

Gender Development of Women Construction Entrepreneurs: The Role of Family as an Agent of Socially Construct

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Abstract

Construction industry traditionally is a male dominated activity. As we move into the twenty-first century, women involvement in construction industry increased from time to time. Starting business in a male dominated industry is a very challenging task for women entrepreneurs. The subject of this study is focusing on the application of the perspectives of third group of Feminist Theory (FT) on women entrepreneur in construction industry. This study will highlight family as an agent of gender socially construct. The research framework is proposed to explore i) how family construct gender of women construction entrepreneurs, and ii) what is the gender of women construction entrepreneurs.

Keywords

Feminist Theory, socially construct, gender and women construction entrepreneurs.

1. Introduction

Background of Study

Women play important roles in forming resources that is significant in achieving the national development agenda. According to Eighth Malaysia Plan, during the Seventh Plan period, women continue to make significant contributions in various fields of national development through greater participation in the economy. In Malaysia, it has been recorded that the number of women involvement in business increased about 26.9 percent in five year's period, that is from 11.1 percent in the year 1990 to 38 percent in the early 1996 (Statics Department Malaysia, 1991). According to Abdullah (1999), one of the important factors contributing to this is the increasing involvement of women in manufacturing and services sector. Contemporary women have been found to be keen to move away from sectors such as education, health care and office work into those traditionally dominated by men (Karim, 1997).

Mohamed and Syarisa (n.d.) acknowledge that women are becoming a very important economic group and therefore more efforts are needed to nurture them in taking up entrepreneurship. Notwithstanding the increasing importance and numbers of women entrepreneurs, few studies have been focused on or included women in their research sample (Baker and Aldrich), 1997) and data segregation on their performance are rather scarce and difficult to obtain. A relatively small number of studies have investigated the factors influencing entrepreneurial performance exclusively among women (Brush and Hisrich, 1991).

In Malaysia, many women entrepreneur associations have been established, such as The Federation of Women Entrepreneurs Association Malaysia (FEM)1996, National Association of Women Entrepreneur of Malaysia (NAWEM)1994, Persatuan Usahawan Wanita Bumiputera (USAHANITA), the Women`s Wing of the Malay Chamber of Commerce Malaysia of the State of Selangor 1974, and so on in order to promote and encourage more Malaysian women to become entrepreneurs, besides creating a platform for networking among them.

It is clear that the Malaysian government has been actively involved and concerned about women entrepreneurship development in the last decade. This is to ensure that the women entrepreneurs are not left out from the process of national and economic development, particularly in important sectors such as information and communications technology (ICT) and bio-technology, in order for the country to successfully realize Vision 2020. (Vision 2020).

There is a perception that construction industry is for men and that women are not entrepreneurial. (Gale, 1991-1992, Gale and Susan, 1995) and (Chris, Smith-Hunter, 2006). Based on findings by Vervey (2007), she found that new challenges, need for achievement and success, love for construction and building, and preference for independence are among the top factors influencing women`s involvement in construction. Other factors such as motivation by family members, dissatisfaction with previous workplace, unemployment and inability to obtain salaried positions have been given low ranking by her respondents. The involvement of women in construction has increased from time to time, and women have started holding important position in the company Vervey (2007) and (Statics Department Malaysia, 1991).

Gender is a social construct. Whereas sex is the term used to indicate biological difference, gender is the term used to indicate psychological, social and cultural difference. This is a practice-based theory according to which sexuality is socially constructed, as are the differences (other than biological) between men and women. Goffman (1977, p. 305) speaks of a “genderism” as “a sex-class linked individual behavioral practice” — a practice linked to gender as class. Gender identity thus emerges from rearing patterns, and is not determined by the hormones. Gender is determined by social practice, and its patterns are specifically social. Social structure is not preordained but is historically composed, thus femininity and masculinity should be seen as historically mutable. According to Harding (1986), the concept of gender applies at different levels. It is: (1) a dimension of personal identity, a psychic process of experiencing self; (2) an element in social order, the foundation of social institutions such as kinship, sexuality, the distribution of work, politics, culture; and (3) a cultural symbol which can be variously interpreted, the basis for normative dichotomies.

The agent of socialization process is “the socials”, such as: family, play, peer & schooling, religious training, and the mass media, to name a few (Andersen and Taylor, 2008). It is said before that family is the primary influence on gender role development in early years of life (Santrock1994; Miller & Lane in Berryman-Fink, Ballard-Reisch, & Newman1993; Kaplan in Witt, 1997).

Parents encourage children to participate in sex-typed activities, such as playing with dolls for girls and playing with trucks for boys (Eccles, Jacobs, & Harold in Witt, 1997). Parents also use punishment, by expressing disapproval, if children intent to break the norms of gender roles, such as when a boy plays with a dolls house (Gleitman, Friedlund & Reisberg, 2000, p. 500) and boys are usually discouraged from showing emotions (Morris, 1988, p. 366). In viewing the above discussion, the objective of this study is to explore on the role of family as an agent of Gender Socially Construct of women construction entrepreneurs. At the end of this paper, we will propose a theoretical framework on how family determine gender among women construction entrepreneurs

2. Theoretical Background

Following Harding (1987), feminist theory (FT) could be classified into three groups. In the first group, men and women are seen as essentially similar, in the second group they are seen as essentially different, and in the third group, similarities and differences are seen as socially constructed.

