

SIPAG, TIYAGA, AT TIPID: WOMEN IN SHOE MANUFACTURING

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This study investigates the female concept of success as well as the factors that account for the women's ability to be accomplished entrepreneurs. Their life stories highlight the strategies employed in combining the business of shoe manufacturing with the traditional roles as child carers and home managers. Also explored is how the families, neighborhood and other institutions shaped women such that they have been able, through economic power, to participate in decision-making within business and home settings.

The enhanced status of women can be gauged through improvement in the factors of production, household, personal well-being and community status. According to women entrepreneurs, the requirements of success in shoe manufacturing are: *sipag* (industry), *tiyaga* (perseverance), *tibay ng loob* (guts), and *tipid* (thrift).

Introduction

Recent studies on Filipino women underscore their disadvantaged position in society. Most wives suffer from the triple burden of housework, childbearing, and childrearing (Nolasco in Mananzan, 1989: 86). The present day woman continues to play the traditional role of a dutiful daughter who is socialized to become an exemplary wife and self-sacrificing mother, catering to the emotional needs of her sons, daughters, and husband. Wives have to earn a living, just like their husbands, to help augment the family income even as they also have to take care of the household chores (Miralao, 1980; Conaco, 1977; Azarcon in Mananzan, 1989: 147).

In addition, Filipino tradition conditioned women to stay at home and this situation hindered the women's career opportunities. With adequate finance to support household expenses, it is "ideal" for the women to stay at home.

Feminist scholars in the Philippines agree that there are societal conditions that persist to maintain the structure and ideology of male dominance. Our colonial experience has institutionalized it in this country. Male dominance is deeply ingrained in the cultural values, norms, religious beliefs, attitudes and life aspirations of human endeavor. The differences in the statuses and roles of men and women are based on certain beliefs regarding their biological make-up. Women are seen as physically weaker than men and therefore expected to engage in light work/activities. Because of their reproductive role, women are perceived to be in a better position, than men, to rear children and manage the home (Sobritchea, 1990).

The socialization process in many homes allows the persistence of gender stereotyping. Children are brought up learning sex-stereotyped roles and upholding the primacy of male attributes and qualities. Female children, in particular, are socialized to believe in marriage and motherhood as their idyllic destiny in life (Rodriguez, 1951).

The male/female dichotomy brings out the issue of "women's work" as nonwork and "men's work" as life-sustaining. Much of the reproductive work is considered women's work since they are housebound (Illo and Veneracion, 1989: 19) while productive work is mostly attributed to the men. In a market economy, domestic or reproductive work does not earn money. It does not produce an exchange value and moreover, is not reflected in the Gross National Product (GNP). Housewives are not considered part of the labor force because of the assumption that they do not "work". They are portrayed as dependent on their husbands' income and whenever they do work, it is considered as supplementary and secondary to their primary reproductive function. This situation has placed women in a vulnerable and disadvantaged position.

Despite all these differences, some women are able to combine marriage with work by putting up home businesses (Marbella, 1978; and Mayangao, 1984: 18). Statistics show that at least 31.1 percent of women are considered as own account workers (NCW, 1990). Of the 31.1 percent own account workers, 94.1 percent are self-employed and 5.9 percent are employers. This implies that many women are active in formal business and some have, in fact, become successful in their work.

Although there were studies and printed stories about women who have succeeded in business (e.g., UP-ISSI, 1990; Marbella, 1978; APSDEP, 1988; FAMD & SERDEF, 1981), very little has been done in exploring

the strategies used by women running the household and business at the same time. Moreover, female-oriented management techniques in business are yet to be explored. This study aimed to fill these gaps.

The central concern of this study was to probe into the subjective aspects of women's participation in production work (e.g., personal reasons of women going into business, their objectives and attitudes about work). It provides insights into the everyday forms of women resistance to male dominance or the women's deviation from their traditional roles, the root causes of such resistance or deviation, the feminist concept of success, and strategies for achieving success in business. In-depth studies of the struggles or efforts of Filipino women to challenge patriarchal structures and ideologies brought out indigenous or native assertions of feminism. Consequently, this study gave insights on Filipino worldview of feminism distinct from that of the West.

