



Female Entrepreneurs: Social Feminist Insights For Overcoming The Barriers

Stream19: Gender Perspectives and Management

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Abstract

This paper examines the problems of Turkish female entrepreneurs and shows a different way in terms of social feminist perspective for overcoming the barriers. Results are presented from a qualitative research source. The qualitative research of problems and barriers of female entrepreneurs is conducted in Kocaeli and Adapazari which in the Eastern Marmara Region of Turkey. The aim is to criticise the barriers within social feminist insights.

Based on the analyses carried out, Turkish female entrepreneurs perceive themselves as domestic and conventional women, and they think that they can balance all functions on their own. Female entrepreneurs know the difficulties in the business world but they believe that they can solve all the problems by social feminist perspective in an integrated manner. They think that the other feminist theories cannot be adopted into Turkish culture.

Introduction

In Turkey, women play different roles when it comes to business start-ups and in the running of enterprises. More men than women start up on their own. There is otherwise a tendency for women to run businesses, which are on average smaller in size and less growth-oriented than those run by the other entrepreneurs. In addition, women business owners tend largely to be concentrated into a relatively small number of sectors (Aslesen, 1998), while men are more evenly spread across a wider range of sectors (Spilling and Jordfald, 1996; Ozen Kutanis and Bayraktaroglu, 2002b).

In Turkish society the place of women is more different than that in Europe. Therefore, the perceptions of Turkish people on women entrepreneurs is affected from this point of view (Ozen Kutanis and Bayraktaroglu, 2002a). In order to understand the different personal characteristics of women in Turkish society, gender segregation should be summarised in feminist literature. It directs attention to how women and men tend to work in different sectors, and why women are largely found at mean and lower levels, and why women have less experience in management positions before starting up their own business (Kuratko and Hodgetts, 1995). It likewise underlines how women, in many families, still have the main responsibility for childcare and housework while men function as the main supporters (Aslesen, 1998).

Entrepreneurship and Gender

Recent technological developments and economic expectancies supported the entrepreneurial culture. Thanks to these events, entrepreneurs have influential status in their societies. In many societies, positive and valuable properties were attributed to entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, the number of women entrepreneurs was getting larger rapidly (Sexton & Bowman-Upton, 1990; Cromie & Birley, 1992; Ljunggren & Kolvereid, 1996). Indeed, female movement started at the end of 19th century in Turkey (Sirman, 1989; Tekeli, 1998). Since 1980, female entrepreneurs have a privileged place in Turkish society, but there are a few researches about this topic academically (Celebi and Sallan, 1997).

The concept of entrepreneur has different explanations according to different writers (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Moore, 1990; Lee-Gosselin, 1990; Dhaliwal, 2000). Some of them consider the promoter of an enterprise as an entrepreneur, whilst the others include dependent entrepreneurs into the concept. From this point of view, two distinct kinds of entrepreneurs can be defined. One is "independent entrepreneur" who is founder and promoter of an enterprise primarily. The other is "dependent entrepreneur" (or hidden entrepreneur) who maintains an 'established enterprise' secondarily. Some women entrepreneurs maintain their enterprises that established by their husbands, fathers or brothers (Ram and Jones, 1997; Ram, 1992; Phizacklea, 1990). Some female entrepreneurs also choose family partnerships, which in essence constitute joint-ownership with their husbands (Barret et al., 1996).

Ljunggren and Kolvereid (1996) searched the gender differences in entrepreneurship grounded on three important ideas: (1) female entrepreneurs stress personal expectancies while male entrepreneurs stress economic expectancies, (2) they perceive higher degree of social support than men do during the business gestation process, and (3) female entrepreneurs were found to perceive themselves as possessing higher entrepreneurial abilities than their male counterparts.

Even in female-dominated industries, both female entrepreneurs' salaries and their organizational status lag significantly behind those of men, and that female entrepreneurs face more problems and are in an even more precarious position than their male colleagues (Cromie & Birley, 1992). They also claim that female entrepreneurs have also less developed, more closely-knit networks than men. They collected data on size, diversity, density, and effectiveness of the networks of 204 male entrepreneurs and 70 female entrepreneurs in Northern Ireland, in an attempt to discover whether the personal contact networks of women are significantly different from those of men. The results indicate that, female entrepreneurs are just as active in their networking as men, their personal contact networks are as diverse as those of men, and they are no more likely to consult family and friends than are men. They tend to rely heavily upon a male colleague as their prime contact but to revert to their own sex for the rest. In contrast, male entrepreneurs relied on members of their own sex for advice.

