
Hen & God: Poems by Amber West:

A Book Review

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Ephemera Americana: Las Vegas, Wal-Mart, Black Friday, a dollar-store, and the 24-hour all-you-can-eat-buffet. *Hen & God* explores everyday experiences of working-class Americans. The collection of poems tells stories that feel raw and painful without the usual pity that accompanies the subjects of wretchedness. There are no victims in these tales. The book is organized in three sections discussing accounts of love, friendship, sex, abuse, parenting, hardship and disappointment. The poet's tone is clever and smug, yet a sense of compassion fills the pages. Imagine the cultural observations made by Alexis de Tocqueville and Jean Baudrillard about America, transcribed and arranged by the poetic hand of Charles Bukowski; Amber West adds the feminist voice.

The book opens with a satirical ballad as god, setting up the context of the poems in relation to a narcissist patriarch, which becomes a theme in the writing. Embodiments of this idea take place through the symbol of the overly confident flying fox, imageries of neglectful fathers, uncaring boyfriends, unfaithful, and lustful men. "For Six Months" epitomizes the denial entrenching that narcissism. "Bastard Blues," "He visits," "Daughter Eraser," and "Zebediah Loyd Skiles West," tap into the bad-fathering motif. These depictions contrast against representations of beat-down and tired women, although that is not to say vulnerable. The poems also expose wives, mothers, daughters, and the hen, as consumable life source. In these contexts, food and sex emerge intertwined.

The overall writing plays with understandings of the feminist abject. West accomplishes this, 1) by provoking visceral disgust in the form of corporal vulgarity and excess, 2) by blurring the distinctions between the subjects and objects of her poems, and 3) in the process of telling stories about us that are not about us. The poet engages grotesque elicitation by challenging our ideas of order, cleanliness, and taboo. "The Bump"—a sonnet about a pus-filled back cyst of "the size of a golf ball," stands as the apogee of repulsiveness in the collection. This poem in particular, flawlessly captures the manner of other less obviously repellent illustrations in the book, in addition to supplementing layers of commentary. West (re)constructs the expression "the bump"—more commonly used to indicate a pregnancy, to discuss an unwanted bodily growth that sickens her. Further portraits of excess are included in "24-Hour All-You-Can-Eat Buffet!" "Leaving Tijuana," and "Black Friday," where renderings of obesity, tourism, crowds, and overindulgence, stimulate tensions between pleasure and filth. West's depictions of sex often produce a similar effect.

The narratives problematize characterizations of subject and object. In the poems, shoppers are "wolves," crowds of people become "herds" of "cows," legs are "shanks," and humans are objectified through voyeurism, such as in "The Neighbor's Boy." In the same vein, inanimate things are personified through subjective identity—Las Vegas is a playboy, television shows become a faithful friend, and Black Friday gains a life of its own. The stories in the poems are

presented with uncanny familiarity. The experiences of the characters are separate from ours, and simultaneously cannot help but to be our own. We recognize the tales and engage empathetically, although still disavowing we too partake in the spectacle that is America.

Pure *jouissance*. The poetry of *Hen & God* asks us to celebrate ordinary realities with a sense of cynicism and joy. The poems keep giving with each read. The snarky expressions, grotesque portraitures, and relatedness of the tales look like, both, home and next door. The metaphors are rich, and the speech powerful. This book appeals to feminist sensibilities beyond reproach and condemnation by diversifying the frequent voices that critique patriarchal oppression. There are no winners or losers, only beauty and rousing thought.

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Negotiating the third space in Chitral Pakistan: Using education to advocate women's rights

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to record the educational experiences of college women in a part of the world where educating girls and women is not a priority and can be dangerous. The literature on girl-child education in Pakistan is thin, and few have thought to study female students or credit their perspectives as legitimate knowledge. At the same time, Ismaili Muslims in the north Chitral District value education for daughters, who today are almost universally sent to primary school. This essay interprets the oral histories of seven Ismaili women attending college in Chitral, Pakistan. We argue that the students' accounts demonstrate indigenous third space feminism that negotiates the apparent contradictions and social invisibility of quiet activism that mimics yet changes the social order. The narrators view themselves as dutiful Muslim daughters educated in Western-style colleges where they learned to be women's rights advocates who wish to pay forward their knowledge. Three themes resulted from analyzing the seven oral histories: (1) narrators experienced hardship to attend school; (2) narrators are grateful for their families' sacrifices; and (3) honoring their families and communities, the narrators plan to become educators and advocates to empower girls and women as they have been empowered, and when they do return to their villages, the narrators employ careful tactics that respect local tradition while transforming it.

Keywords

education, girls, oral history, Pakistan, third space feminism, women

Introduction

This essay illustrates third space feminism by way of the oral history narratives of seven women enrolled in college in remote Chitral, Pakistan. Attending college in a society where educating girls and women ranks low on a long list of social and political concerns, these Ismaili Muslim women plan to return to their villages to advocate for women's

rights, including education for girls. As one narrator said: "I did not know until I was in college that according to Islamic Law, daughters should get 25% of her father's property. Knowing about our rights will make the women in our community stronger economically as well as socially." We argue that the narrators inhabit Pérez's (1999) decolonial third space where those

without status or power perform social change right under the noses of the dominant, privileged, and/or oppressive group(s) in power. The third space can be thought of as quiet revolution and ingenious practice not just for surviving inhospitable or overtly hostile circumstances but also for negotiating the tensions of invisible interstitial social locations (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bañuelos, 2006; Bhabha, 1990; Khan, 1998; Licona, 2005; Pérez, 1999; Sandoval, 1991, 2000; Villenas, 2006). The narrators' stories can be understood as decolonial third space feminism, representing organic indigenous practices that imitate but displace the social order.

