

## **GENDER DEVELOPMENT: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF FAMILY FROM SOCIAL FEMINIST THEORY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present research is anchored on the third-wave feminism theory, views gender as a social construct, the formation of gender of women entrepreneurs as being the result of the socialization process of children. The key feature of the present work is an investigation into the role of family as a socially constructed agent of gender among women entrepreneurs. The present study provides a critical review of family types, parenting styles, and sibling relationships that may have influenced the gender identity of women entrepreneurs during their childhood. Finally, the researchers propose a framework of the role of family on gender development.

### **KEYWORDS**

Gender, development, family treatment, feminist theory, social constructs, and women construction entrepreneurs.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Numerous issues on entrepreneurship among women raised in the 1980s warrant further investigation. However, the 1990s brought about a more urgent call for a feminist theory of entrepreneurship (Stevenson 1990; Hurley 1991). Feminism theory, a specific area of social theory, addresses issues of political, economic, and social rights of gender. This theoretical approach also provides a rich tradition of analyzing gender, making it useful for researching the economic activity of women and men (Greer; Greene 2003). (Brush 1992) reviews the state of the field and offers an “integrative” approach that allows for the consideration of a woman’s professional and family life. This perspective focuses on woman business owners as embedded in an environment of networked professional, familial, and societal relationships.

Feminist theory is an extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical discourse that aims to understand the nature of gender inequality. It examines the social roles, life experiences, and feminist politics of women in a variety of fields, such as anthropology and sociology, psychoanalysis, economics, literary criticism, and philosophy (Miller 1987; Kaplan 1991). According to Harding (1987), feminist theory can 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 way people behave and think is the final product of socialization. From the moment an individual is born, he or she is molded into the being the society wants him or her to be (Andersen; Taylor 2008, 83). Through socialization, people learn both what is appropriate and what is improper for both genders (Crespi 2003).

As children move from childhood into adolescence, various factors influence their attitudes, behaviors, and characters in relation to their gender roles. These factors include the child’s peers, school experiences, and television viewing (Witt 1997). Media such as television are able to construct feminine identity in a postmodern culture (Damean 2006). According to (Maxwell 2002) and (Rose; Rudolph 2006), the peers of a child may influence his or her emotional and behavioral development. However, the strongest influence on gender role development seems to occur within the family setting, with parents passing on to their children their own beliefs, both overtly and covertly (Witt 1997).

The present study focuses on the family as an agent of socially constructed gender. Previous studies state that the family is the primary influence on gender-role development in early years of life (Santrock 1994; Miller 1987; Berryman-Fink 1993; Kaplan 1991; Witt 1997; Berk 2000). Family has been proven to play an important role in a variety of fields, such as education (Merrill 2009), sexuality (Daring; Hicks, 1982), sports (Lauer; Gould; Roman; Pierce 2010), and even food intake and selection, in the child's development (Salvy; Elmo; Nitecki; Kluczynski; Roemmich 2011).

According to (Witt 1997), children regularly learn to adopt gender roles that are not always fair to either gender. A child's earliest exposure to what it means to be male or female comes from parents (Lauer; Lauer 1994; Santrock 1994; Kaplan 1991). From their infancies, parents treat their sons and daughters differently, dressing them in gender-specific colors, giving them gender-differentiated toys, and expecting different behavior from boys and girls (Thorne 1993). A study by (Rubin; Provenzano; Luria 1974) suggests that parents begin to have different expectations of sons and daughters as early as 24 hours after they are born.

According to (Crespi 2003), the attitudes of family and parents mediate traditional gender roles. According to the same study, the concept of gender socialization can be operationalized as three distinct forms of transmission from parents to children: personal attitude, resources (self-esteem, age, and status), and family life (housework gender division).

Looking at the significant role of parents on the child development, we focus on developing measures to identify the role of family as an agent of socially constructed gender of women entrepreneurs. The details on how to measure the family influence on gender development have been observed in order to construct a gender development framework.

