Gender in family firms: a literature review

Jarna Heinonen[1] and Ulla Hytti [12]

University of Turku, School of Economics, TSE Entre[1], Pori Unit[2],

e-mail: firstname.surname@utu.fi.

Abstract

The study aims at conducting a thorough literature review to explore and outline how gender issues are tackled in family business research. A total of 170 family business articles were identified in the selected journals in 2000-2011. Our study demonstrates that most of the studies give no information on the gender, but implicitly focus only or primarily on men and the women are invisible in the studies. The articles were then categorized based on the identified 'research strategies' with different emphasis on gender issues. The findings demonstrate the division of roles and responsibilities in the household and the business, and related decision-making processes. We argue that family business research faces methodological problems of focusing primarily on firms with male owner-managers as informants and the gendered processes as well as the core of family business research, i.e. the notion of 'familiness', remain neglected. The research implications are also discussed.

Introduction

Recently, there has been a growing concern about the significant gender imbalances in entrepreneurial activity. Women are less likely to start new businesses and their experiences from entrepreneurship may differ from that of men (Bird & Brush, 2002; Minniti et al., 2005). However, most of these studies assume a gender-neutral perspective (Marlow et al., 2009) and it is suggested that these differences need to be interpreted from the gender theory perspective (Lansky, 2000) as a necessary means to understand how entrepreneurial activity and experiences of entrepreneurship may vary.

Despite a growing interest on gender in new venture activity, gender is largely unexplored in family firms (Sonfield and Lussier, 2009). This may be linked to the unit of analysis: the family firm is put at the heart of the research rather than the individuals. In the studies that investigate the individual, emphasis is placed on the owner-manager (Hamilton, 2006), even if family business research generally acknowledges the different roles an individual may occupy in the family business (business, ownership or family) (Taguiri and Davis, 1996). There have been methodological calls within family business research to investigate the complex and interconnected relationships between the family, individual members and the business

(Habbershon, Williams and MacMillan, 2003). This study focuses on one particular aspect – gender. There is a need for a thorough literature review to explore and outline how gender issues are tackled in family business research. By analysing gender we are able to discuss the division of roles and responsibilities in the household and the business, and related decision-making process. We are also able to suggest gaps and areas for further research in the area.

Methodology

The research material is conducted by analyzing all “family business” (or “family firm”) articles published in major entrepreneurship journals between the years 2000 and 2011 (Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice, Journal of Business Venturing, International Small Business Journal, Entrepreneurship and Regional Development, Small Business Economics, Journal of Small Business Management, and Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal). This list was adopted from the Grade Four and Three Journals in the most recent ABS (Association of Business School) Academic Journal Quality Guide. The selection was supported by Chrisman et al. (2008) who evaluated and ranked management journals as outlets for family business. In the next phase the review will be extended to cover also “Family Business Review” (Grade Two) due to its specific focus in family businesses. All the family business articles identified were screened in order find out how gender issues are tackled in family business research. This process resulted in 170 articles identified of which 44 articles included at least some information on gender. In the analysis, the particular strategy towards gender and the main results of the study were recorded. This process was split between two researchers.

Findings

In the following we discuss the findings of our screening and analysis based on the 44 articles identified and focus on variety of ways how gender is tackled in the studies. Our categorisation of the studies is not exclusive and some studies are exemplary for a number of ‘research strategies’ discussed below.

Narrow view on family business

Overall, it seems that in the majority of the studies, the unit of analysis is the family firm and relatively little research is conducted from the perspectives of the individuals in the business or in the family. Most studies on family firms seem to rely on quantitative surveys sent to one single decision-maker (typically CEO/owner manager). It is not atypical that the informant is not even specified. Also other more general level problems can be identified: the definition of family firm varies a lot and is sometimes weak affecting research findings (Dyer 2003). For example in a study by Carlson et al., (2006) they define family firms as those where the CEO or CEO's family own more than 50% of stock. Respectively, Ensley and Pearson (2005) define family business as privately held firms with a significant proportion of the top managers as founders or substantial (over 10%) stakeholders. Westhead and Cowling (1998) discovered that in the sample of 427 firms the share of family firms varied from 78.5% to only 15% depending on the definition used having considerable influence on the findings. Loose and diversified definitions danger the possibility to replicate and compare findings with prior research (Dyer 2003).

