

DISCUSSION
AND
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The present study explored issues of identity of women by examining how educated women after marriage, residing in a joint household typically resolve conflicts when confronted with contradictory demands of self-aspirations based on higher education and the expectations of family members that are more conventional. This chapter discusses the key findings of the present study in the context of globalization and the changes in family and kinship systems.

Higher education, marriage and identity of women: A *mêlée*

The tremendous expansion of higher education and diversification of occupations has brought forth positive aspects for women such as greater mobility, economic independence and increased decision making power. Nevertheless, with globalization, paid work is no longer a choice for a middle class Indian woman; it has become an obligation (Krishnaraj, 1999). Modernity is evident in a politically active, self-sustaining economy that provides the individual with the opportunity to contribute to and progress with society. The Indian women in this study identified higher education as one factor that contributed to their status as empowered modern women. However, they also recognized the fact that while the pursuit of higher education enabled them to become members of the professional community, it did not prepare them to deal with roles and responsibilities of the educated modern woman. Martha Fetherolf Loutfi (2002) echoes this sentiment. She claims:

Important as work is for income, production and status, people are not defined solely by their work...Thus, an examination of the issues surrounding women,

gender and work must be holistic. This means considering the role of productive work in life as a whole ... (p. 5)

The women identified shifting life course events (such as university life, professional jobs, marriage) that caused changes in their own identity.

Higher education of women, in the present study, contributed to their personal identity as the personal descriptions of their self included becoming 'independent', 'analytical', 'confident', 'ambitious', 'logical', 'mature', 'responsible' as well as developed skills of 'problem solving' and 'decision making'. Higher education empowers women, in the sense that it provides them ability to make choices and take decisions that are appropriate for their life. In other words, the agency of women is enhanced with education where her ability to negotiate increases. For Kabeer (2005), education specifically develops 'transformative' agency wherein a woman gains ability to reflect about the restrictive aspects of her roles and relationships and act on it. Women as active agents were sampled in the present study when some of them were fairly independent in terms of negotiating and making decisions regarding the course they wanted to pursue or which institute they wanted to join as well as in the process of marriage partner selection. This indicates changes in the process of socialization where parents encourage independence and assertiveness among daughters.

While accepting this interpretation, one could nevertheless argue that the empowering nature of higher education of women is conditioned by the context in which it is provided. In societies like India that are characterized by gender inequality, where women's role is largely seen as 'domestic', the role of education is visualized in terms of equipping her with skills to become better wife and mother. The meaning attributed to

higher education by women determines the impact of higher education on their own identity. For instance, self-motivated professional employed women with educated parents, who had stayed in hostel, experienced greater impact of the entire process of higher education on their identity, in comparison to women from liberal arts who pursued graduate degrees for better job opportunities or to fulfill aspirations of parents. Several aspects of patrilineal kinship ideology prevalent in North India such as restrictions on mobility of women, gendered division of labor, anxiety regarding early and appropriate marriage and control of female chastity constrain women's access to educational opportunities (Chanana, 1998; Derne, 1994; Ganesh, 1999). Hence, the deeply entrenched cultural norms, rules and practices that shape social relations in North India is likely to influence the behaviors, define values and shape choices (Kabeer, 1999).

Therefore, one can argue that though higher education influences the identity development of women, its influence may vary depending on the context of education.

Then, is higher education really a key to empowerment of women?

Throughout the process of conducting interviews, and subsequent data analyses, each woman's path of identity development was mapped. The results revealed that higher education was not only a common road traveled, but also one that appeared to significantly influence each individual's conception of self. The contribution of higher education in shaping identity was mediated by marriage. Marriage appeared to be a significant event that not only challenged the existing identity but demanded transformation to adapt to the new identity enmeshed in the roles of wife and daughter-in-law. The contrasting norms of behavior for a daughter and daughter-in-law create impediments for a woman in forming a coherent identity.

In Indian society, the institution of marriage is so powerful that it calls for behavioral and psycho-social changes in women. In the present study women talked about changes within self after marriage that related to their thinking and behavior, and changes in self-in-relation with their own parents and friends as well as creating new social networks. Many women consciously decided to change as they considered that changes within self were required in order to adjust to new environment, roles, relationships and family, especially when a woman stays in a joint family. In other words, marriage enhances the social identity of a woman with her assimilation in the new family and formation of a new identity defined in the matrix of relationships.