## **THE ROLE OF FAMILY ON SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED GENDER**

As children move through childhood into adolescence, they are exposed to many elements that may influence their attitudes and behaviors, which are then reflected in their gender roles. These attitudes and behaviors are generally first learned at 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; it is 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 where 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 influence children. However, this influence cannot be termed an individual influence because it occurs in the context of family (Bowes; Watson 1999). (Collin; Maccoby; Steinberg; Hetherington; Bornstein 2000) and (Parke; Buriel 2006) argue that the parent-child relationship emerges from different types of environment. (Patterson 2008, 440) identifies several measures on family contextual factors such as family types, parenting styles, and sibling relationships.

## **FAMILY TYPES**

Families have changed, especially in the latter half of the 20th century, and most of the changes either have stabilized at a high level or are continuing in similar directions (Kamerman; Neuman; Waldfogel; Jeanne 2003). The growing competence and development of children are 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. Various family theories outline the interactions that occur among family members (Andersen & Taylor, 2008). Examples of family types are female-headed households, male-headed households, married-couple families, stepfamilies, and gay and lesbian households (Andersen; Taylor 2008, 403).

### **“Only Child” Families**

Many couples are now choosing to have only one child. Literature suggests that an “only child” is often viewed as being spoiled, selfish, lonely, and maladjusted. However, research does not agree with this negative view. Children

in one-child families appear to be bright and successful, self-confident, self-reliant, resourceful, and popular with other children (Patterson 2008, 346). According to (Berk 1996), only children have somewhat closer relationships with parents, who exert more pressure for mastery and accomplishment.

### **Large Families**

Children of large families obviously experience different conditions from those in smaller or one-child families. Children in larger families have the advantage of having relationships with siblings. These relationships and interactions give them the opportunity to experience companionship, emotional support, and assistance in their growing-up years. Children in large families often experience degrees of rivalry, and may need to fight for the attention of their parents. The positive interactions that occur between siblings contribute to perspective taking, moral maturity, and competence in relating to other children (Berk 2000).

### **Single-parent Families**

One-parent families have become more common in recent years. A number of varieties of one-parent families exist: those resulting from divorce, parents who never married, and widow/widowers. In single-parent families, the absentee parent (i.e., the parent who does not have custody of the child) may have little or no involvement, or may be highly involved in the child's life (Berk 2000). In studying children reared by unmarried mothers and children of same-aged married couples, Weinraub et al. find that 8- to 13- year-old children from single- and two-parent families are equally well adjusted when levels of family stress are low (Patterson 2008, 446).

### **Single Divorced-parent Families**

Most single-parent families are headed by single divorced female parents. "The assumption has been made that the trauma from divorce is likely to result in poorly socialized, cognitively deficient children who experience poor parent-child relationships" (Hammer; Turnover 1990, 194). This may be the case in many situations; however, no relationship can be generalized. "Research has also been undertaken on healthy single-parent families where it was found, in general, that the physical and mental health of the children appeared to be good" (Hammer; Turnover 1990, 194).

Studies suggest that children living with their mothers are healthier than those living with their fathers. Most children show improvement in adjusting two years after their parents divorce. However, for a few, emotional distress and declines in school achievement persist (Berk, 2000; Hammer; Turnover, 1990).

### **Never-married Single-parent Families**

A cultural shift toward later marriage is believed to have contributed to a rise in never-married mothers. "It has been thought that children in these kinds of families are shielded from marital strife, children of never-married mothers show slightly better academic performance and emotional adjustments than do children of divorced or remarried mothers. But they do not do as well as children in first marriage families compared with children of two parent reared families" (Berk 2000, 577).

Compared with children of two-parent families, single-parent children may receive less attention and may experience difficulty in interacting with other children, inadequacy in school performance, and behaviors associated with the lack of a male parental influence (Berk 2000; Hammer; Turnover 1990).