In attempting to study the female view of success, this research has discovered that women's personal characteristics and environmental conditions play an important role in the success of their business.

The Physical and Social World of Women

The province of Laguna shows a history of an early set of patterns for a healthy economic development based on the manufacture and processing of various food products. Likewise, the beginning of shoe manufacturing in Malaban and De la Paz dates back to the Spanish period where many families became involved with wooden shoe manufacturing, and a few of which still persist today amidst the growth of shoe manufacturing. The proximity of Biñan to Manila that is the country's center of commerce encouraged shoe manufacturers, specifically the women, to learn the rudiments of the trade. Biñan, Laguna presents a culture that is distinct from other towns. This community emphasizes work regardless of gender. Men and women have to earn a living to overcome poverty. They were socialized to earn living early in their childhood stage. As Parson and Bales (1955, in Worsley, 1988) argue:

“Primary socialization, especially in preschool years, structures the child's personality not just in general terms, but according to the particular culture of the society.”

The industriousness of Biñan women could be attributed to availability of jobs in the community and the pressing problem of poverty. Most of the women in this study confirmed that many jobs were available in the community such that the indolent would not survive.

Moreover, the manufacturing industries are supported by formal and informal economic structures, such as credit institutions, and means of communication and transportation that have enabled these industries to flourish.

Few recreational facilities in the barangays also fostered the growth of the shoemaking industry since the people, especially the women, shifted their interests from recreational activities to making slippers and shoes. Notably, the absence of recreational facilities for women have conditioned them to work and earn a living, to work hard to improve their standard of living.

The absence of secondary schools in Barangays Malaban and De la Paz deterred the citizens from pursuing and completing their formal education. The growth of shoe factories in the two communities further hindered their entrance to secondary schools. Children were often encouraged by their parents to stop schooling to help the latter in their jobs as vendors, shoe manufacturers, and farmers.

On the other hand, the presence of shoe factories became a training ground for the people to learn footwear manufacturing. Moreover, these factories specified the roles of men and women in the industry, thus emphasizing sex-role characteristics.

The physical arrangement of factories complements sexual division of labor since most factories are designed in a manner such that male workers work together while female workers work either in a separate room or at home. This kind of setting has also divided the supervisory work of the manager cum owner. Since mostly women own the factories, they generally supervise the whole process of shoemaking. However, husbands help by managing the male workers (*maglalapat*) who are based in the factories, whereas women managers look into the activities of female workers before marketing their products.

The physical arrangement of factories and flexibility of working time has allowed women to work at home while doing their housework. They sew the top portions of shoes between cooking or taking care of children, and most often continue their work in the evening when the whole family is asleep. On the other hand, the male workers work in the factories and concentrate on fitting the sole and top portion of the shoes.

The shoe factories are often family enterprises where members of the family also engage in production along with other workers. This social organization of factories brings less labor conflict. Conflicts in the factories are often resolved before these become bigger because the manager, with the help of the husband, acts as a "parent" whenever problems arise. Problems are settled as one big family.

Resolving problems again entails sexual division of labor. Whenever female workers are in trouble, the female manager solves it while the husband and the foreman take care of conflicts among male workers.

Women's Socialization

The exposure of women to responsibilities and jobs had conditioned them to view life as a struggle. Women helped their parents support their families in the process of imbibing the value of work that persisted until adulthood. Married women strove to own factories because they wanted their children to finish college, land in prestigious jobs, and have stable professions. These jobs socialized women to become achievement-oriented and identified themselves as supporters of the family.

Chafetz (1988: 149) suggested that:

"Gender identity is established in the early years of life by a complex and subtle set of mechanism, many not within the control, or at least the full control of parents (e.g., media, peers, teachers)."