Responsibility of women increases after marriage. Women are considered to be 'naturally' responsible for most of the unpaid work of the household (Ganesh, 1998; Okin, 1994). The role of a 'home maker' is a salient factor in how women construct their primary identity. Till today the gender role socialization in India highlights 'men as bread winners and women as home makers and care takers'. Papanek (1990) notes that 'given the persistence of gender-based inequalities in power, authority, and access to resources, one can conclude that socialization for gender inequalities is by and large very successful' (p. 170). In the last decade, this ideology has changed substantially where many women are employed outside home and contribute significantly to the economic well-being of the family. The perception that women's work outside home is less significant and of less worth, devalues their economic contribution and fails to acknowledge their career aspirations. Employed women often suffer from a 'double bind' (having to be professional and having to be 'womanly') and the 'double burden' (of labour at home and labour at work) (Cotterill & Letherby, 2005). Thus, women become

involved in “a cycle of socially caused and distinctly asymmetric vulnerability” (Okin, 1994). Clearly, the educational level and employment status does not guarantee that women will be able to exercise power in their marriages.

With social and economic changes, Indian family is witnessing a change in the socialization process of women, especially in middle and upper middle class, where the socialization is geared towards acquisition of skills of self-management, self-reliance, challenging existing gender roles and resisting complicity to the societal expectations. In the present study, many women did not receive deliberate ‘training’ from parents for marital roles, and instead were encouraged to realize their educational and career goals. Although marriage was an important goal for these women, it was not the ultimate goal, as a sizable majority of the women also wanted to pursue their careers. They did not wish to be full-time wives or daughters-in-law. That was also reflected in their conceptions of marriage where women with professional education considered marriage as a ‘risk’ to their independence. Few women who did not seem to experience any significant impact of higher education on their identity adopted the new roles after marriage more comfortably.

Gender role socialization, deliberate or tacit, is still so powerful that women tend to make more adjustments after marriage. Bourdieu (1977, cited in Kabeer, 1999) has conceptualized this deeper reality of socialization in the idea of “*doxa*” – the aspects of tradition and culture which are so taken-for-granted that they become naturalized. Due to the fact that marriage still continues to remain mandatory for all individuals especially girls, some families engage their daughters towards preparation for marital roles in terms of developing acceptable behavior and learning skills of home management. In line with

this socialization, women consider domestic responsibility, family harmony and solidarity as their significant duties. Some women in the present study conformed completely to the conventional roles of wives and daughters-in-law after marriage. The identity pattern of these women was called 'acceded'. Higher education did not bring significant changes in their identity, thereby creating minimal conflicts in their identity development. It may be concluded that 'the absence of alternative roles makes marriage a virtual necessity for women, and also guarantees compliance with inequalitarian marriage rules...' (Banerjee, 1999, p.673)

Marriage in India at this time reflects much of the confusion and contradictions that characterize a traditional society that is growing into a modern one (Sonpar, 2005).

Increased participation of women in work force has led to changes in gender roles. In the present study women who aspired to establish a career made efforts to make marriage and career compatible. In the process, there is an increased burden for women to balance multiple roles. Higher education empowers women to negotiate their identity after marriage wherein they develop awareness and ability to challenge patrifocal family structure and ideology. Further they develop ability to control key aspects of their life and develop control in relation to resources, self-reliance and decision-making. Therefore, many educated women who were conscious of their identity developed strategies to retain their core identity. Women's ability to strategize within a set of concrete constraints that reveal and define the blueprint of patriarchy is termed as 'patriarchal bargain' (Kandiyoti, 1988). These bargains influence the shaping of women's gendered roles and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts. Educated women devised their own individual ways to negotiate their role construction. Different women have responded in

different ways to deal with the challenges to converge the conflicting identities posed by self-aspirations and conventional norms of Indian society.

For instance, in order to balance their multiple roles, some women compromised on a 'job' rather than a 'career'. Career is interpreted as a determined, competitive and ambitious working plan and the notion of a job appears less threatening as it is designed to accommodate the familial responsibilities (Athanasiadou, 1997).

On the other hand there were women who continued to carry the double-burden of role of a home maker and a professional. Under the circumstances, women often had to forgo their individual needs in order to meet the demands of family roles. Conflict can arise in the conception of their self as women attempt to juggle the roles of wives and daughters-in-law with the role of a professional. The identity pattern of these women was called 'double-bind'. Gradually, after a certain period, some 'double-bind' women turned 'assertive' to realize their self-goals guided by strong career aspirations and values of independence and freedom. It is possible, however, that they may continue to remain 'double-bind' women to accommodate their responsibility towards parenthood. Currently none of the women had any child. Moreover, the question that arises is, how best can these 'assertive' women achieve their self-goals? Is it possible by being in a joint family or creating a separate household is the only viable solution?