### **Blended Families**

A blended family is one in which a parent brings with them children from a previous marriage. "For some children, this expanded family network is a positive turn of events that brings with it greater adult attention. But for most, it presents difficult adjustments" (Berk 2000, 581). Clearly, many difficulties arise in accepting a stepparent into the family, especially one who may hold child-rearing practices that differ from those to which the child is accustomed. Research has found that children of remarriages are likely to experience difficulty in accepting the new setup.

This difficulty extends from some children having to deal with the loss of a primary parent, in addition to accepting a new one. Other feelings may include divided loyalties, confusion in terms of belonging, confusion because of membership in two households, and unreasonable expectations because of the adjustment process. In other words, how well children adapt is related to the overall functioning quality of the family (Berk, 2000; Hammer; Turnover 1990; Papalia; Olds 1995).

### **Gay- and Lesbian-parent Families**

Currently, a larger percentage of the homosexual population is rearing children. The actual number of homosexual or gay parents is not known. Families headed by either a single homosexual or homosexual couples are very similar to those headed by heterosexuals. "Gay and lesbian parents are committed to and effective at the parental role. Some research indicates that gay fathers are more consistent in setting limits and more responsive to their children's needs than are heterosexual fathers" (Berk 2000, 576).

In lesbian families, the quality of mother-child interaction is as positive as in heterosexual families. Children of lesbian mothers regard their mothers' partners as highly as they do their own parents. "Overall, children of homosexuals can be distinguished from other children only by issues related to living in a non-supportive society. A significant concern among gay and lesbian parents is that their children will be stigmatized by their parent's sexual orientation" (Berk 2000, 577).

### **Adoptive Families**

A number of different reasons exist for the emergence of adoptive-parent families. Aside from partners being infertile, situations wherein parents do not want to risk passing on a genetic disorder, or wherein the parents may be older or unmarried but want a family may also arise. In Australia, limited numbers of healthy babies are available for adoption; thus, more people are adopting from foreign countries. Adoptive families cannot be categorized because they are all very highly diverse, and each family can face a multitude of challenges. "Different heredity means that adoptive parents and children are less alike in intelligence and personality than are biological relatives resemblances that can contribute to family harmony" (Berk 2000, 575).

All adopted children, whether born in a foreign country or in the country of their adoptive parents, experience some degree of emotional stress as adolescents. Their feelings include those of abandonment and not knowing their exact origins. "Adoption is a satisfying family alternative for most parents and children who experience it. The outcomes are usually good because of careful pairing of children with parents and guidance provided to adoptive families" (Berk 2000, 576).

### **Grandparent-reared Families**

The number of grandparents rearing grandchildren has increased over the past decade. "Usually, grandparents step in because substance abuse, emotional problems, or physical illness prevents the child's parents, most often the mother, from engaging in competent child rearing" (Berk 2000, 584).

This situation can cause significant emotional distress for both the child adjusting to a new environment and the grandparents who have been suddenly placed in a childrearing situation. "Previous family experiences have left their mark, in the form of high rates of learning difficulties, depression, and anti-social behavior" (Berk 2000, 584). Children in this environment usually receive a great amount of love; they also experience the needed parental guidance (Berk 2000).

## **PARENTING STYLES**

Parents play a crucial role in fostering their child's growth and development. Parents may differ in how they attempt to control or socialize their children, as well in 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 four typology of parenting styles that influence how the child develops: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved, and (Berk 2000). These parenting styles significantly influence not only

how children develop and socialize, but also how they learn. These different styles dictate how children adapt to teaching approaches and methods in schools, as well as how they interact in the classroom.

### **Authoritarian**

This approach is highly controlling in its use of authority and places a high value on conformity. “These parents provide well-ordered and structured environments with clearly stated rules” (Parlins 1999). The parent pours the “appropriate” information into the child, who is considered as an “empty vessel.” As a result, they engage in very little give and take with children, who are unquestioning in their manner. “It was found that children of authoritarian parents tend to lack social competence, have lower self-esteem, are anxious and rarely take initiative in activities” (Goodman; Gurian 1999).