Goffe and Scase, (1985) identified four categories of female entrepreneurs, based on two factors. First factor is about their relative attachment to conventional entrepreneurial ideals in the form of individualism and self-reliance. Second one is related to the willingness of the female entrepreneur to accept conventional gender roles, often subordinate to men. The four categories are summarized as follow (Simpson, 1993): '**Conventionals**' balance their entrepreneurial ideals and conventional ideals about gender-related roles, they do not aim to growth their business situation therefore there is not any conflict between business and personal situation. '**Innovators**' highly committed to entrepreneurial ideals but reject conventional female roles, they strongly motivated by profit and growth, and business is primary life interest for them. '**Domestics**' highly committed to traditional female role, entrepreneurial ideals and businesses are not very important for them. '**Radicals**' cannot balance their entrepreneurial ideals and traditional ideals about gender roles, they think that business is geared towards helping to overcome women's subordination. Cromie and Hayes (1988) also categorised female entrepreneurs almost in the same way.

This typology has been criticized on a number of levels (Allen & Truman, 1988; Carter & Cannon, 1988). Allen and Truman (1988) argue that entrepreneurial ideas and adherence to conventional gender roles are not appropriate for the analysis of female entrepreneurial behaviour. The socio-economic reality of women's life and different types of female subordination (social class, marital status, ethnic origin) should be considered. Carter and Cannon (1988) claim that female entrepreneurs are not a homogeneous group, and emphasize two important features of business ownership. The first one is about dynamic or turbulent process of business ownership. Businesses expand, contract, diversify and change their situations. The second feature is about changing typology of entrepreneur. The domestic entrepreneurs may, by the very experience of business ownership, become innovators with a very strong attachment to entrepreneurial ideals.

There are many limitations of the researches about female entrepreneurs stem from the lack of adequate sampling frames (Carter & Cannon, 1988; Curran, 1986; Goffe & Scase, 1985). Most studies of female owners have used small samples or have no gender focus. Additionally, researches about entrepreneurship concept have many methodological problems (Moore, 1990; Stevenson, 1990).

At the end of Sexton & Bowman-Upton's study, (1990) the females did score significantly lower on traits related to energy level and risk-taking. They also scored significantly higher on the traits related to autonomy and change. These scores indicate that female entrepreneurs are less willing than male entrepreneurs to become involved in situations with uncertain outcomes (risk taking) and have less of the endurance or energy level needed to maintain a growth-oriented business.

Cooper and Artz (1995) claims that women entrepreneurs were more satisfied with business ownership. For women entrepreneurs, the higher levels of satisfaction may reflect a view that they have fewer attractive alternatives; it may also be that they discover greater relative satisfaction from the day-to-day aspects of business ownership.

According to the study of Ozen Kutanis and Bayraktaroglu (2002a) Turkish people give more importance to traditional roles of women entrepreneurs than their business-related works. They give more chance to males in entrepreneurship. Although they considered male entrepreneurs as experienced entrepreneurs, female counterparts do not accept this idea. Turkish people imagined women entrepreneurs domestically, but female entrepreneurs convey conventional perspective. People saw the business environment very difficult for women, but females noticed that they believed to overcome the difficulties. Turkish people also perceive limited sectors were proper for women entrepreneurs, on the contrary females told that they could enter every sectors easily. While the female entrepreneurs see the advantages of flexibility, freedom and independence of entrepreneurship, but the people did not accept this idea, because they noted that entrepreneurs must work very hard. While Turkish people accepted the idea of 'female entrepreneurs stress personal expectancies while the male ones stress economic expectancies', whereas female entrepreneurs did not accept this item. The people think that 'female entrepreneurs perceived having less control and lower entrepreneurial abilities than their male counterparts', but female entrepreneurs did not accept this idea. Lastly, the people think that 'female entrepreneurs need more information about business world than their male counterparts' contrary female entrepreneurs notified that both male and female entrepreneurs need detail information about business world.

