative contribution and participation. Women’s role and contribution to family business occurs within that overlap of the two systems of work and family, and they need to be acknowledged as an active and prominent force in family-owned firms. The ‘integrated perspective’
offers a descriptive framework that helps to develop an understanding of women’s presence and personal contribution to the family business. Further qualitative research in the participative process of women in family firms needs to be undertaken so as to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the ways in which women integrate their family and business roles and domains and act as the guiding ‘invisible hand’ that contributes to the achievements of both the family and the business.

REFERENCES