In an authoritarian household, boys show high rates of anger and defiance, whereas girls are dependent and lack an adventurous spirit. This style is inconsistent in a rapidly changing society that values choice and innovation. Most children of authoritarian parents do not feel as if they have a close relationship with their parents (Berk 2000; Parlins 1999; Dinwiddie 1995; Goodman; Gurian 1999; Huxley 2001).

### **Authoritative**

The authoritative style is both demanding and responsive. “Parents retain their authority, stay in control and expect mature behavior from their children” (Goodman; Gurian 1999). Authoritative parents are assertive, but are not intrusive and restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive, rather than punitive.

Authoritative parents allow their child sufficient freedom of expression to enable him or her to develop a sense of independence. Researchers have found that the most well adjusted children, particularly in terms of social competence, grow up having authoritative parents. “Children were seen to have higher self-esteem, social and moral maturity, involvement in school learning, self control and be less gender typed” (Berk 2000, 563; Berk 2000; Parlins 1999; Dinwiddie 1995; Goodman; Gurian 1999; Huxley 2001).

### **Permissive**

Children reared in this style are encouraged to think for themselves, to discard inhibitions, and to reject conformity. These parents are warm and accepting; however, they are mainly concerned with not stifling their child’s creativity. These parents are highly attuned to their child’s developmental and emotional needs; however, they have difficulty setting firm limits. “Permissive parents allow children to make many of their own decisions at an age when they are not yet capable of doing so” (Berk, 2000, 564).

Different studies have found that children of permissive parents tend to be very immature, have difficulty controlling their impulses, and are reluctant to accept responsibility. They tend to be disobedient, rebellious, and show less persistence at tasks in preschool than children of parents who exert more control (Berk 2000; Darling 1999; Dinwiddie 1995; Goodman; Gurian 1999; Huxley 2001). “The link between permissive parenting and dependent, non-achieving behavior was especially strong for boys” (Berk 2000, 564).

### **Uninvolved**

Uninvolved parents are generally unresponsive and undemanding. They show little commitment to providing care for their children. They likewise provide only the bare essentials to their children (Berk 2000). “In extreme cases, this parenting style might entail neglect and rejection” (Goodman; Gurian 1999).

Often, these parents are emotionally detached and depressed, and have little time and energy to spare for their children. They may respond to a child’s demands for easily accessible objects; however, any efforts that involve long-term goals, such as establishing and enforcing rules regarding homework and acceptable social behavior, are weak and fleeting. Different bodies of literature suggest the following as signs of uninvolved parenting: deficits in attachment, cognition, play, emotion, and social skills. These parents may also display aggressive and acting-out behavior (Berk 2000; Darling 1999; Goodman; Gurian 1999).

In response to these different parenting styles, one should be aware that parenting is not a one-sided activity. It is a dynamic, interactive situation, and children have their own styles or temperaments. This, in turn, affects the parenting styles and elicits different responses. “Obviously, parents don’t fit neatly into the parent style categories.

Most parents use a combination of styles. However, one style usually predominates” (Goodman; Gurian 1999).

## **SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS**

Sibling relationships play an important role in a child’s development, not only in the family life, but also by influencing the way the family functions within the 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). Previous studies 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).

### **Siblings**

Sibling relationships differ from culture to culture. In some societies, siblings are identified by genealogical or biological criteria, where siblings share two biological parents and half-siblings share one. They may also be identified by legal criteria, such as being stepsiblings or adoptive siblings (Cicirelli 1994). In other societies, siblings are defined differently, and these definitions can become complex.

