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*MIRROR OF THE SOUL: A FORMATIVE METHODOLOGY FOR THE
REORGANIZATION OF IDENTITY VERIFICATION PROCESSES TOWARD
ENTREPRENEURIAL AGENCY IN WOMEN EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE¹*

**ESPELHO D'ALMA: METODOLOGIA FORMATIVA PARA A
REORGANIZAÇÃO DE PROCESSOS DE VERIFICAÇÃO IDENTITÁRIA EM
DIREÇÃO À AGÊNCIA EMPREENDEDORA EM MULHERES EM SITUAÇÃO
DE VIOLÊNCIA DOMÉSTICA**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how symbolic interactionism can inform the development of a formative artifact aimed at supporting identity reorganization among women experiencing domestic violence, here discussed in relation to intimate partner violence (IPV) as addressed in the international literature. Grounded in the assumption that identity is relational, situated, and continuously negotiated through social interaction, the study draws on Mead, Blumer, Goffman, and Strauss. Using Design Science Research (DSR), the research defines requirements, builds, and demonstrates the artifact through a pilot course structured in sequential sessions. The intervention mobilizes the reflexive self (I/Me), role-taking, impression management, protected backstages, trajectory, and identity work to foster self-reflection, experimentation with alternative symbolic positions, and the rehearsal of entrepreneurial identity claims. Evidence from participant observation, field notes, and written records suggests shifts in self-descriptions and increased willingness to enact roles associated with competence and agency. The study discusses how intentionally designed interactional arrangements may support redefinitions of situation and identity work toward entrepreneurial agency.

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Keywords: entrepreneurial identity, symbolic interactionism, Design Science Research, domestic violence, entrepreneurship.

RESUMO

O interacionismo simbólico é usado neste estudo como base para a construção de um artefato formativo voltado à reorganização identitária de mulheres em situação de violência doméstica, com foco na transição de definições de si associadas à vitimização para definições associadas à agência e à autonomia econômica. Parte-se do pressuposto de que a identidade é relacional, situada e negociada nas interações sociais, conforme Mead, Blumer, Goffman e Strauss. A categoria definição de situação orienta a compreensão de que a violência doméstica tende a restringir enquadramentos simbólicos e papéis disponíveis, afetando a percepção de possibilidades de ação. Adota-se a Design Science Research (DSR) como estratégia metodológica para definir requisitos, construir e demonstrar o artefato por meio de um curso-piloto estruturado em encontros sequenciais. O desenho do artefato mobiliza conceitos de self reflexivo (Eu/Me), role-taking, manejo de impressões, bastidores protegidos, trajetória e trabalho de identidade, articulando atividades de autorreflexão, experimentação de papéis e produção de registros. Os resultados do piloto, analisados a partir de observação participante, diário de campo e registros escritos, indicam deslocamentos na linguagem de si e na disponibilidade para ensaiar papéis associados à competência e à ação. Conclui-se que arranjos interacionais planejados podem favorecer redefinições de situação e apoiar processos de reorganização identitária em direção à identidade empreendedora.

Palavras-chave: identidade empreendedora, interacionismo simbólico, Design Science Research, violência doméstica, empreendedorismo.

INTRODUCTION

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is widely recognized as a social problem with repercussions in both the private and public spheres. IPV is defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (UN Women, 2015). The World Health Organization recognizes it as a public health issue and a violation of human rights due to its impact on physical, mental, and



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social well-being (WHO, 2023). In Brazil, since the 1990s, IPV and domestic violence have required systematic interventions, with implications for specialized services (Andrade; Fonseca, 2008; Signorelli; Auad; Pereira, 2013). In the field of public security, the Brazilian Public Security Forum (2025) indicates that 64.3% of homicides of women occur in the home. In the economic sphere, losses estimated at R\$ 975 million in 2016 were attributed to work absenteeism among women experiencing violence (Carvalho; Oliveira, 2017).

Women's difficulty leaving abusive relationships has been discussed from different perspectives. Financial dependence is frequently identified as a factor that hinders separation from the abusive partner (UN Women, 2015; Amaral, 2023). However, there is evidence (Amaral, 2023; Amaral; Ferreira, 2024) that this situation cannot be fully explained by material constraints alone but also involves symbolic processes that shape self-perception and perceived possibilities for agency.

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, these processes can be analyzed in terms of processes of self-construction and verification, the definition of the situation, and restrictions on roles and relevant audiences (Blumer, 1982; Goffman, 1985; Strauss, 1985). This approach makes it possible to relate violence, identity, and agency, connecting the social problem to the interactional mechanisms that sustain or hinder trajectories of autonomy.