Hence, the studies view the family firm through the eyes of the single person – typically the family or non-family CEO – and the other influential persons in the family firm (in particular those without the official role) remain hidden. This single informant problem as well as the lack of information on respondents (Dyer 2003) are identified but it seems that little is done to overcome the challenges. While this can be considered to be a challenge in business research in general, it seems particularly so in case of family firms. Family firms are conceptualised as tri-partite systems involving the business, ownership and family spheres and individuals that inhabit one or more of these spheres (Tagiuri and Davis 1996, also Vallejo 2011). Furthermore, there is research evidence that individuals without any visible or formal decision-making role in the business do influence or are involved also in the business decisions (Bhalla et al. 2009). Regarding certain topics, such as succession, family involvement or mentoring, it is important to determine applicable family relationships – father-son, father-daughter, mother-son, mother-daughter, uncle-nephew, and so forth (Dyer 2003). More importantly, it seems that there is a reason to expect that the family firms are researched also in ways that enable the inclusion of these different views, in particular with regard to topics that by definition involve different parties and have consequences beyond the immediate concerns of the family firms. Attempts have been made to capture the notion of ‘familiness’ and family influence and to acknowledge the varying degrees of it (Astrachan et al. 2002) but still the contextual factors which may create unique opportunities to ascertain the ’familiness’ of an organisational setting remain unexploited (Dyer 2003). Interestingly, many studies were conceptual studies or commentary pinpointing the need to further research the very core of family firms indicating gaps in the previous (empirical) research.

Gender measured but not analysed

In some studies the gender (sex) of the research participants is reported but not applied in the study, such as Sciascia et al. (2010) focusing on effect of family ownership on internationalisation. In the study 76% of the respondents were men. Based on the review of the literature on variables used in studying family business succession Le-Breton-Miller et al. (2004) found out that gender of the incumbent is measured in less than 10% of the empirical studies. Roughly the same holds for measuring the spouse/mom leadership. Niehm et al. (2008) explore the antecendents and consequences of community social responsibility (CSR) for family firms operating in small and rural markets. Business manager gender is reported but not applied. Miller et al. (2001) examine the managerial strategies employed in very small family businesses operating in small communities across the US and report the demographic profile of their respondents (73.7% men and 26.3% women). Oswald et al. (2009) examine the relationship between family control and financial performance of the firm. Gender is applied to compare the sample to a previous study. Marshall et al. (2006) investigate how age and organisational behaviour (leadership style) affect succession processes and plans. The study includes 81% men as participants. Interestingly, the study does not include gender as a control variable even if previous studies suggest differences between female and male directors in their leadership styles (Cruz et al. 2012). Similarly, Ensely and Person (2005) studied whether there are behavioural differences of the top management teams across three levels of ‘familiness’ of new venture firms: parental, familial, and nonfamily firms. Approximately 90% of the respondents were male, but gender was not controlled nor discussed in the study. The same Inc. 500 survey setting was used in the commentary of Ensley (2006) on the linkage between CEO tenure, strategic persistence, and firm performance in family business context. Again gender was not focused.

Eddleston et al. (2008) examine how participative decision-making and generational ownership dispersion affect conflict. Gender is applied in the study to compare the survey sample to two other studies and it is applied as a control. However, no gender differences were found. Fitzgerald et al. (2010) aim to ascertain the impact of family, business and community factors on the socially responsible processes of small family businesses, and to investigate the influence of financial success and attitudes toward community on these processes. Gender of the business manager is applied as a control but no gender differences were found. Wu at al. (2007) investigate effects of family ownership and management on use of equity and public equity financing, and include information on owner attributes. Gender effects were reported but they were not statistically significant. Romano et al. (2000) focus on analysing both organisation and owner-manager characteristics as antecedents to capital structure in family firms. The study includes mainly Australian respondents, and it is reported that that 2.8% of the respondents are women. The authors comment that "*interestingly, proportions relating to characteristics of family business owners are in line with those reported by Australian Bureau of Statistics*" etc. suggesting that women as family business owners in Australia are indeed a marginal phenomenon. Based on Family Business Australia (www.peak.fambiz.org.au) reporting the results from "The MGI Australian Family and Private Business Survey 2010", 11% of the family business owners are women. Unless there has been a sharp increase in women as family business owners in ten years, the women seem to be underrepresented in the study. Since there were studies in which no information is given on the participants, this leads us to ponder whether this neglect reflects the problem of representative samples in a more general way. Chrisman et al. (2012) compare the demographics of the US small firms, Small Business Development Center's (SBDR) population and the SBDR sample they used. The conclude that although female-firms are overrepresented in their sample (42.4%) and the SBDR population in general (40.1%) compared to national average

(33.6%), the sample is sufficiently similar to small business in the US and the SBDR population. Gender (sex) is not further reported.