### **Birth Order**

The order in which children are born was once believed to define what sort of characteristics the child would develop and how successful they are likely to become. Firstborn children are likely to exhibit the following behaviors: 1) imitate sounds and actions of the mother (Sutton-Smith 1982); 2) be influenced by parents (Dunn 1984); 3) hold more responsibility and leadership-type roles (Sutton-Smith 1982); 4) use status and bribery tactics (Sutton-Smith 1982); 5) are bossy and dominant (Sutton-Smith 1982); 6) become powerful members of society (Sutton-Smith 1982); 7) have increased behavioral or regressive problems (Dunn & Kendrick 1982)

However, later-born children are likely to exhibit the following behaviors: 1) often sulk, whine, plead, cry, and appeal to parents (Sutton-Smith 1982); 2) imitate older sibling(s) (Dunn 1984); 3) become weak members of society (Sutton-Smith 1982); 4) are influenced by the sex and personality of the firstborn sibling (Dunn 1984)

Although some of these observations become apparent in some first- and later-born children, one cannot generalize children’s abilities based on their order of birth. No empirical evidence supports such statements, and these statements are far too simple (Dunn 1984). However, birth order does provide “different opportunities, such as availability of family resources, availability of parental time, energy, and attention, quality of the relationship with parents, and influence on younger siblings” (Cicirelli 1994).

Generally, older siblings have considerable influence on cognitive, social, and emotional development of their younger siblings. They may take on the role as teacher, counselor, and confidant, without there being any obligation to do so (Cicirelli 1994). In other societies, the older brother takes the lead status in the family, followed by the oldest sister. Younger siblings are taught to respect and obey their older siblings as they would their parents. “In many cases the older sister has an important mediating role between the older brother and the younger siblings when inevitable conflicts develop” (Cicirelli 1994).

**Table 1.** *Definitions of Siblings (Cicirelli 1994)*

<b>Culture</b>	<b>Identified as Siblings</b>
Marquesas	Full biological siblings
Pukapuka of the Cook Islands	Children of the biological siblings (i.e., first-cousins)
Malo of New Hebrides	Cousins, parents, and grandparents of same sex
Abaluyin of Kenya	Children who are fostered in the same household

## **Gender**

The relationships between sisters often appear to be the closest. Brother-sister relationships are positioned in between in terms of closeness, with brother-brother relationships being the least close (Adams 1968; Cicirelli 1982).

Sisters are more likely to take on caretaking roles and maintain communication between the rest of the family and the brother(s). Sisters may also act as counselors for their brother(s), as well as motivators. In other societies, “the brother-sister relationship is of most importance in marital arrangements, and the brother-brother relationship in social and economical activities” (Cicirelli 1994).

Sisters and brothers are regarded as complementary, with brothers being the protectors of their sisters and the sisters being the “spiritual mentors” of their brothers (Cicirelli 1994). “In New Guinea, sisters are valued over their wives with the feeling that men can replace their wives but not their sisters” (Cicirelli 1994).

## **Number of Siblings**

Most families have no more than three children. Factors such as the rising cost of rearing children, entry of women into the workforce, and availability of effective birth control methods have caused a decline in birth rate and have increased the rate of single children. However, some families are now larger because of the addition of half and stepsiblings (Cicirelli 1994).

According to (Berk 1991), “disciplinary practices become more authoritarian and punitive as family size increases and parents try to keep large numbers of youngsters in line.”

Within other societies, families are larger because more children are needed to work and “to help maintain daily family functioning and survival. The larger sibling group offers a greater support system for parents in their old age, as well as for the members of the sibling groups themselves” (Cicirelli 1994).