In Indian context where households are organized along more corporate lines, where a powerful ideology of 'connectedness' binds the activities of family (Kabeer, 1999), individual women's capacity to address structural inequality is restrained. Even with higher education and employment, women do not actively seek the opportunity to set up separate households as this is not socially desirable. Instead, most of the women continue

to make efforts to maintain their marriages, and strengthen the 'cooperative' dimension of 'cooperative-conflict' (Sen, 1990).

In circumstances where the goal for autonomy and addressing self-directed emotional needs and personal fulfillment becomes significant for women, one can anticipate that some 'double-bind' women after some time may turn 'assertive'. Importantly, for these women, as Erikson (1946) suggests that a genuine identity should be constructed around a set of specific domains. Women should develop self-awareness and self-consciousness to realize that certain aspects of their identity are true, genuine and real, those are indispensable; while others are marginal and superficial. This dilemma to maintain core identity amongst multiple identities is anchored in the question: Can a woman integrate her identity defined by her self-aspirations and the one defined by her status of a married woman? Some women try to strike a compromise by compartmentalizing the identity guided by self-goals from the identity of being a conventional wife and daughter-in-law. However, such a strategy often leads to confusion, dissatisfaction, anxiety and frustration among women. The identity patterns of the women reflect that identity is an ongoing process. As Marcia (1980) writes, "a well-developed identity structure is flexible. It is open to changes in society and to changes in relationships. This openness assures numerous reorganizations of identity contents through out the person's life, although the essential identity process remains the same, growing stronger with each crisis" (p.160). Some families have responded remarkably openly to women's education and career aspirations by allowing them to continue their careers and providing support at home, as in the case of 'accomplishers'. Studies have demonstrated that the education and employment of one generation can have significant effect upon the next generation of

women (Seymour, 1994). It is possible that in a generation of two, as a greater number of these educated married women become mothers-in-law themselves, a more flexible hierarchical relationship will develop. This already appears to be the case with educated mothers-in-law sampled in the present study in case of 'accomplishers'.

'Doing gender': the construction of self

The conception of 'selfhood' or 'personhood' is governed by the culture and gender. It is important to focus on gender to gain a more nuanced understanding of the conception of personhood. Lamb (1997) reiterates that 'conceptions of personhood cannot be understood in isolation from conceptions about gendered selves' (p.296). Thus, gender display is an important component of the construction of self. 'Doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987) wherein the men and women demonstrate to others in society, and to themselves, that they are appropriately masculine or feminine within a social context, is significant in social interactions and individual identity construction.

Within the context of marriage, 'doing gender' is a vital family phenomenon. The categorization of identity of half of the women as 'double-bind' clearly indicates the gendered construction of self. Conventional gender norms guide men to determine their core identity as 'breadwinners' and women as 'homemakers and caretakers'. In the present study, the sense of 'relational' self of the women was evident in conjugal relationships when all the women felt inseparable from their husband and prioritized them as the most important person in their life after marriage. In addition, the conception of their 'relational' self was extended to include their responsibilities towards other family members who were attached to the husband. Woodd (2000) states clearly that 'the

kaleidoscope of relationships that a woman sustains within her multiple roles contribute to her identity' (p.9).

Given these gender imperatives, a wife who also contributes to family income may represent a threat to husband's identity. Moreover, if her work requires her to stay away from home for longer hours, it may threaten her sense of herself as a 'good wife' or 'daughter-in-law'. And she may experience guilt. Increasing higher education of women may pose such a dilemma for women. In the present study, two professional women admitted downplaying their educational level in front of the husband as he was less educated than her and did not appreciate her greater academic achievements.

Social change in India has led to increase in higher education, greater mobility and increased employment opportunities for women. Higher education has emerged as a significant factor contributing to the perception of self as more individualistic among Indians (Verma & Triandis, 1998; Mishra, 1994). Even in the present study, many of the responses related to higher education connote a self-orientation when women talked about seeking careers for 'being independent' rather than familial reasons or when they asserted that they are making their own decisions with respect to attending college, choosing majors and getting employed. Even the fact that very few women were formally socialized for marriage and that their conception of marriage was limited to only husband and wife implies an unusual degree of individuation-an increased concern with the personal self rather than just the familial self (Roland, 1988). Moreover, after spending a year with her in-laws, one woman created a separate household with her husband. She attributed the decision to her socialization and the process of higher education that developed a compelling need for personal space and independence in her. Sinha et al.