Howorth, Westhead and Wright (2004) study ownership transfer processes, in particular management buyouts and buyins, and include family firm owners (vendors) and MBO/MBI teams (buyers) as informants in the study. Sex of the different informants is reported but not applied. Family members from two generations in Italian and Swiss family firms are interviewed, observed and discussed with in a multiple-embedded case study by Chirico (2008) and Chirico and Nordqvist (2010). Chirico studies how knowledge can be accumulated in family firms in order to enable survival across generations. Chirico and Nordqvist focus on dynamic capabilities and trans-generational value creation in family firms. Names of the family members are disclosed and accordingly gender is implicitly visible, however not analysed. Given that issues such as commitment, psychological ownership and trust (Chirico 2008) as well as family business culture (Chirico and Nordqvist 2010) are found to have a major role in knowledge accumulation or trans-generational value creation respectively, addressing gender might have been useful to widen the perspective of ‘familiness’ (see Dyer 2003).

Gender differences identified through controlling

In another set of studies, gender differences were found and reported. The gender as a variable is applied as a control, and if statistically significant differences are found, the differences between women and men family business owner-managers with regard to their firm performance, for example, are reported. For example, Cruz and Nordqvist (forthcoming) examine antecedents of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) in family firms by adopting a generational perspective. In the study they control for the sex of the CEO/top manager that is surveyed in the study. The results suggest that the women are less entrepreneurial than men. Olson et al. (2003) identify strategies for family businesses in order to increase the success of both their businesses and families. The study includes interviews with household managers and business managers. In the study gender of the business manager is applied in the analysis. The results suggest that being a female business manager is negatively associated with family’s business income. Zellweger et al. (2011)

investigate how intentional founders, successors and employees are different in terms of locus of control and entrepreneurial self-efficacy, independence and innovation motives. The study surveys over 36.000 students in 8 countries out of which nearly 10.000 with a family business background. The sample (over 5.300) includes those that intend to follow their parents' footsteps, to create their own firms or to become employees. Gender is included in the analyses and results suggest that women display a higher likelihood to opt for employment and a lower likelihood to become intentional founders. Interestingly, the study finds that high levels of internal locus of control lead to preference for employment. It is suggested that students with family business background are pessimistic about being in control in an entrepreneurial career but optimistic about their efficacy to pursue one.

Taken together these results suggest that women underscore men in entrepreneurial intentions, orientation and performance. Since gender is included only as a control, these gender differences are not discussed or interpreted at length. Since these findings are expected – women are inferior to men – they need not to be discussed. Gendered and stereotypical assumptions about women participating in family businesses (Hamilton 2006) reinforce family business management as a male construct and therefore limit the understanding of familial and entrepreneurial behaviour in various family business contexts (Howorth et al. 2010).

Controlling gender is equally important when the role of culture and relationships within family business is being studied based on the perceptions of family business employees, for example. Davis et al. (2010) acknowledge that their study may be gender-biased due to male dominance of respondents as gender may influence subordinate perceptions of leadership (Lewis and Fagenson-Eland 1998). This further emphasises the need to provide further information on the respondents (see Dyer 2003) although the informants and their activities within family business context were not explicitly studied.

Danes et al. (2008) investigate the contribution of quality management, inclusive of family/business interface management, to the success of small family firms. For the study both business manager and household manager were interviewed and gender of the owner is included in the owner characteristics (30% female owners). Male and female owners did not differ on gross revenues. Gender had a negative effect on congruity, women's congruity scores were 0.91 less than men's. Congruity in the study is viewed an important family output and defined as "*the extent to which the different schedules pursued by a family, both individually and collectively, fit together harmoniously, appropriately, suitably or agreeably*" (p. 18, Stafford and Avery, 1993). The authors explain that females often have a greater mismatch between demands and available resources to meet those demands (Danes 2006). For females, then, it is particularly important to consider decision impacts on family and business simultaneously in order to sustain the stock of resilience capacity for long-term quality management and business success.