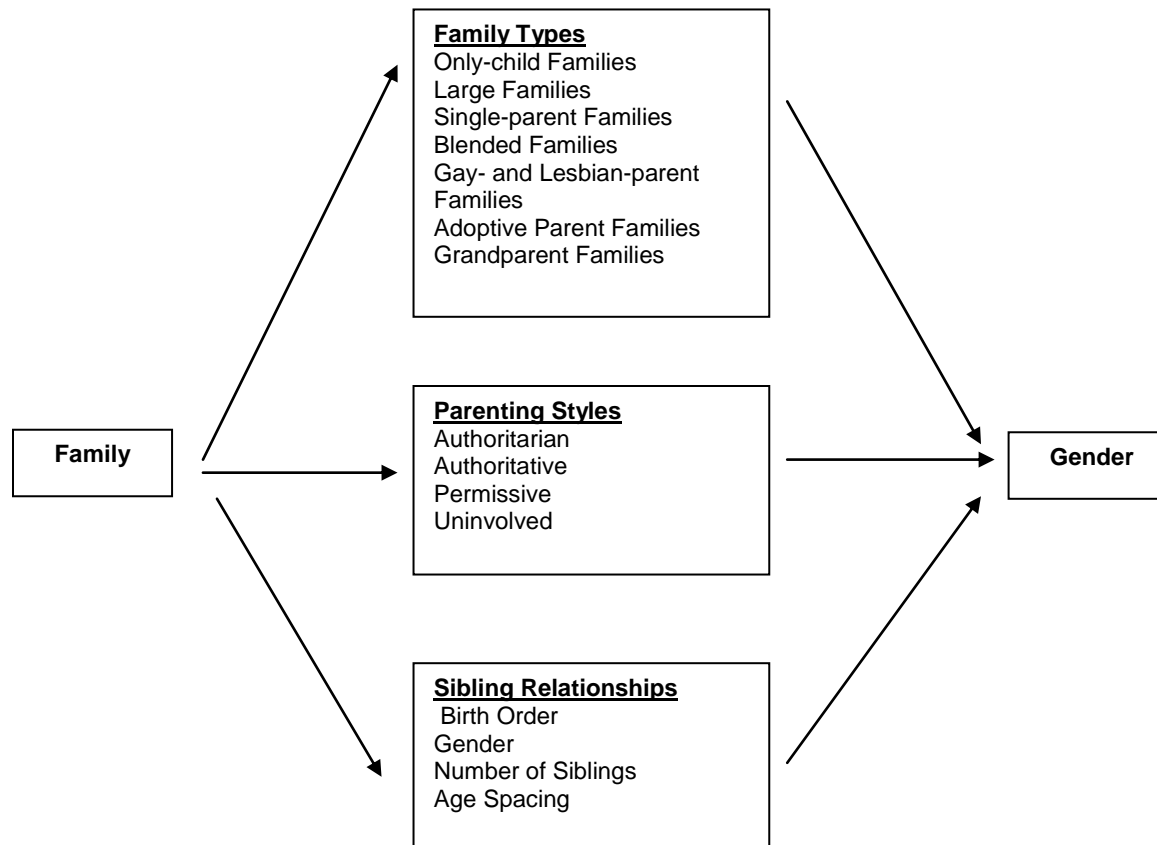
## **Spacing of Children**

Research reveals that an age gap of 2 to 4 years between siblings may be optimal for greater mental stimulation and for minimizing conflict (Dunn 1984). In addition, the closer siblings are in age, the greater their chance of sharing developmental events in similar ways (Bank; Kahn 1982). Spacing siblings further apart may provide parents with greater opportunity for career development and improvement of the family’s economic status (Dunn 1984).

However, “play, companionship and affection are shown whether the age gap is four years or only eleven months, so too are aggression, hostility and teasing” (Dunn 1984).

## PROPOSED FRAMEWORK ON THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY ON WOMEN GENDER DEVELOPMENT

Based on the third-wave feminist theory, which proposes that similarities and differences are socially constructed, the present study proposes a framework on the role of family on gender development. The use of variables and dimension is according to the above discussion.



*Figure 1. Propose Framework on the Influence of Family on Gender Development of women entrepreneur*



## CONCLUSION

The present work provides a proposed framework on the influence of family on gender development of women entrepreneurs. Based on extensive literature, the present study suggests that the roles of family in influencing gender of women entrepreneurs can be divided into three elements: family types, parenting styles, and sibling relationships. Family types include only-child, large, single-parent, blended, gay- and lesbian-parent, adoptive-parent, and grandparent-headed families. The styles of parenting can also be differentiated into four major styles: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved. Finally, sibling relationships are influenced by birth order, gender, number of siblings, and age spacing. These three elements can be used to measure the social impact of family on the gender development of women entrepreneurs. The present article helps to enhance knowledge on the contribution of social feminist theory in explaining gender of women entrepreneurs.

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