In this context, the possibility of engaging in entrepreneurial activity depends, among other aspects, on how competencies are perceived, recognized, and negotiated in social interactions (Goffman, 1985; Strauss, 1985). Studies on women's entrepreneurship (Bandura, 1997; Eddleston; Powell, 2013; Ferreira; Nogueira, 2013) highlight the relevance of self-confidence, recognition of skills, experiences, networks, and symbolic recognition in processes of entrepreneurial identity formation. Considering this, this article presents the development and demonstration of a formative artifact aimed at identity reorganization, focusing on



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the entrepreneurial identity of women experiencing intimate partner violence, grounded in symbolic interactionism and developed through Design Science Research (DSR).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This section synthesizes the concepts, arguments, and information that support the study and is structured around three themes: domestic violence and women's difficulty leaving abusive relationships, the assumptions of symbolic interactionism for understanding identity processes, and entrepreneurial identity as a relational process. The aim is to establish the theoretical framework that underpins the analysis of identity disorganization in contexts of violence and the development of formative strategies oriented toward the reconfiguration of agency and economic autonomy.

Domestic violence and remaining in abusive relationships

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) has been widely described as a multidimensional phenomenon, with effects on health, work, and living conditions (Walker, 2016; Kind et al., 2013; Stochero; Pinto, 2023). Part of the literature points to associations between violence and mental health-related symptoms, as well as processes of social isolation and constraints on decision-making (Walker, 2016; Kind et al., 2013; Stochero; Pinto, 2023). From a socioeconomic perspective, studies discuss impacts on work attendance, job stability, and income, as well as burdens on public services (Lloyd, 1997; Cerqueira; Moura; Pasinato, 2019; Silva; Nascimento, 2022; Deslandes; Silva; Ugá, 1998; Perova & Reynolds, 2017, pp. 188–196).

At the institutional and legal levels, the Brazilian legal framework encompasses measures such as the Federal Constitution (art. 226, §8), the Maria da Penha Law (Brasil, 2006), and the criminalization of femicide (Brasil, 2015). In the state



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of Paraná, initiatives such as the Maria da Penha Patrol are responsible for monitoring compliance with protective measures (PMPR Diagnostic Report, 2025). The existence of institutional mechanisms does not eliminate women's difficulty leaving abusive relationships, which calls for approaches that consider both material and symbolic dimensions.

Symbolic interactionism

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, identity is not a fixed essence but a process of attributing meanings to oneself, produced and verified through interaction (Mead, 1967; Blumer, 1982; Goffman, 1985; Strauss, 1985). The self is a construct corresponding to the reflexive capacity to take oneself as an object. In Mead (1967), it can be understood in the tension between the "I" and the "Me", which relates to the internalization of social expectations.

Blumer (1982) develops this perspective by stating that action is oriented by meanings; meanings emerge from interaction; and meanings are interpreted and transformed. Goffman (1985) describes the presentation of self, impression management, and the distinctions between front stage and backstage, highlighting that the self is performed and depends on audiences, validation, disruptions, and repair processes. Strauss (1985) emphasizes trajectories, careers, and identity work, situating identity transformations over time and within negotiated orders.

In contexts of intimate partner violence, the definition of the situation may become monopolized by the abusive partner, restricting available audiences, roles, and feedback. Depreciative labels, restricted interactions, and social isolation may reduce opportunities for identity verification and stabilize meanings related to incapacity, dependence, and devaluation (Blumer, 1982; Goffman, 1985; Strauss, 1985). From this perspective, violence is linked to interactional mechanisms that affect agency and decision-making.



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Entrepreneurial identity as a relational process

Entrepreneurial identity can be understood as a relational and dynamic process that depends on audiences, recognition, and situated experiences. Studies on women's entrepreneurship discuss the role of self-confidence, recognition of skills, experiences, networks, and symbolic recognition (Bandura, 1997; Eddleston; Powell, 2013; Ferreira; Nogueira, 2013). Part of the literature also highlights processes of socialization and repertoires of action associated with family, school, social networks, and work (Cavalcanti, 2007; Pereira et al., 2013; Santos et al., 2016; Bacelar et al., 2020), including gendered mediations and normative expectations.

Psychosocial factors, self-evaluative beliefs, emotions, networks, and contextual conditions influence the transition from entrepreneurial intention to action (Machado, 2006; Nassif, 2016; Versiani et al., 2021). Barriers such as fear of failure, stereotypes, lack of networks, and credit constraints are discussed as obstacles to action (Machado; Guedes; Gazola, 2017; Freitas; Teixeira, 2016). In contexts of domestic violence, some of these obstacles are intertwined with isolation and processes of identity disorganization.

The literature suggests that domestic violence may compromise the interactional conditions necessary for identity verification. From this perspective, formative strategies focused on entrepreneurship, when guided by mechanisms of situation redefinition, expansion of audiences, and role rehearsal, may support identity work toward self-definitions associated with agency.