Werbel et al. (2010) investigate the degree that the new business venture owner's spouse is a constraint in the creation of new business venture. [In a way this study is not linked directly to family businesses as such, but rather looks at the family dynamics in the venture creation.] Gender of the new business venture owner is applied as a control in the study. The results indicate that when a spouse experiences work-family conflict a spouse is likely to be a resource constraint that creates new business venture owner physiological strain. Spousal commitment to the venture is likely to exacerbate this relationship. The authors conclude that a spouse is not inherently a resource or constraint in the new venture creation.

Gender differences hypothesised and discussed

In some studies the gender is included in the actual model and the gender difference is hypothesised. Cruz et al. (2012) analyse the effect of family employment on performance in micro and small firms. The study is conducted as a longitudinal study of owners in Dominican Republic in 1998 and 2000. The study hypothesised that a positive effect of employing family members on firm performance will be higher in women-led businesses. This is grounded in the idea that female owners' managerial style and their role as family caretakers allow them to capitalise on the benefits of kinship ties and manage more efficiently the unique challenges of reconciling business and family goals. The results suggest in general terms that employing family members increases sales but decreases profitability. With regard to the gender effect, employing family members results in improved performance in women-led firms (and in firms that have received family funding). Employing family members impairs firm performance when the firm is the main source of the owner's household income. The authors conclude that women owners may understand better than men how to handle the conflict between pursuing socio-emotional and financial goals simultaneously and to the firm's advantage. Hence, this study not only hypothesises the gender difference but also reports a positive difference in favour of women owners.

Galbraith (2003) examines the relationship between marital dissolution and the short-term financial performance of small closely held family businesses. Gender effects are analysed and hypothesised in the following way: Females remaining as the 'in' spouse in the family business will be affected more negatively than males remaining as the in spouse. The underlying idea is that the female family business owners might be impacted more negatively by divorce as her proportional time commitments to custodial children may increase in the post-separation environment. The results indicate that marital dissolution does impact short-term financial performance and that several organisational and situational variables significantly impact this relationship. No statistically significant gender differences are found even if based upon previous research on time allocation, it was expected that female business owners would be impacted more negatively than male business owners. While in the each of the five models the estimated coefficient on gender was in the hypothesized direction, none were statistically significant.

Based on grounded theory approach and multiple case-study of 8 family businesses Khavul et al. (2009) identify a number of differences between female and male entrepreneurs when they studied how rural east African entrepreneurs establish and grow their businesses. They focus on the forces that strong family and community ties exert on male and female entrepreneurs. They conclude with a number of research propositions with gender differences on how strong ties influence business activities. The proposed differences are deeply rooted in the cultural traditions and norms and they suggest that women end up conducting business in a different manner rather than simply perform better or worse in comparison to men.

In their conceptual study, Sundaramurthy and Kreiner (2008) identify various individual factors, including gender of the owner-manager, which describe degrees of integration between the family and business identities in family firms, and may have an impact on firm governance. Based on previous studies they found out that certain roles and domains seem to be more often integrated to women (Hartmann 1991) as they are expected to identify more strongly with their family roles than men do (Eby et al. 2005). In addition, women may rely more on personal savings and contributions from family as they face difficulties in raising external financing (Aronson 1991; Buttner and Rosen 1989; Changanti et al. 1996; Fay and Williams 1993; Haynes et al. 1999). Conceptual study of Sharma and Irving (2005) on the antecedents and outcomes of family firm successor commitment identifies that gender and/or birth-order need to be included in the model. Familial norms strongly influence the socialization process in family firms and the career choice of the next-generation members, and this ‘obligation based’ normative commitment is related to next-generation’s decision to pursue career in family businesses.

In a study by Sharma et al. (2003) they focus on gender but not as a characteristic of the individual respondent but as a variable linked to the succession process. They study which factors affect satisfaction with the succession process and they control for the same sex or cross sex succession. The informants in the study include both incumbents and successors. They assumed that the same sex succession pairs (mother to daughter) would be different from the different sex succession pairs (mother to son). The study revealed differences between the satisfaction levels of incumbents and successors but not between the same sex/different sex pairs. Yilmazer and Schrank (2006) examine financial intermingling, that is the use of family assets for the business or business assets for the family in small family businesses. In their study the unit of analysis is the household, and therefore they report that their study includes married couples (97.1%), 1.2% single females and 1.7% single male. No differences between the different types are reported. The study find intermingling taking place and predominantly from household-to-business. Family businesses are not significantly different from non-family businesses in terms of intermingling.