Liberal versus Social Feminism

According to Fischer et. al. (1993) there are two perspectives that help to organize and interpret past researches, and highlight avenues for future researches. These perspectives are 'liberal feminism' and 'social feminism'. In terms of liberal feminist theory, women are disadvantaged relative to men due to overt discrimination and to systemic factors that deprive them of vital resources like business education and experience. Previous studies that have investigated whether or not lenders and consultants discriminate against women, and women actually do have less relevant education and experience, are consistent with a liberal feminist perspective. Those empirical studies provide modest evidence that women may experience, impedes their ability to succeed in business.

Liberal feminism is unwieldy and it covers a wide range of opinions, not all of them compatible. Liberal feminists work towards an egalitarian society, which would uphold the right of each individual to fulfil their potential. The liberal feminist tradition goes back to feminism's earliest days (the first wave feminism) and argues for the necessity of social reform in order to give women the same status and opportunities as men.

The treatment of Liberal feminism is conventional in terms of established feminist theory, evoking the idea that women's and men's ways of knowing and coping with the world are essentially the same, so that the main task of feminist research and policies is to allow women's estate to reach a state of similarity with men's via the removal of overt or systemic forms of discrimination against women. In entrepreneurship research this approach is seen in, studies of potential discrimination in the way that lenders deal with women entrepreneurs.

Liberal views of the nineteenth-century feminists, and 'new' feminism, which argued that equality between the sexes, could not be achieved by legislation. Indeed, 'new' feminists held that in many areas men and women's social needs were divergent, given the biological and psychological differences between them. Liberal feminism has been widely criticised by those who believe that it concentrates only on the most superficial forms of sexism, doing nothing to deconstruct the deeper ideological formations, which subordinate women to men. It has also been attacked for bias in favour of white, middle-class women, ignoring the specific needs of minorities. Nevertheless, it should not be denied that liberal feminists are responsible for welfare, education, and health reforms that have benefited the lives of millions of women.

Social feminist theory suggests that, due to differences in early and ongoing socialization, women and men do differ inherently. However, it also suggests that this does not mean women are inferior to men, as women and men may develop different but equally effective traits. Previous entrepreneurship studies that have compared men and women on socialized traits and values are consistent with a social feminist perspective, and have documented few consistent gender differences, and have suggested that those differences that do exist may have little impact on business performance. In their study, it is suggested that, women's lesser experience in working in similar firms and in helping to start-up businesses may help to explain the smaller size, slower income growth, and lesser sales per employee of their firms.

Social feminism holds that there are differences between male and female experiences through deliberate socialization methods from the earliest moments of life that result in fundamentally different ways of viewing the world (Fischer et al., 1993). In this view, men and women are not regarded as equal. Social feminism accepts that the furthering of one's capacity for autonomous agency is only possible within the confines of a solidaristic community, which sustains one's identity through mutual recognition.

Social feminism guided by maternal thinking, tries to protect the private life by preserving and protecting its 'moral imperatives'. It seeks increases in privacy as opposed to liberal / radical feminism. It also purges feminism's soul of its antifamilial and matrophobic spectre and restores an authentic and unique identity of women. Social feminism refines public / private dichotomy and consists of some problems that threaten to undermine the political relevance of maternal thinking and hopes for a new feminist political consciousness. It reinforces an abstract split between the public and private realms that cannot or should not be maintained; and no theoretical connection is provided for linking maternal thinking and the social practice of mothering with the kind of 'ethical polity', namely one informed by democratic thinking and the political practices of citizenship. Female entrepreneurs have already chosen the private sectors.

As we move into the global economic and political uncertainties of the nineties, it will be essential to exercise such an enlarged mentality both in the domestic and the international arena. The first kind of paradigm in feminist theory fails us by dogmatically freezing women's identity in the role of the victim; the second paradigm fails us by undermining the normative principles around which identity-transcending group solidarities would have to be formed.