Building on the premise that identity processes are interactionally mediated, this study adopts Design Science Research to design and demonstrate a formative artifact aimed at reorganizing identity work in contexts of intimate partner violence.



METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This section outlines the procedures adopted for the development, application, and analysis of the formative artifact, explaining the research strategy, the criteria that guided its construction, the data generation methods, the analytical procedures, and the ethical considerations involved. The aim is to provide a systematic account of the methodological choices that underpin the relationship between the theoretical framework, the artifact design, and the empirical evidence used in the study.

Research strategy: Design Science Research (DSR)

This study adopts Design Science Research (DSR) to design and demonstrate a formative artifact operationalized through a training course aimed at supporting the reorganization of the entrepreneurial identity of women experiencing domestic violence. DSR organizes the process into stages of problem understanding and requirements definition, artifact development, and solution evaluation and demonstration (Peppers et al., 2007). The understanding of the problem was supported by a literature review on domestic violence, identity processes, and women's entrepreneurship, as well as the researchers' professional experience in care and training contexts involving women experiencing violence. These elements supported requirements such as the centrality of identity strengthening, the encouragement of economic autonomy, methodological accessibility, and the possibility of replication in institutional contexts.

Artifact: a training course in sequential sessions

The artifact consists of a course organized into four sessions structured around thematic dimensions related to identity, self-reflection, reframing life trajectories,



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entrepreneurship, and action planning. The pedagogical design emphasizes participatory methodologies, such as discussion circles, reflective activities, group work, and written reflections, understood as interactional devices for meaning-making and identity work, aligned with the symbolic interactionist framework.

Data production and analysis

Data were produced through participant observation, researchers' field notes, and participant-generated written materials collected at the beginning and end of the course. The analysis followed a qualitative and interpretive approach aimed at identifying shifts in meanings attributed to the self, to personal capabilities, and to possibilities for economic or entrepreneurial engagement, with a focus on shifts in self-definitions from dependence toward agency and competence.

Ethical procedures

Anonymity, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw were ensured throughout the study, along with measures to minimize risks of exposure, embarrassment, or revictimization. The implementation of the course and the production of data followed principles of respect, protection, and participants' well-being.

DESCRIPTION, DEMONSTRATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE ARTIFACT

This section presents the implementation context, the structure of the formative artifact, and the analysis of the data generated during its demonstration through the pilot course. The section is structured around three dimensions: (i) the institutional and interactional conditions that guided the selection of the site and the implementation of the proposal; (ii) the pedagogical and methodological



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design of the artifact, based on the assumptions of symbolic interactionism; and (iii) the empirical evidence derived from participant observation, participant-generated written materials, and the field journal, interpreted in light of the theoretical categories employed. The aim is to clarify the relationship between the conceptual framework, the design choices, and the identity reorganization processes observed throughout the sessions.

Demonstration context and location selection

The selection of the demonstration site was treated as an element of the artifact's design, considering that the environment influences relevant audiences, feedback, and definitions of the situation. Initially, an institutional partnership was pursued in Curitiba/PR, but no formal agreement was established. With the support of the Maria da Penha Patrol/PMPR, the search was extended to São José dos Pinhais/PR. A shelter that was visited declined to participate in the proposal and expressed reservations about the scope of women's entrepreneurship, associating it with handicrafts. Subsequently, a partnership was established with the NGO Respeito Não Tem Cor, an organization working with Black women, refugees, and women experiencing domestic violence, offering educational activities, psychological support, and legal guidance. The NGO already maintained a partnership with the PMPR and held weekly meetings. The researchers began attending group meetings as participant observers to build rapport and subsequently agreed on four sessions for the course demonstration.

Structure of the artifact Mirror of the Soul

The technical-technological product is entitled *Mirror of the Soul: a formative methodology for the reorganization of identity verification processes toward entrepreneurial agency in women experiencing domestic violence*, and



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was developed between March and April 2025. The course was conducted with a group with participation ranging from eight to twelve women throughout the sessions.

The artifact is organized into four in-person sessions including writing activities, guided discussions, recognition dynamics, and projection exercises. Materials included slides and physical materials (paper, pens, and cutouts), treated as expressive resources and supports for meaning-making.

The course design articulates symbolic interactionist categories oriented toward the reorganization of identity verification processes:

a) Reflexive self (I/Me): activities such as “who I say I am” and personal records to make internalized expectations and alternative responses visible (Mead, 1967).

b) Definition of the situation: exercises identifying labels and reinterpreting episodes to shift frames and expand possible interpretations (Blumer, 1982).

c) Role-taking: dynamics experimenting with positions such as active participant, capable woman, and emerging entrepreneur, enabling rehearsal of alternative self-definitions (Mead, 1967; Strauss, 1985).

d) Impression management and protected backstage: interaction rules and confidential environments allowing rehearsal of self-presentations and feedback processes relevant to identity verification (Goffman, 1985).

e) Trajectory and identity work: progression of meetings as a sequence of meaning revision, strengthening recognition, and construction of biographical continuity (Strauss, 1985).