In this study, most women identified their roles as future mothers and at the same time, as earners.

The rank-order of women has a significant impact in the shaping of their values and attitudes toward their families. Most of the women in this research were either the eldest or the second-to-the eldest children. They often took over the duties of their mothers whenever the latter were away. These women acted as surrogate mothers to their younger brothers or sisters. Some of them went with their parents to work on the farms or sell wares and other agricultural products. In effect, the children's duties and responsibilities are often attached to their positions in the rank-order of siblings.

The economic participation of women does not require them to stay away from their traditional roles. However, they perform these roles only whenever they are free and most of the time, with the assistance of another female who may be a household help, or a younger sister, or an in-law. This brings to light Chafetz's (1988) view that:

“The content of gender-roles learned in childhood is likely to be quite traditional, even when the parents are not necessarily traditional in their own roles.”

The mothers of these women were mostly shoemakers and vendors making the skill in producing and marketing of footwear inter-generational. These women were able to learn the intricacies of the footwear industry because they grew and became aware of their roles as sewers, future mothers, and supporters of families, while their mothers were struggling to become successful in the business. Lessons in footwear making and marketing started early in life and went on until women married. This experience equipped them with technical knowledge in establishing their business.

Jobless or lowly-paid parents caused families to live in poverty. It became a challenge for them to work hard to overcome poverty and its effects. Poverty pushed them to work hard to be successful in the business. The opportunities in the industry that were available in the community, poverty, a strong desire to work and earn a living, and a determination to succeed in the business, served as motivators to success.

Women who have started earning a living at an early age, married young. Their jobs prepared them to support their families. Confident that they could have their families, most of them accepted the responsibilities as mothers, housewives, and earners. Their jobs were conducive to their multiple roles since the schedule for making footwear was flexible. Most of them worked as sewers or pattern-makers at home between housework and supervision of their children. The growing needs of the children motivated these women to work hard and look for means to improve their living conditions. Neighbors who were making profits out of footwear manufacturing became their sources of inspiration. The growing demands of the market further encouraged these women to put up their business. This would seem to point out that women set new goals according to the needs of their families and the environmental condition. Katz (1976) (in Chafetz, 1988) pointed out that:

“Sex-role socialization occurs over the entire lifespan; that at different life stages, the cognitive and social tasks associated with sex-roles that are to be mastered differ; and that the social influences on sex-roles development with each stage differ.”

The skill in embroidering designs and sewing top portion of slippers exposed these women to the intricacies of manufacturing. Moreover, their experiences in selling trained them to market their products. It is important to note that marketing is a major factor in making the factory profitable.

Several factors have played important roles in shaping women's business (e.g., environmental conditions, such as presence of shoe factories in the communities composed of shoemakers). These molded them to become survivors in the business. The poverty they experienced, the skills they had learned in the various phases of their lives, and their exposure to earning a living early in life, developed traits such as *sipag*, *tipid*, *tibay ng loob*, *tiyaga* that are important for a successful business career. Notably the exposure to life outside their homes has influenced them a great deal in being more successful than their parents. Most of the women were orphaned early in life and this deprivation enables them to thrive on the dynamics of their community. The women struggled through life inspired by many of their neighbors who became successful through business. Successful men and women in the business became models for their lives and for taking the risk of investing in business.

Hard work, thrift, industry, patience, and perseverance were qualities that made these women successful in the business. However, these qualities brought negative effects on their health. Many older women in the business became sickly because of sleeping late at night and skipping meals. The only consolation was that they were able to afford the best medical treatment in Manila.

Women's Concept of Success

Recognition of women's success by the community often came in the form of donations sought from them and the tapping of their potentials as leaders of the community. Success to women means more income but also more expenses.