The differences noted above may be referred to either a situational (structural) – liberal feminism- or a dispositional perspective (related to work, family or social life) – social feminism- that affects women's ability to start and grow businesses (Liou and Aldrich 1995; Carter et al 1995). Traditional gender models were on the other hand suggested to relate to the more individually focused strand of research, addressing human capital, personal attitudes and family situation (Kovalainen, 1995). There seems to be a obvious need to use

integrated theoretical models that recognize the influence from both personal/dispositional and structural/situational factors on female entrepreneurship.

Most studies tackle gender issues by examining differences between males and females. This implies a one-on-one relationship between **sex** and **gender**. Sex is a biological variable, given with birth, while gender resembles a socially constructed and contested characteristic, which is accepted during life. Mothering would be a socially constructed gender role for most women, in most periods of history, and in the majority of known human societies. Therefore, a human being with the sex 'female' might adapt into a 'male' gender, accepting opinions and lifestyles categorized as belonging to the male gender. So, in order to survive in the 'male' business world, female entrepreneurs could have adapted to male gender opinions concerning business. There is another explanation for possible differences in opinions in the literature on 'cultures'. Sex is not the relevant factor to look at when defining differences in opinion, but rather the cultures within which the entrepreneurs are embedded. Sex is not necessarily the main cause of the differences, but the culture may be the more decisive indicator through the socialization process of people.

Increased participation and success of women could result in changes in certain demographic variables, such as higher degrees of residential mobility, new lifestyle and nutritional habits, increased duration of work time, possible higher rates of divorce or of never-married women, postponement of childbearing or lower fertility, overall increase of social stress, or higher emotional/psychological satisfaction and well-being. In spite of negative effects of women participating in the labour force, such as increased risk of coronary heart disease (Brezinka and Kittel, 1996) or the lowering of fertility rates, some certain positive effects would also be useful. For example, in Sweden, not only has increased female labour force participation occurred in tandem with increased fertility, but some studies even find that women are experiencing overall better psychological health, improved survival chances and reduced mortality as a result of their entry into the labour force (Vagero, 1994).

As applied to entrepreneurship, the argument is that women's approaches are different but equally effective when compared to men's. There should be an "Integrated Perspective" that combines the two feminist theories. In Fischer et al.'s article, this conviction is reflected in the design of their study. The study examined three hypotheses. One of them was about social feminism (women differ from men in their entrepreneurial motivation) and the others were on liberal feminism (women have less entrepreneurially relevant formal education and relevant experience than men, leading to their having less successful firms). In the end, all three hypotheses were shown to have mixed support. Incorporating a variety of feminist perspectives would represent a general advance in the discipline of entrepreneurship, which has not often been critical of its own premises, despite the fact that many women "do not feel comfortable with the present stereotypical notions of what entrepreneurship is" (Stevenson, 1990:441).

As the sociological theories of entrepreneurship are incipient, feminist theory may be able to help them revise themselves now and grow not into gender-free theories but into theories that understand what their knowledge is based on and into theories that takes gender relations into careful consideration. Feminist organizational theories are still in the beginning stages and critiques may help these stages to develop. Smircich (1985) states that a feminist perspective will include greater tolerance for deviant modes of discourse. organisational theories can attempt to make a contribution to society and not just help to maintain the status quo. If new theories can help organizations that are not male dominated this could eventually produce a change at the societal level (Hurley, 1999).

As a different point of view, Seyla Benhabib (1996) uses the term "standpoint feminism" to designate a type of feminist theory and research paradigm which shows the following five characteristics:

1- Social-scientific theories of the past have been “gender blind,” that is, because they have failed to take into account the standpoint, the activities, and the experiences of women. Gender blindness affects the cognitive plausibility of theories.

2- To correct gender blindness, it is necessary to identify a set of experiences, activities, patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting which can be characterized as “female.”

3- Such experiences and activities are a consequence of women’s social position or of their position within the sexual division of labour. Whereas the male of the species has been active in the public sphere of production, politics, war, and science, women’s activities by and throughout history have been confined to the “domestic/reproductive” and “private” spheres.

4- The task of feminist theory is to make this sphere of activity and its consequences for human life at large visible and present at the level of theory. Feminist theory articulates the implicit, tacit, and non-theorized experiences, and activities of women and allows these to come to the level of consciousness.

