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Women Empowerment: Social Dilemmas of Identity Crisis

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Abstract

As everyone around is rattling on about women empowerment but in practicality the situation might be different what seems at the superficial level. Often what is witnessed as a means to break through historical barriers of gender inequality, culture, etc., however; it can also lead to internal conflicts regarding self-identity. Despite being the efforts done by women becoming empowered still they are facing the constant issues of identity crisis. Some are eventually searching for, fighting for and craving for personal identity still yet being empowered. The paper puts forth that under the gab of empowerment; social dilemmas to identity crisis amongst women still needs due consideration.

Keywords: Craving, Crisis, Empowered, Gab, Practicality.

Introduction

As it has been said that behind every successful man there is a woman but does the contrary stands true in the contemporary times. I am time and again surrounded by questions as a woman do I feel successful, am I being paid equal to men, am I competent enough to handle the position I am being bestowed with, etc. and many more.

Sultana and Mahbub (2021) in their work defined women's empowerment as "the process of empowering women. Empowerment raises the status of women through education, awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment equips and allows women to take life-determining decisions. They may get the opportunity to redefine gender roles, which in turn provide them more freedom to pursue desired goals." Women empowerment is a term that reckons time and again as a constant influx moving towards change. However, still the question remains in context that whether it exists in practicality or being a myth. This paradox of empowerment lies in situations where the women are burdened with dual expectations that is succeeding the societal pressures of the traditional male-dominated spheres of work, politics, etc alongwith being at the same time expected to fulfill traditional roles of mother, caretaker, etc. This concept is mostly commemorated in mainstream media, but this narrow portrayal affects women's sense of identity as they at times don't meet the ideals laid down by the society. It is so because they are still struggling with other complex issues one of that being the identity crisis.

This term identity crisis was popularized by Erik Erikson (1968) putting forth a period when an individual initiates interrogating who they are including their role, values, beliefs and goals. This might include confusion, uncertainty, conflict about multiple identities especially roles related to gender, culture, religion, professional versus family roles, etc. These are triggered by life transitions such as adolescence, marriage, migration, career changes, parenthood, retirement and many more. The concept holds an elaborative and detailed analysis in the ancient texts and tradition. It has been studied and examined usually as a part of themes in literature, psychology and many others. Several writers and poets have operationalized the term the way in which they have formulated their works. The meaning of the identity crisis varies with respect to different connotations and situations. The arenas, sample subjects as well as the context do account while defining the term. As far as in this situation it implies a period of vacillation and being perplexed wherein a person's integrity becomes insecure typically because of a change in their expected role as well as ambition in

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society. Women inspite of holding various leading positions still strive for carving out their identity. They are still exploring as to what all really defines their personality and character at times as well.

As empowerment on one hand would encourage women to redefine femininity however this shift may cause confusion for those who have been struggling reconciling novice opportunities with traditional ideals of what is meant to be a woman. There is a contradiction between the cultural expectations and individual choices for women. The cultural backgrounds and family expectations influence a woman to embrace empowerment gradually making them alienated from their roots. The women belonging to young generations (after independence) may feel more independent whereas older generations (before independence) might face more resistance from traditional structures.

Literature Review

Dombrovskis (2016) study was carried out on first-year female students at Latvian universities consisted of 501 students aged 18 to 27. In the result it was indicated that age, education, socio-economic background or social class was associated with identity crisis.

Nagpal and Sharma (2016) in their study on Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande who have been termed as distinguished women writers in India as they established their immensity by dealing with the issue of women's position in the existing society. They have always stressed upon the exposing the discontented personal life and frustration of women due to the given set up and orthodox attitude of the patriarchal world. According to them marriage provides women security however are devoid of self-expression and open involvement with the outer world. They both opined that after marriage a woman is transmitted from one cage to another. Nagpal and Sharma (2016) in their work portrayed the predicament of women in the selected works of Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande. Herein the effort has been made to depict the humiliation and the helpless attitude of women at various points of life through several of their literary outputs. Thus, Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande were the flag bearers of the women liberation and had continually written to express the women's standpoint thereby, awakening the women's consciousness so as to emancipate them from the cocoon of domesticity, insecurity and helplessness.

Rezaei Dareh Deh, Baradaran and Karami (2016) study investigated the links between both work-family conflict and women's identity crisis. The survey method and questionnaire was being used, in this study. The sample was extracted using cluster sampling from employed women in Khorram Abad city specifically from three occupational groups of women. The results indicated a link between roles syndicate work-family and work-family conflict experience further changes of the conflict explicated the family factor as well as family role expectations. The association between family social support of employed and work-family conflict experience was too established. Finally, research findings indicated that was affinity between the work- family conflict experience and women's identity crisis. It was concluded that women balancing multiple roles i.e. worker, caregiver, mother, etc., usually experience conflicts among expectations resulting in stress and identity confusion. The

crisis could also be due to lack of role congruence.