The first group, in which liberal feminist theory and feminist empiricism belong, sees men and women as essentially similar. It is inspired by liberal political theory, i.e., a human is defined by his/her ability to think rationally. Men and women are seen as equally able and any subordination of women must depend on discrimination or on structural barriers, as for example, unequal access to education. Such barriers can be partly or totally eliminated. This view has been criticized for having an unstated male norm. It does not question bureaucracy, leadership, and so on, but advises women to adapt to the existing order in society (Calás & Smircich, 1996).

In the second group in which social feminist theory, psychoanalytical feminist theory, or radical feminist theory belong, men and women are seen to be, or have become, essentially different. Feminine traits are perceived as benefits rather than as drawbacks and as resources to be used constructively (Chodorow, 1988; Gilligan, 1982). Management research within this tradition has studied organizations that have attempted to remove the corporate ladder and build flat organizations, having shared leadership and consensus-oriented decision making (Iannello, 1992). This view also does not question the male norm; it merely provides an alternative or a complementary norm. Constructing men and women as different means that one understands “man” and “woman” to be essential, unitary (and different) concepts, which limit the repertoire of both sexes.

Social constructionist and poststructuralist feminist theory belong to the third group. This group is not concerned with what men or women are but with how masculinity and femininity is constructed and what effects this construction has on the social order.

Gender refers to what is regarded as masculine or feminine and is independent of a person’s biological sex. Gender is a result of upbringing and social interaction, and it varies according to time and place. Gender is something that is “done,” “accomplished,” or “performed” rather than something that “is.” Any seeming stability depends on the recreation or repetitive performance of gender (Butler, 1990, 1993). One is not free to perform gender in anyway one chooses. Each culture’s norms restrain proper gender behavior, and these norms have social effects. Social constructionist feminist work investigates and challenges such norms or such notions about gender, which are taken for granted.

When gender—not sex—is in focus, this means that the study object goes beyond men and women. Professions, for example, are gendered, and so is entrepreneurship, as will be demonstrated later. The study object of this article is neither men nor women, but constructions of gender in research articles about women’s entrepreneurship.

3. The Role of Family on Gender Socially Construct

Every child moves through childhood into adolescence, and he/she is exposed to many elements that may influence his/her attitudes and behaviors and it’s reflected in his/her gender roles. These attitudes and behaviors are generally learned first in the home and are then reinforced by the child's peers, school experience, and television viewing, (Witt, 1997).

For most children, families are responsible for their initial socialization process. In other words, families have a major and long-lasting effect on children's lives. The home is the first environment of learning for the child, and where the acquisition of knowledge, competencies, attitudes, and values begins (Berk, 2000).

The child is actively involved in the socialization process, which is a two-way interaction wherein each person influences the other. Parents and children engage in reciprocal interaction, with children both responding to and eliciting behavior (Witt, 1997). Families influence children's development in direct and indirect ways. Individually, parents, siblings, and extended family members can have an influence on children. However, this influence cannot be termed an individual influence because it occurs in the context of family (Bowes & Watson, 1999).

In this paper, the nature of attachment relationships during the childhood had been explored and the way in which style of parenting affect development had been examined. Based on a literature review, according to Patterson,(2008) there are few measures on family contextual factors such as, family types, parenting styles and sibling relationships.

4. Family Types

Families have changed, especially in the latter half of the 20th century, and most of those changes have either stabilized at a high level or are continuing in the same direction (Kamerman, Neuman, Waldfogel and Jeanne, 2003). Children's growing competence and development is largely influenced by family life and family relationships. The well-being of children continues to depend on the quality of family interactions. Children today are reared in a variety of households and different family systems. In this study, a number of these different families are examined. Family type plays an integral role in children's development. Moreover, various family theories outline the interactions that occur among family members (Andersen & Taylor, 2008). There are many types of family that are:-

1. "Only Child" Families
2. Large Families
3. Single-parent Families
4. Single Divorced Parent Families
5. Never-married Single Parent Families
6. Blended Families
7. Gay- and Lesbian-parent Families
8. Adoptive Families
9. Grandparent Reared Families

5. Parenting Styles

Parents play a crucial role in fostering their child's growth and development. Many writers have noted that the broad pattern of parenting is important in predicting the well-being of the child. Parents may differ in how they try to control or socialize their children and the extent to which they do so. The overall pattern of interactions, rather than one single act, shapes a child's behavior. Parents develop various interaction styles with their children. Research has identified a typology of four parenting styles (i.e., authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved), each of which influences how the child develops (Berk, 2000). These varying parenting styles significantly influence not only how a child develops and socializes, but also how they learn. These different styles dictate how children adapt to teaching approaches and methods in schools, and how they interact in the classroom. The types of parenting styles are authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and uninvolved.