Similarly, men have viewed success in line with their wives' perception — they saw success as improvements in the business and in the households. Both husbands and wives defined success in terms of sales generated, continuity of production, cash inflows, increase in capital, improved physical facilities, and more credit lines. The difference lies in the process involved. Women talked of success in marketing, for instance, the use of checks and the employment of accountants, while men emphasized the external appearance of the factors of production (e.g., presence of delivery vehicles, existence of factories over time, and ownership of market stalls). This proved that women had more responsibility in the management of shoe factories.

In the households, both husbands and wives perceived success in terms of material gains including children's education and benefits. Husbands also viewed success as having the opportunity to engage in pleasurable activities. Their vices were satisfied because of money. Contrastingly, women have seen the positive and negative effects of success as happiness and pain, physical and marital.

Women's concept of success reveals that they played an active role in keeping the business going. They felt happy and lighthearted once their hard work was compensated by increase in orders and sales that eventually led to increase in income.

Other than the physical improvement of the household and factories and the emotional well-being and community status of the women, success was attributed to religious and magical beliefs. They believe that God has showered them with blessings thus making their business successful. No matter how industrious or thrifty or persevering one is, women claimed that all these would come to naught when bad luck comes. To prevent bad luck, they ask the help of fortunetellers (*manghubula*), follow some practices of the Chinese businessmen, and place good luck charms in their homes, stores, and factories. Moreover, women believe in luck and *gulong ng palad* (wheel of fortune). Their business could attract luck depending on the location of the factories and houses, the shape of their lot (e.g., bag-shape lots bring more wealth), their high spirits when starting the day's work, the lucky days to start their business, doing good to others and sharing one's luck with others by celebrating with the barriofolk. However, some women are resigned to the fact that luck is elusive no matter how they tried hard to work and market their products. While they may not be lucky today, they are still hopeful that their luck will come in the future (*gulong ng palad*).

From the foregoing discussions, it is safe to say that women's view of success is holistic. It includes the following:

- a business which has accumulated assets of land, labor, and capital;
- a household where women are happy with their families and satisfied with properties acquired, basic needs provided for, a stable income, and savings; and
- most importantly, pride in seeing their children finish schooling, an opportunity denied them.

Besides their smooth relationship with their husbands and children, they feel that they are satisfied because of their improved quality of life. They were able to emancipate themselves from poverty, and most importantly, from male dominance. They felt happy and lighthearted once their hard work was compensated by the increase in orders and sales.

Women were able to get what they wanted from men through persuasion. This seems to point out that Filipinos are not confrontational by nature. They make use of their charms as women and their communication skills in persuading men to achieve their goals. Thus, many of them were able to convince their husbands that they could do the marketing of shoes with the use of these qualities. Furthermore, storeowners, who are usually Chinese, later expressed their trust and confidence in dealing with women rather than male shoe managers. They pointed out that women are more reliable than men when it comes to delivery and quality of products. Hence, women have slowly gained confidence in a world that was originally male dominated. In turn, the business has emancipated women from poverty and their traditional roles as women.

The qualities of women and their business acumen would have a very great impact in raising the quality of life of Filipino families and the country's economy on the assumption that the structure of society would fit with the women's potentials.

Implications to the Country's Economy

The success of women in the shoe manufacturing industry shows their potentials in helping our economy. Their economic participation however, did not relinquish them totally from their household responsibilities. Although the switching of the roles made men aware of women's role, still, women had to supervise the household. Economic participation therefore, gave them more responsibilities and burden.

Moreover, these women were mostly found in the informal sector of the economy and hence, they remain outside of the jurisdiction of the government's trade policies.

Financial and marketing problems are often handled by Chinese businessmen thus making the women vulnerable to loan sharks and imbalanced trading arrangements. If women were successful in shoe manufacturing, the Chinese businessmen were more successful.

Women's disadvantaged position was aggravated by the process of business transaction as individuals rather than collectively. They have not formed organizations which could offer opportunities for greater bargaining power with the department stores in Manila. The prices are still dictated by the Chinese businessmen rather than the manufacturers. Presently, however, most women feel satisfied since they are earning so much and are happy about the results of the business.

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