Winter et al. (2004) also include multiple informants in the family firm. They investigate owner-managers' continued involvement in the business and the continuation of the business itself over time by conducting a longitudinal survey to the same households in 1997 and 2000. Both the family manager and business manager were surveyed for the study. Characteristics of the participants are disclosed and applied in the analysis. Based on the study sex of the business manager is an important factor with businesses headed by women more likely to close than business led by men and female business managers less likely to be involved in the business over time. On the other hand, the study finds that the most important factor in continuity is the respondent's assessment of the business as a success: successful businesses are continued or sold/gifted when the owner-manager leaves the business. The authors warn against viewing all business closures as a failure. Interestingly, the paper does not aim to give any interpretation to the gender differences identified. Is the women's involvement in the business merely a transitory phase: they run the business only momentarily for example after the death of their husband, and hence they disappear from the scene sooner than men? If continuity is linked to the success can we deduce that women are running less successful businesses?

Gender applied in the context of ethnicity

Based on a recent review of trends in family business research (Benavides-Velasco, Quintana-García and Guzmán-Parra, 2011), it is suggested that gender and ethnicity are one of the primary topics covered in the family business articles in the business, business finance, economics and management journals of the Social Science Citation Index during 1961-2008 period. Out of the 703 articles published in 75 journals reviewed 26 articles (3.6%) were classified under this heading. The problem with the classification provided by Benavides-Velasco et al. (2011) is the combination of ethnicity and gender under the same heading suggesting that the gender and ethnicity as similar characteristics possessed by only some of the research participants, like gender in case of women and ethnicity in case of non-Western participants. In their review of the contents of the papers, they suggest that the papers for example provide insight into the interaction of gender and management practices and its effects on family business performance or study the women-owned businesses. They also suggest that future research is needed to "*recognise gender and ethnicity as a dimension to uncover the differences among various family cultures*", and that "*future contributions would benefit from inclusion of the moderating effect of gender and ethnicity on the analysis of complete range of management practices and strategic decisions in family businesses*".

In their case-study of 6 Asian family firms Janjuha-Jivraj and Woods (2002) explore whether the experiences of succession are influenced by ethnicity and cultural values and traits. If available, family members of three generations were interviewed, of which one is a daughter in the 3rd generation, others are males. They conclude that attitudes towards succession are influenced by culture and experiences. Gender is not applied when successors are discussed. Mothers of the heirs, however, are identified to have a considerable influence on succession as they are silent buffers between generations. Although mothers´ invisible and powerful presence during the transition period is acknowledged, some fathers feel that mothers´ involvement undermines their authority. The findings are discussed from the ethnicity perspective with focus on the immediate and extended family as well as the religious-ethnic community. Generational differences are also addressed whereas discussion on gender issues remains modest with some integration to the decision on the family business succession. A study on business succession in Turkish family-owned businesses (Tatogly et al. 2008) demonstrates that only 4.2% of the studied successors are daughters, whereas 59.6% of the businesses are transferred to sons and 15.9% to brothers respectively. This is not problematized as the predecessor dominates the method of successor selection and sons and other males are described and treated as 'heirs apparent' in the studied cultural setting. On the other hand, the most important selection criteria being competency, interest in the business, and education level implicitly indicate female inferiority.

Karra et al. (2006) explore the relationship between altruism and agency costs in an ethnic family business. The in-depth case study of one family business established by a Turkish Bulgarian immigrant demonstrates how the founder´s altruistic behaviour toward family, kin, and nonfamily members linked through ethnic ties create a sense of togetherness and reciprocity influencing agency costs. From the gender perspective the analysis does not provide any interesting findings as gender is not explicitly addressed. Women are, however, visible in the business: the firm was named Neroli after the founder´s daughter, and some female family members and friends were involved in key positions, e.g. his wife not only worked in the store, but also managed relationships with firm´s distributors.