Misra (2018) studied the identity crisis development of female secondary students has been measured and analyzed to find out the level of said problem. In this study, investigator has considered to focus on the influence of parent in respect to develop identity crisis as per the situational criterion. Identity crisis is an identical problem of an individual which will assure the ineffective integration of physiological as well as psychological systems. Through the study of said variable of the study, it has been found that self-identity crisis of the female secondary students (influenced by the role of family or family members) is in moderate level of measurement. Furthermore, it can be explicitly stated that family expectations (on behavior, roles), parental pressure, or conflicting family norms could firmly influence self-identity. Identity crisis could also occur when external expectations were inconsistent with personal inclinations.

Bajaj and Lall (2018) in their study explored the link between identity processing style, identity commitment, identity orientation, self- esteem and meaning in life. The sample included 199 late adolescent women in the age range of 17-20 years. The results depicted links between the identity constructs and self-esteem as well as meaning in life. It could be inferred that late adolescence/young adulthood was a critical period wherein women experienced greater variations that being in college, vocation, relationships, etc., they investigated and negotiated identity could be stressful. Identity crisis was consistently correlated with lower self-esteem, lack of meaning in life and psychological distress. Also, establishment of a sense of coherent identity provided women more stability and purpose.

Ugale (2018) in her paper in mainly analysing autobiographical fictional work of Doris Lessing work "The Golden Notebook" investigated the identity crisis of the main character's identity crisis. Doris's experiences of life lead her to focus on position of women in a patriarchal society including their relation to men as well as children. She also mentioned their recurring attempts to elude away from the social and political oppression. The prime focus was on Anna Wulf who had a personal, artistic and social breakdown. Anna kept four notebooks that recorded every phase in her life out of fear of anarchy and chaos. The black notebook was dedicated to her life in central Africa; the red notebook to her experience in the British Communist Party and thoughts concerning the current political situations in England; the yellow notebook recorded Anna's life as a writer and also about her alter-ego Ella (the protagonist of the novel entitled "The Shadow of the Third"); lastly, the blue notebook had Anna's dreams as a personal diary that kept factual account of her life and search for identity as a women writer. This work proved that women were not liberated completely. Anna was still preoccupied with determining patterns and stereotypes. She did not succeed in finding a way of living wherein she can have a contended love life however, she eventually succeeded in achieving wholeness also, dealing with society or men's, prejudice about independent women.

Cesaroni, Sentuti and Pediconi (2021) in their work amalgamated a case study (in the form of biographical interview) and a narrative analysis (in the form of follow-up interviews or conversations) for investigating the experience of a woman who established a business and

after retirement declared her son as its heir. The findings indicated that interchange between a woman entrepreneur's multiple identities might evolve through two main processes of change i.e. transformation and fading. While in transformation, adverse interactions between identities transform into synergistic and fruitful relationships however, in fading, conflicts between identities gradually dissipated paving way for peaceful coexistence. Women's agency demonstrating predominant in creating these processes possible and assisting her achieve personal and professional fulfillment. Thus, women often juggle between multiple identities for e.g. professional, mother, partner and community member. Over a period of time, some identities transform, fade or get into conflict with each other. Managing the variations in these is a part and parcel of identity work.

Ishwariya and Parthasarathi (2022) in their paper highlighted Anita Nair's work "Ladies Coupe" depicting six female characters and their life stories. This particular novel dealt with subjects such as women's empowerment, quest for identity, women's sufferings and so on and expressed the characters' inner thoughts as well as mental psyche. She was a realistic writer who depicted individual's real-life situations in her novels and was a unique writer with enormous proficiency in creating fascinating novels. She vividly conveyed the sorrows and frustration of women in society. In a patriarchal society the arduous challenge for a woman was to discover her identity alongwith equipping herself with the necessary skills and qualities. Ishwariya and Parthasarathi (2022) investigated the good characteristics of women who have overcome adversities in their lives. It also put forth the ways in which women empower themselves as capable individuals in society, beginning to find themselves and established a strong identity in society. They also highlighted hidden perspectives and revealed a novice dimension of femininity with reference to the contemporary age. As feminism varies depending on age and practice, so it does not have to be the same for all ages. It focused on the women's latent and shattered feelings alongwith bringing out their emotional values in their lives. It is crucial to understand emotional distress than physical pain.

Chakma and Pandey (2022) in their study on northeastern states concluded that Nagaland, and Mizoram had male-dominated societies where it was challenging for women to hold influential positions in politics. This caused identity crises among women since they were unable to participate in the formulation of state policy and frequently denied political space. In comparison in Meghalaya's distinctive matrilineal society, women still had very little influence and none at the local level of government because they were ineligible for seat reservations to run for office, an important component of achieving sustainable democracy at the local level. In all the three states, women contribute significantly to society via their labour however only a few of them have been given the opportunity to run for state democracy.