5- Feminist theory not only engages in a critique of science and theory, but it also contributes to the process of transforming women’s consciousness by giving female activities and experiences public presence and legitimacy.

Hence, a number of works, mostly from the late 1970s, had the characteristic of visible and private women, but public man. The time has come to move to a new synthesis of collective solidarities with plurally constituted identities and integrated feminist theories.

Research Objective, Methodology and Sample

This paper examines the problems of Turkish female entrepreneurs and discusses the alternatives of overcoming the barriers grounded in social feminist perspective. Results are presented from a qualitative source, which consists of in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs in SMEs in the Adapazari region. For the qualitative research, the results are analysed using content analysis (Holsti, 1969; Luborsky, 1994). The findings of this study will be analysed from the social feminist point of view in a different manner.

In this qualitative research stakeholder analysis (Burgoyne, 1994) and tracer method (Hornby and Symon, 1994) are used and the sample of this study consists of 54 female entrepreneurs in the Adapazari region. First of all the famous stakeholder female entrepreneurs are determined. After the in-depth interview with the first female entrepreneur, the second one is designated and the interview list is completed. When the female entrepreneurs started to give the same information, the in-depth interviews are finished. The in-depth interviews are conducted face-to face separately. By this way, the detailed information has been gained.

Research Limitations

This research is conducted within only one region, in a short time (5 months) by two researchers. Therefore, time, person and geographic limitations are available in this study. In addition to this, the limited types of sectors within the female entrepreneurs have activities could be included into this study.

On the other hand, Adapazari and Kocaeli region is in between west and east or urban and rural areas of Turkey. Because of this feature, it can be said that, this region was a synthesis of the different sub-cultures. Therefore the opinions of the respondents show different point of views.

Research Findings

In this part, firstly the demographic and entrepreneurial properties of female entrepreneurs will be summarized, secondly gender related problems of them will be shown and at last, social feminist insights for overcoming the barriers will be discussed.

Demographic and Entrepreneurial Properties

The interviewed female entrepreneurs are married (55 %), have no child (52 %), have a few children (48 %), graduated from university (55 %), are in between 30 and 55 years old (69 %). The dependent women entrepreneurs are younger than the independent ones. Their husbands are graduated from university and they also have private enterprises. Their fathers are graduated from high school or university. In general, their education is on social sciences. The education level of their mothers is less than their fathers, and most of the mothers were housewife. The education level of family of independent women entrepreneurs is higher than that of dependent ones. They are children of manager or entrepreneur fathers and housewife mothers. The support of their mothers and husbands encouraged them to entrepreneurship.

The 47 % of them in light industry (textile, furniture, boutique, tailor), the 38 % are in health and service sector (doctors who have private surgery, pharmacists who have private pharmacies, financial consultants who have separate offices, beauty specialists who have beauty saloon, fitness centre owners, lawyers who have private offices, and transporters), and 13 % of them have activities in education sector (teachers who have a private courses of university examination, driver course owners, kindergarten owners). Only one of them (2 %) has activity in heavy industry (metal sector). As it is seen, their enterprises are in limited sectors.

90 % of the interviewed female entrepreneurs employ at least two labours in their enterprises. 72 % of them work more than 45 hours in a week, and 56 % of them have experience less than five years. This situation may be affected from the earthquake occurred on 17th August 1999.

The dependent ones (41 %) maintain the enterprise, which established by their brothers, fathers and husbands. Some of them are also partners with their husbands in their private enterprises. The rest (59 %) have independent enterprises, they have taken the support of their families but establish their firms on their own.

To start-up an enterprise independently, women need many years for gaining self-confidence and they also want to persuade others about their success. In addition, their high education level also encourages them in starting-up process. Apart from the need for income, some of the female entrepreneurs in the in-depth interviews also tended to emphasise dissatisfaction in a previous work situation as important for their decision to start up on their own. For several, this motive comes in addition to the need to make use of personal skills and resources. The desire for personal autonomy, flexibility on time, the need for independence and difficult conditions of the firms are the other factors which force the female entrepreneurs to start-up new enterprises.