6. Sibling Relationships

Sibling relationships play an important role, not only in the family life, but also by influencing the way the family functions within society (Cicirelli, 1994).

Sibling relationships within the family cannot simply be put down to birth order, gender, number of siblings, and spacing of siblings. Children's personalities, social circumstances, and the relationships between child and parent also need to be considered (Dunn, 1984). However, previous studies can help us to understand that "the sex and personality of the firstborn is more likely to influence the later born children in a direct way than vice versa" (Dunn, 1984). Sibling relationship can be measured in terms of birth Order, Gender, number of Siblings, Spacing of Children

Based on the above discussion, the framework on the role of family in gender development has been proposed.

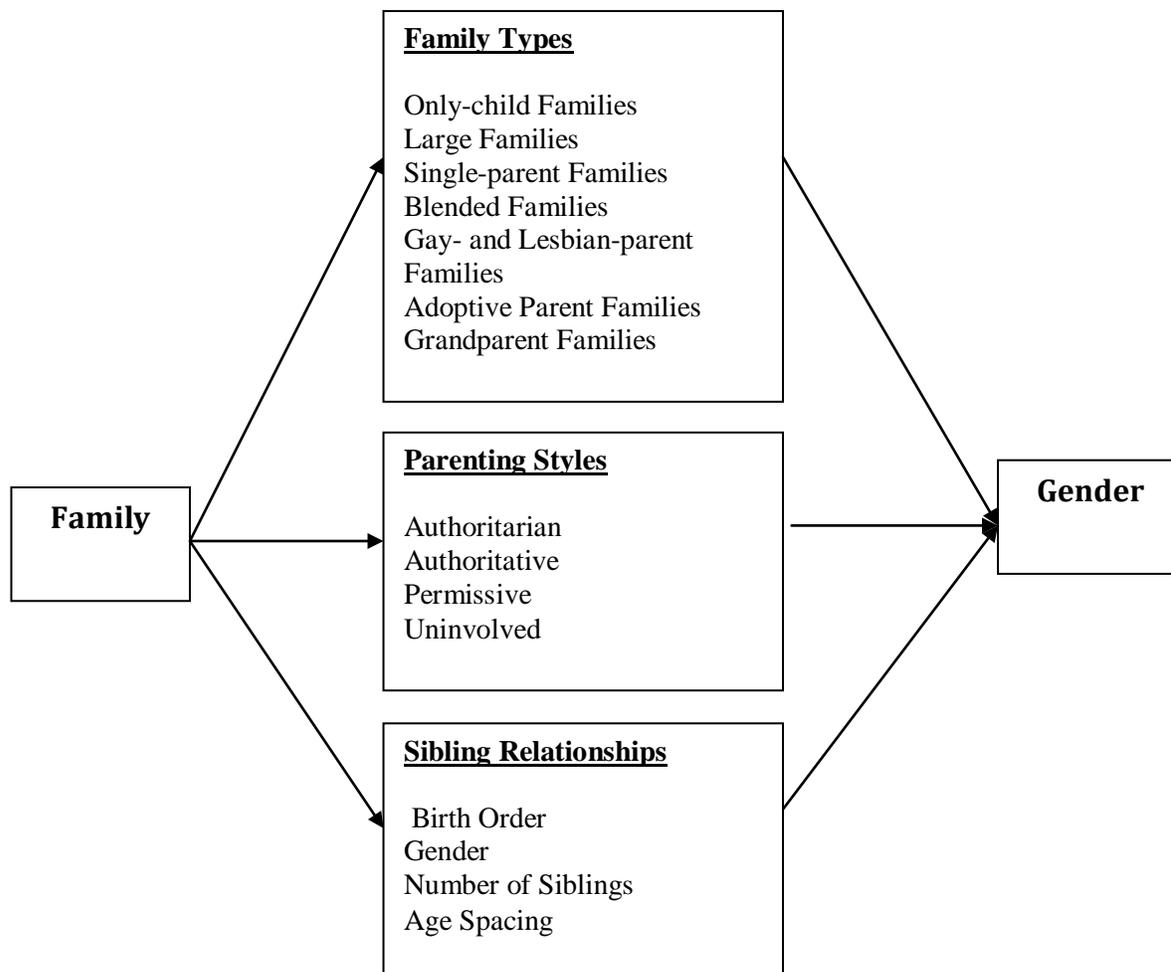


Figure 1: Proposed Framework on the Influence of the Family on Gender Development of Women Entrepreneur.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper came up with the proposed framework on the influence of the family on gender development of women entrepreneur through elements of measuring the family. The roles of family in influencing gender of women entrepreneur can be divided into three elements, which are family types, parenting styles and sibling relationships. The family types included only-child families, large families, single-parent families, blended families, gay- and lesbian-parent families, adoptive parent families, and grandparent families. The styles of parenting also can be differentiated into four major styles, which are authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved. Lastly, the sibling relationships that measure about the birth order, gender, number of siblings, and age spacing. This three elements help in measuring the gender development of women entrepreneur.

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