(2001) suggest that it is important to find out the intention behind such individualistic behavior because individuals resort to such individualistic behavior but often with collective intentions (such as to maintain family solidarity in the case of this woman). Changes in the way contemporary women define their conception of self raises pertinent questions related to the sense of self developed among these women during the life course, especially with higher education and marriage, and later parenthood. How can the gender structure be reconstructed to include the new roles of women that direct their sense of self? Which situations or norms determine the expression of their authentic aspects of self? What are the best ways to balance multiple and often contrasting identities of educated women after marriage?

Revisiting the conceptual framework of the study

The conceptual framework of the study was expanded by integrating the emerging findings from the present study, to make it more detailed and specific.

With urbanization and industrialization, there has been an increase in enrollment of women in higher education and the work force. The socialization practices in specific sections of Indian society are also witnessing a change where parents encourage their daughters, along with sons, to pursue higher education aimed at establishment of a career. There is a shift in the socialization of girls from gendered to more liberal and dependence to independence (of mobility, decision making) modes. The socialization pattern and higher education is highly contextualized where the family ideology and self-goals will determine the kind of higher education pursued. The entire process of higher education influences the identity of women, making it more individualized.

Marriage, still being almost compulsory for women (and also men) in India, poses a challenge for educated women to adjust to new roles, relationships, different sets of values and ideology of affinal family. Marriage leads to transformation of identity of women. However, significant factors have emerged from the study that interplay to determine the extent of change in the identity of women. These factors are postulated in colored boxes in the re-structured conceptual framework (refer to figure 12).

The framework encapsulates links between antecedents in family socialization, factors related to higher education (such as meaning of higher education, course of study, place of study) and marriage (such as age at marriage, composition of affinal family, attitude of husband and family members about women's education and employment), that lay varying degree of impact on the identity of educated women after marriage.

The study has witnessed some degree of empowerment of educated women in their negotiations to maintain the core identity after marriage. Moreover, affinal family members have started to acknowledge women's role as economic contributors and thus provide a supportive and encouraging environment to women to balance their multiple roles.