Widening the perspective with multiple informants

While entrepreneurship research has become more and more critical of the '*single, lonely entrepreneur*' as the key to the success of the family firm, this ideal seems still to hold a strong foothold in family firm research. For example, in a study by Salvato et al. (2010) of one single family firm history the factors identified necessary from the founder's decline business into a new business were assigned to result from *"the critical role of farsighted family champion of continuity*". On the other hand, they also found that the choice of non-family executives, development of a compelling business case and a balanced engagement of family members in the business were also important factors. From a gender perspective it is interesting that the widow of the founder - Irene Rubini Falck – is identified to having taken over the running of the business after her husband's death. The Falck family genogram is presented in the study and it identifies both women and men in the family. For the study 5 family members (3^{rd} and& 4^{th} generation) and 6 non-family members are interviewed and they are all men (16 interviews in total). Hence, the study design suggests that the women are not involved and therefore not relevant in the family firm study (Salvato et al., 2010).

In a study by Marchision et al. (2010) the aim is to study how corporate venturing impacts family business through the family unit and individual family members. The study is based on an in-depth longitudinal case study of corporate ventures in family firms. The paper presents short case vignettes - of younger generation members active in corporate venturing, one of the members is identified to be a female (youngest daughter). (Case Beta) In the other cases, the corporate ventures are based on the successors' initiative. In case Beta, it is stated that the father insisted in having all his five children to be part of the company (at the time the youngest daughter was working in investment banking). As there were no suitable management positions available, she was assigned to start the new venture. Hence, the responsibility for coming up with the corporate venture comes from the father (incumbent). The case portrays a huge success with the new venture and a new business field emerges. Then, a non-family manager is hired for the core business. The benefits of corporate venturing for the individual include ‘credibility in front of the non-family manager. The findings include interviews with several family and non-family members, and it is not specified from the perspective of whom this 'credibility' is listed as a benefit, the father, the daughter or both. Similar benefit is not represented in the other cases involving male successors in corporate venturing, even if in those cases, the success of the venture is marginal or the venture fails.

Tsang (2002) examines foreign direct investment behaviour of Chinese family businesses from an organisational learning perspective. The study is conducted as a comparative case study of 10 firms in which between 2-10 interviews of key managers were conducted. Tsang makes a comment that with two exceptions the researcher managed to talk to the family member in charge of overall operation of the firm. *“This person is usually the head of the family, a male, and referred to as “the boss” by non-family members of the company*”. Hence, the male dominance of Chinese family businesses is disclosed. Similarly, the male dominance in Chinese family businesses is visible in a longitudinal ethnographic study on family business succession process (Lam 2011) which is investigated as an ongoing social process. The study manages to capture the dynamism and complexity related to succession process as well as simultaneous multi-entity roles of the actors as it uses multiple informants – business founders, successors, family members and non-kin employees – total of 76 informants in 12 family businesses and focuses on the process of ‘doing’ business succession. The idea is not to find out the ultimate truth (i.e. what has actually happened during the succession process), but rather to understand the social process from the informants’ perspective. Gender issues are not addressed although family relationships and gender are visible in the text. The study reveals the research opportunities related to multiple informants and the ethnographic approach. Lam also recognizes possibilities to integrate gender perspective to the further analyses.

Atypical unit of analysis – couples – is used in a study of Fletcher (2010) aiming at exploring how venture creation and family business start-ups are constructed between co-habiting couples. Again gender is not explicitly addressed and the outcome of the study – a typology of co-preneurs – establishes different management and ownership roles to the couples, not the individuals. Descriptions provided on the origin of the business idea and early start-up phases demonstrate the multiple ways of entering into the business either alone or together. Also division of work varies between the couples. In the study co-preneurship assumes the shared risk and legal responsibility for the business as well as the balancing of work and family commitments without any gender perspective.

Role of entrepreneur in the context of wider social forces – analysing gender as a process

In an in-depth case study of an ethnic (South Asian) family firm in the UK Bhalla et al. (2006) investigate the nature of strategy process through a multiparadigmatic examination of the narrative of the firm. The events of the case provide only very little information on gender related issues: the family women are no longer involved in the business. *"…[They] do take an interest in the business, but they don´t interfere.* " However, applying the analytical tool, i.e. paradigmatic frameworks developed by Whittigton (1993) Bhalla et al. acknowledge that gender is a fertile area for research within the given framework and particularly within its systematic approach which emphasizes that family business is to be studied in the context of wider social forces, culture, and institutions that facilitate and impinge upon business activity (Bhalla et al. 2006).