Thakur and Gupta (2023) in their work mentioned that women in any Indian family have always been treated secondary as compared to men who still have the primary position according to the patriarchal customs. Thus, women have been discriminated against and treated as insignificant in the decision-making pertaining to family issues. Due to this treatment of women in many families especially in the

rural areas of India, their identity as an individual have always had been at stake. Geetanjali Shree who was one of the renowned novelists who wrote in the Hindi language, has been one of the exponents of the issues of identity crisis via her short stories and novels. Her novel *Mai* (originally written in Hindi in 2004), which was later translated into English by Rahul Soni entitled "The Roof Beneath Their Feet" depicted the story of the main protagonist who was feeling lonely and suffering from an identity crisis. Thakur and Gupta (2023) in their paper explored the agony and desires of a woman's lonely heart that just lost her identity in the patriarchal thinking of society. Hence, she went through identity crises which ultimately lead to loss of interest in life ultimately, she died due to the meaninglessness of her life.

Ikram and Sultan (2025) in their qualitative research study utilized statistical data from reports, scholarly articles, books as well as newspaper publications. Also, Habermas theory of identity deficit has been applied for critically examining the crisis. This study examined the role of governmental institutions and legislation in shaping women's identities and evaluated the state's response to gender-related issues. The analyses indicated that Pakistan's institutional failures, gender discrimination, inconsistencies in law, ethics and societal values had magnified the identity crisis among women. As gender equality has been integral to a country's socio-economic stability, this issue posed a significant threat to national progress and development. Alongwith this, lens of Habermas identity deficit theory, the research investigated two key crises among Pakistani women i.e. firstly, the legitimization crisis, wherein societal norms crashed to verify women's identities and secondly, the motivation crisis, wherein legal and cultural contradictions hampered their empowerment. A multi-dimensional approach was needed to address the legal reforms, institutional accountability as well as societal change. The study emphasized the desperate requirement for a structured policy framework to viaduct the gap between law and practice, ensuring women's rights and identity have been protected and promoted in Pakistan. Last but not the least in some societies, women's identities have been constrained by tradition, social expectations and unequal laws. These external pressures reduced their sense of agency, causing feelings of identity deficit or internal conflict.

Thorana and Fatima (2025) in their work drew a prominent description of a female Greta's difficult battling between her damaged thoughts and her daily life that could be found in the story "To Reach Japan". For the incredible portrayal of her internal yearning, quest for identity and desire for a profession was explicated. Identity crises have been common among women in society as they grapple with traditional roles, social expectations and the requirement of defining themselves. As a consequence, the obstacle from their relationships i.e. wife, mother, and daughter etc., interpret them greater than their own identities and goals. The conflicting factors as a consequence of identity crisis were a woman's sense of self has been moduled by her social roles, cultural standards and personal experiences. For reaching Japan exploration for her true identity and perceiving hard to overwhelm all the obstacles and at last shunning away from her marital life for achieving her dream.

Conclusion

Women's empowerment seems partly real in several places, including India there has been substantial progress in education, legal rights, political visibility, health etc. But most of the core power inequalities such as economic participation, leadership, wage equality, autonomy and protection remain as well as are still lagging. In many of the country's empowerment is uneven i.e. varying hugely by region, caste/class, socio-economic status, etc. Unless there are efforts focusing more on implementing laws, changing societal norms, enabling women economically (specifically leadership roles) and closing gaps in representation, empowerment will still remain incomplete. Although, empowerment can boost self-esteem, it can also bring in mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. The strategies that women needed to cope with the identity crisis, includes therapy, peer-support groups and community-based empowerment initiatives that must be highlighted time and again. Media plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of empowered women. It should portray body standards and affecting women's self-worth. So empowerment initiatives need to often advocate for body positivity including media representation can undermine its efforts. Last but not the least, the importance of social and emotional support networks such as family, friends and mentors in assisting women to navigate their identity crises must be accentuated.

Recommendations

The concept of empowerment has to be redefined wherein a more inclusive and intersectional definition of empowerment that highlights the complexities of women's identities. Alongwith this framework providing independence for women to navigate empowerment by not abandoning their personal or cultural values needs to be prepared. The role of education and advocacy in assisting women comprehending that empowerment should be about choices that provide women the freedom to carve their individual identities. The policies that direct towards a more holistic approach to women's empowerment, supporting not only economic independence but mental health, personal growth as well as social inclusion requires to be recommended. The role of media in both empowering and complicating women's self-image i.e. the rise of influencers, online activism and self-presentation on has to be taken care of. A notion of reflection on the psychological paradox of increased autonomy leading to more pressure and stress needs to be pondered upon too.

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