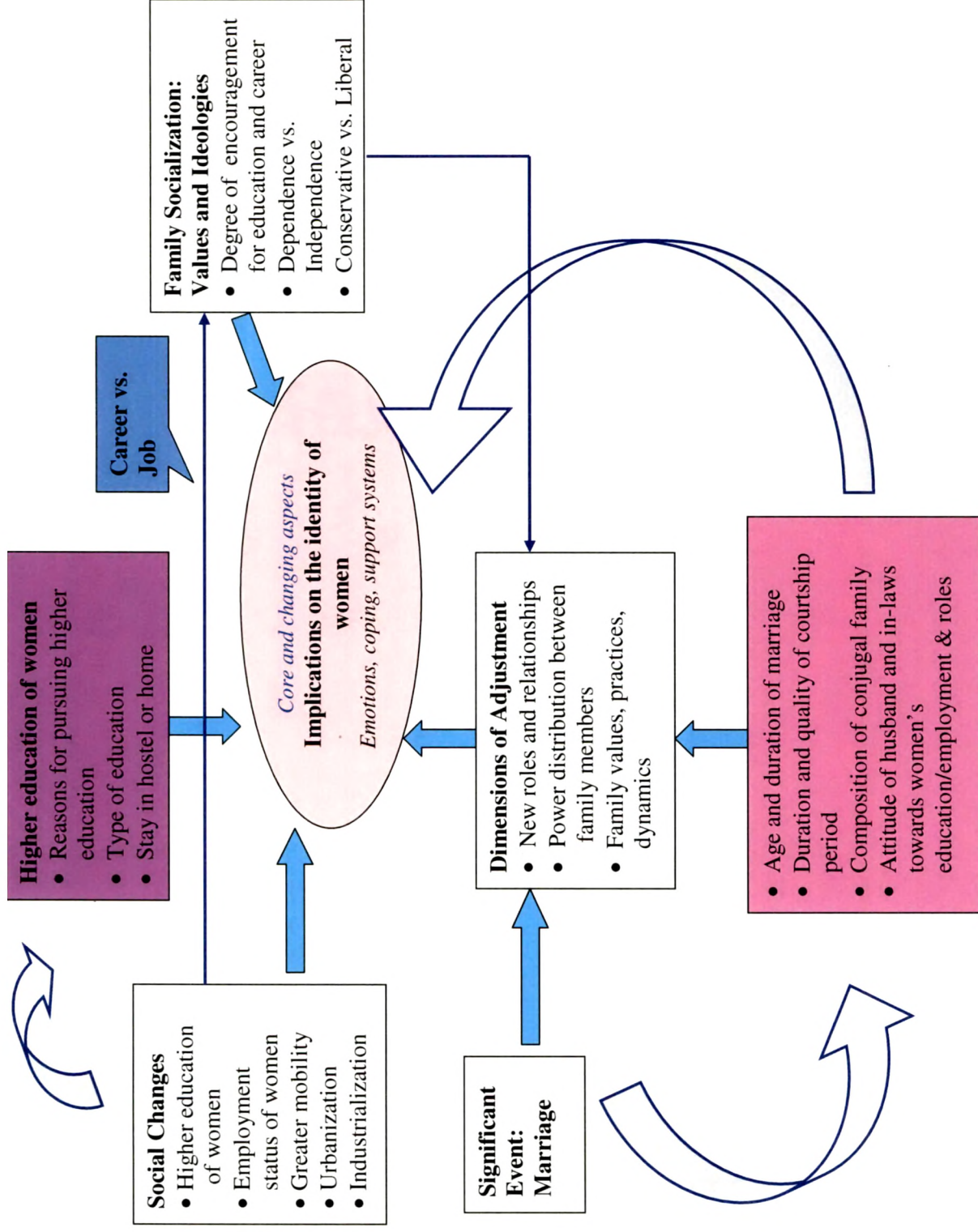


Figure 12. Identity of women mediated with higher education and marriage.

Conclusion and Implications

Higher education influenced the identity of women, but was dependent upon the context in which it was provided, that is, characterized by the process of socialization, meaning attributed to higher education and the course pursued. There was a reflection of change in the socialization process of girls wherein parents encouraged them to pursue higher education aimed at establishment of a career.

Marriage contributes to the social identity of women as she forms new networks of relationships and adapts to new roles. Marriage called for behavioral and psycho-social changes in a woman. However, educated women felt equipped to negotiate their identities where they could retain the core aspects of identity and bring changes (sometimes temporary) in peripheral aspects only.

Women's perceptions about their own roles have significantly changed but the men's perceptions about women's roles as 'home makers' have not altered. Educated women have started to assert themselves and as Chanana (2001) argues, self-conscious women will disagree to their 'role extensions' to include their role as professional in their current roles of wives and daughters-in-law. Instead there is a need to redefine and restructure roles. Unless the division of work within the family and the relative prestige attached to varied tasks changes, the status of women will not change.

What does this mean for tomorrow's women? Recognition of increased demands placed on the family as a result of college-educated women's participation in the work force should create demands for a more flexible conceptualization of household roles and realization of their expected responsibilities. As Loutfi (2002) suggests, families of every form face situations that challenge their ability to provide both the sustaining bonds and

the personal autonomy that are required for a healthy individual. The study has implications for policies for economic and social development that support the complex roles women play in their personal and social lives which may not only result in women's increased opportunities to and participation in both higher educational and professional settings, but also a more fulfilling role as wife and mother in the home. The women who have chosen the path of higher education may, indeed, benefit from such social policy. The study indicates that these educated women could act as agents of social change for the next generation when they become mothers-in-law.

Future Research Directions

The present study was limited to the perceptions of educated married women only. In order to get a holistic picture of the family and understand the dynamics that operate in influencing the identity of women after marriage, the perceptions of significant others (such as husband and mother-in-law) can be explored.

Caste is an important factor that influences the gender roles and access to higher education and employment opportunities for women. There is certainly a need for continued investigation of identity of educated and married women in different castes to develop a more sensitive understanding of the situation. Generally speaking, caste, in itself, is an important aspect of an individual's identity.

The present study did not take into consideration the education of parents. However, five professional women during their interviews referred to the education of their parents as an important motivating factor for their own higher education. Moreover, studies also reveal that the education and employment of mother has significant influence on the educational aspirations of the daughter. In future, similar studies should include detailed

information about the education of parents and the place where the woman was socialized. Identifying the link between earlier events and later functioning can be a helpful, and even necessary, first step in understanding process (O'Brien, 2005). Identity is a dynamic and ongoing concept. Identity changes with time and life events. It will be interesting to trace the life trajectory of these women by conducting follow-up studies to know their life-paths. For instance, it will be interesting to map out the life of 'assertive' women who had decided that they wanted to revert to their 'original' identity. Were they successful in implementing their decisions? What was their course of action? Longitudinal studies would be helpful in revealing developing identities in the course of marital life.