Some studies assume gender as a process approach by analysing the complexities of the dynamics of family business and are, thus, capable of gaining a deeper understanding of the role of women. Hamilton (2006) aims to explore the role of women in founding and establishing a family firm. She provides narrative accounts of wives and husbands of three families and demonstrates that family business is an inherently social, cultural and historical phenomenon and should be studied accordingly. Hamilton's study reveals that although women may not be presented as owner-managers they may nevertheless take powerful leadership roles in establishing the family business. It also suggests that patriarchy provides only a partial understanding of family business leadership and needs to be challenged. Entrepreneurial identities, which emerge through participation, are constructed and shaped by multiple discourses. Different discourses and practices may be invoked to present the business to the outside world and these may be quite different to what is being presented behind the scenes. Although patriarchal discourse and practice are dominant, there are multiple, shifting forms of power constantly negotiated and re-negotiated. Family business gender relations are far from simply determined, and the role of men and women in family business are to be re-conceptualised. (Hamilton 2006). Similarly, Larty and Hamilton (2011) demonstrate the power of narratives by describing how they approach and frame the analysis of their own narrative research material. The study is rather a methodological piece of work but it also raises questions about gender and power in family businesses. The contribution of women in terms of ideas, time and capital is important in many plots and some reversals of fortune may have triggered entrepreneurial activity of the family. In all, Larty and Hamilton (2011) show how structural approach to narrative analysis may lead to interpretations which contribute to greater understanding of the role of entrepreneurs in different contexts, e.g. the role of women in family businesses.

Through a case study Watson (2009) looks at how entrepreneurially related identity work occurs in practice. He presents an account of aspects to a small business through ‘identity work’ of two individuals/cousins in charge of the business. This ethnographically oriented study exploits research material from interviews, conversations, dialogues and field notes in order to find out how the two cousins – ‘anti-academic’ Ali and Dina with academic background – draw upon and negotiate different discursive resources when making sense for themselves and others of their business and its changing circumstances. The study highlights the identity work as a relational or dialogic activity involving contestation with others. In addition, identity work is about individuals defining who they are as well as identifying who they are not. Individuals draw on variety of discursive resources in their identity work. The study does not address gender issues, but demonstrates the power of the approach in analysing e.g. gender as a process.

Discussion and conclusions

The contribution of the study is to demonstrate how gender is included in family business studies. We identify that most of the studies give no information on the gender. Implicitly those studies focus only or primarily on men and the women are invisible in the studies (Hamilton, 2006). The minority of the studies addressing gender either explicitly or implicitly are informative on the different strategies applied in the family business research. Gender is applied as a characteristic (variable) when some differences and similarities between women and men family business owner-managers with regard to their firm performance are reported (Vega, 1999; Sonfield and Lussier, 2005). Some studies apply gender more thoroughly and include gender in the analytical framework and discuss the hypothesized differences accordingly. The challenge related to single informants is addressed in some studies which therefore manage to gain better insight on the notion of 'familiness' or family relationships. In those studies gender becomes visible even if not explicitly addressed. Only a few studies explore gender in the context of wider social forces and assume a gender as a process approach by analyzing the complexities of the dynamics of family business and a deeper understanding of the role of women (Hamilton, 2006; Lewis & Massey, 2011). Our findings support Sarasvathy's (2004) suggestion of explicitly researching the individual and the firm also in family business research. We argue that family business research faces methodological problems of focusing primarily on firms with male owner-managers as informants and the gendered processes as well as the core of family business research, i.e. the notion of 'familiness', remain neglected.

Therefore, further studies are suggested to focus on capturing also empirically the notion of 'familiness' which has been conceptualized as focal in family business research. More importantly our study demonstrates the need to investigate the complex mechanisms of 'familiness' and business with special focus on gender. Addressing these gaps requires a thorough methodological re-thinking in order to tackle the challenge of not only the single, male owners/managers as informants, but also the stereotypical assumptions reinforced in the studies. This study has mainly focused on *how* gender is being studied in family business research, but it would be equally interesting to find out *what* are the themes that are more likely to be tackled with gender perspective.

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