Evidence by Session and Design Implications

Session 1 – Identity and self-reflection



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Writing exercises focused on self-definition and the naming of personal characteristics were proposed. Difficulty in positive self-attribution was observed, along with silence and emotional responses among some participants. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, this reaction may be interpreted as an indication of restricted arenas for identity verification and limited availability for public claims of competence (Mead, 1967; Stets; Burke, 2000). As a design implication, it was identified that the sequence should begin with less direct activities, such as brief narratives and timeline exercises, and establish short cycles of confirmatory feedback prior to explicit questions about “who am I.”

Session 2 – Entrepreneurship and autonomy

Entrepreneurship was addressed as a pathway to economic autonomy, focusing on the identification of skills, interests, and initial steps. Greater participation was observed in activities grounded in personal experience than in lecture-style segments. The findings suggest that interaction oriented toward role-taking and feedback generates more material for identity work and identity verification than passive content reception (Blumer, 1982; Strauss, 1985). As a design implication, reducing lecture time and expanding dialogical and competency-recognition devices is recommended.

Session 3 – Social comparison and recognition

Comparison among participants was explicitly addressed. Initially, references to aesthetic aspects predominated, followed by deeper elaboration when timeline activities focused on achievements and learning experiences were introduced. Group sharing functioned as an interactional arena for self-presentation and peer recognition. As a design implication, it is recommended to orient comparison toward competencies, decisions, and episodes of action,



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creating cumulative records of achievements that support identity verification processes.

Session 4 – Narratives of overcoming and projection

Audiovisual materials were used to present the experiences of women who rebuilt their trajectories through work and entrepreneurship, alongside explanations about the Maria da Penha Law and different forms of violence. The videos functioned as symbolic models and expanded repertoires of possible roles (Strauss, 1985; Goffman, 1985). The exercise of writing a letter to oneself articulated past, present, and future projections, functioning as a record of biographical continuity, goal setting, and support for identity verification processes.

Pilot summary

vidence from the pilot implementation indicates that identity reorganization occurs through sequences that combine welcoming practices, role rehearsal, feedback, written records, and the expansion of audiences. Direct questions about identity tend to generate richer material when preceded by narrative activities and rituals that foster relational safety and support identity verification processes.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study was grounded in the thesis defended by Amaral (2023) that financial dependence, frequently mentioned by women experiencing violence as a justification for remaining with the abusive partner, may operate as the surface expression of identity-related processes. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, identity is treated as a relational process verified in interaction (Mead, 1967; Blumer, 1982; Goffman, 1985; Strauss, 1985; Stets; Burke, 2000). The analysis argues that domestic violence contributes to the disorganization of



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identity verification processes and to the restriction of contexts of confirmation through the monopolization of the definition of the situation, the use of depreciative labels, and the limitation of alternative role-taking.

Based on this perspective, the formative artifact *Espelho d'Alma* was designed and demonstrated following the Design Science Research approach (Peffer et al., 2007). The demonstration suggests that welcoming practices, narrative exercises, and the use of material artifacts (such as timelines and letters to oneself) function as devices for identity work, enabling micro-sequences of rehearsal–feedback–recognition. Through these sequences, shifts were observed in self-language and in participants' willingness to assume roles associated with competence and action.

From a methodological standpoint, there is alignment between the theoretical framework and the artifact's design, as symbolic interactionist categories were translated into activities and analyzed through participant observation, field notes, and participant-generated written materials. Limitations and needs for adjustment were also identified, including low participation during lecture-style segments, the need for mediator preparation to handle emotional intensity, and logistical aspects related to the use of media and materials. These elements were incorporated into a proposal for refining the artifact.

As contributions, the study presents: (a) a formative artifact with a replicable methodological script grounded in symbolic interactionism; (b) a process-oriented evaluation logic based on the definition of the situation, roles, audiences, and artifacts; and (c) evidence that intentionally designed interactional arrangements can support the reorganization of identity verification processes toward economic and entrepreneurial agency. The limitations relate to the duration of the course, the number of participants, and intermittent attendance—factors that restrict the stabilization of meanings over time. Future developments



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include testing the artifact in longer series, integrating periodic measurements, and exploring adaptations for other institutional contexts.

The findings suggest that economic autonomy requires interactional conditions for identity verification, and that formative methodologies can operate as public technologies to support this process.

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