Gender Related Problems

At the beginning of the interviews female entrepreneurs did not emphasized any entrepreneurial problems, and they defined themselves as colleagues of all entrepreneur. On the other hand they stressed gender related problems while they answering the questions. 46 % of female entrepreneurs stated that they have enough experiences as their male counterparts. They also emphasized (56 %) that they sometimes worked as male entrepreneurs. They did not accept the prejudices about their business activities. They insisted that they work very hard and try to do their best in business world. Additionally 37 % of the female entrepreneurs accepted that working hours of men was greater than that of women in general. 68,5 % of them believes that to start-up an enterprise was very difficult for women in Turkish society. Especially, they explained the 'problems of legitimacy' in the business world. 34 % of the respondents also accepted that males started-up an enterprise because of earning money, and 46,3 % of them agreed the idea of females started-up an

enterprise because of independence and flexibility on time. 61,1 % of the female entrepreneurs expressed that sector types for them were limited. 42,6 % of them also stressed the idea that female entrepreneurs stressed personal expectancies while the male ones stress economic expectancies, and 74,1 % of the respondents emphasized their perception of 'stronger social support' than men. Therefore the support of their families (husband, brother, father, mother) is very important for them during the start-up process.

33,3 % of the interviewed women entrepreneurs are conventional female entrepreneurs who try to balance the entrepreneurial ideals and female roles, and the most amazing one, 46,3 % of them stated that conventional responsibilities of women entrepreneurs have more importance than their work. They do not complain about this situation, and they accept the situation without interrogation. They perceive this dual role as necessary sacrifice in terms of altruism perspective, not a barrier in their business lives.

In spite of the findings mentioned above, it might be noted that 77,8 % of female entrepreneurs perceive having enough control and entrepreneurial abilities as their male counterparts. These different findings show that female entrepreneurs do not abandon any side. Their intention is to balance work and family activities in their social life.

Social Feminist Insights

As it is shown above, 79,6 % of the interviewed female entrepreneurs is conventional (33,3 %) or domestic (46,3 %) type of female entrepreneurs. When this event is investigated, the cultural values and norms might be taken into account. Females are grown up in terms of social and cultural values during their childhood. Their role models are usually their mothers, and their expectancies and perception processes are affected this social climate.

Social feminism argues that social structures (work, family, social life) limit experiences and socialization of women. This view argues that socialization experiences of men and women result in different self-perceptions, motivations, and beliefs. Social feminist perspective purges feminism's soul of its antifamilial and matrophobic spectre and restores a unique identity of women. It tries to protect the private life by preserving and protecting its moral imperatives. Social practices like mothering, child-care and house-works are important for organizing the households in Turkish culture.

Gender is socially constructed concept in a culture, and gender roles are usually determined within social life. In collectivist cultures like Turkey, socially mental programming is very important and people are related each other in terms of the cultural values. Female entrepreneurs emphasized the importance of their dual roles and stressed that they try to balance these different areas. Indeed they rejected feminist perspectives in the interviews. They give evasive answers the feminism related questions. In their opinion, feminist perspectives abstract women from social life. They stressed that their families, husbands and children were very important for them, and they said that their entrepreneurial activities should not prevent this harmony. In their point of view, family concept is a holy concept; therefore feminist theories cannot be adopted into the Turkish culture. They expressed that they wanted to protect their private lives.

Conclusion

The Turkish female entrepreneurs are married, have a few children, graduated from university and 30 or more years old. They are children of manager or entrepreneur fathers and housewife mothers. They have activities in limited types of sectors (light industry, service, health and education sectors). They employ labour and have experience less than 5 years. They have self-confidence about entrepreneurship, and they claimed that they can overcome the dual roles.

Turkish female entrepreneurs define themselves as different part than their male counterparts. Because of Turkish culture, they have responsibilities of the dual role, which consists of both domestic and entrepreneurial activities.

Females are brought up in the context of social and cultural values during their childhood. Social feminist perspective tries to protect the private life by preserving and protecting its moral imperatives. Social practices like mothering, child-care and house-works are important for organizing the households in Turkish culture.

Even though they did not describe social feminist perspective, their point of view is very similar with this theory. Additionally, an integrated and eclectic theory, which consists of social feminism perspective, can be developed for the Turkish female entrepreneurs.

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