The seven narrators' histories share themes: (1) Narrators traveled extraordinary distances daily to attend the equivalent of primary and secondary school and, in doing so, endured hardships, from the dangers of walking to school to corporal punishment once they arrived. (2) Their families sacrificed economically and socially to educate the narrators. (3) Narrators desired to improve the lives of women in their villages. Third space feminist practices often emerge in contradictory social contexts, such as the present case. For example, the narrators continue to honor their families and culture while also attending college away from the traditional Muslim women's boundaries of home. The narrators remain bound by the customs of their villages. At the same time, the narrators, because of their education, find that they no longer fit into traditional women's tribal and community social roles prescribed by ethnic and religious mores.

As Pakistan was granted its independence from Britain in 1947, these women as college students live in a formerly colonized country with a formal education

system based on the British educational legacy. In recent years, however, Pakistan has seen increasingly conservative Islamic groups eschew secular education for men and any education for women. Yet the seven narrators embrace the Western-style education of Pakistan's universities as a means of helping their villages. In their desire to help others, the narrators are self-effacing, but they also articulate a consciousness of gender issues compatible with feminist thought. The narrators do not reject their ethnicity or religion, but they see no reason not to question their rights as Muslim women or to advocate for other women's rights. We identify these tensions as evidence of the third space where normative categories and binaries fail to account for peoples' material circumstances and lived experiences. Indeed, the students' stories illustrate third space tactics where the voiceless enact small changes that eventually can amount to large social shifts (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bañuelos, 2006; Bhabha, 1990; Khan, 1998; Licona, 2005; Pérez, 1999; Sandoval, 1991, 2000; Villenas, 2006). The fact that there is little in the literature that records the perspectives of Pakistani women on the subject of education further illustrates these women as occupying a third space "like a shadow in the dark" (Pérez, 1999, p. 6).

Background: Chitral Pakistan and Ismaili Muslims

The oral history narrators are all Ismaili Muslim women from Chitral, Pakistan, which lies in the northernmost district in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province between the Hindu Kush and Himalaya Mountains. Consisting primarily of rugged barren mountains, Chitral

District borders Afghanistan to the North and Northwest. Extended winters isolate Chitral District from the rest of Pakistan during cold-weather months as heavy snowfalls block roads. Harsh conditions and subsistence farming in Chitral District make life difficult for its people who mostly live in small rural communities. This especially affects rural women, who spend 16-18 hours a day collecting fodder, cooking, cleaning, and caring for their families and the cattle (Pardhan, 2005). In fact, six of the seven narrators are from rural areas, and all seven attend college only because they are funded by charity or scholarship.

The Chitrali people are all Muslims except for the approximately 3,000 people of the Kalash ethnic group indigenous to Pakistan (Hilton, 2009). The majority Muslim population in Chitral is Sunni, and the remaining roughly 30% is Ismaili. Generally, the people living in southern Chitral District and Chitral Town are Sunni Muslims. In northern Chitral District, however, Ismaili Muslims represent the majority.

Ismaili Muslims, as followers of Aga Khan, value education, and educate both genders as long as it is financially possible for them to do so (Liljegren, 2002). Aga Khan the IV became the 49th spiritual leader or Imam of the Ismaili people in 1957. Settle (2012) writes, "Ismailis speak affectionately of the Aga Khan as their savior in historic times of famine and follow his guidance, which advocates capacity building through education and enterprise" (p. 390). Over the past three decades, with the aid of the Aga Khan Development Network, the literacy rate among girls and women has improved in Chitral District, especially in the north. The rate of Chitrali girls' enrollment in primary schools is

nearly equal to that of boys', despite high poverty and relatively conservative attitudes toward women (Dawn.com, 2003).

Literature Review: Universal Education and Women's Education in Pakistan

International development experts posit that increasing the rate of women's education increases the economic efficiency and the social welfare of a country; thus, investment in education is justified as an efficient resource allocation and economic rate of return (Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2008). However, studies find that increasing women's education boosts women's wages, which frequently results in women having a larger return on education investment than men (Schultz, 2002; World Bank, 2013). Empirical evidence also shows that an increase in women's education improves human development outcomes such as child survival, health, and schooling (Morrison, Raju, & Sinha, 2007).

Pakistan faces difficulties regarding education, in general, and women's education in particular. In much of Pakistani society, women are regarded as socially and intellectually inferior to men (Sudduth, 2009). Alavi's (1972) description of the patriarchal structure in Pakistani society has changed little in 40 years:

Pakistan remains a strictly patriarchal society, in which women are treated as 'given' or 'acquired' through arranged marriages, to spend their lives in the service of a male dominated social system. ...It is not only a single patriarch, the head of a nuclear family, but the whole male dominated kinship organization which has a stake in the subordination of women. (para. 4)

Attitudes towards educating girls and women remain mostly negative in

Pakistan because communities are concerned with preserving traditional values, which do not include educating women (Khattak, 2008). Furthermore, in recent years, the Taliban has been actively destroying girls' schools in Pakistan (Perlez, 2011).

Additionally, for decades, Pakistan underinvested in education, and in this environment of resource constraints, government spending on girls' education tends to be shortchanged (Aly, 2006; Coleman, 2004; Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2008; Rana, 2011; Strohlic, 2013). Girls comprise 75% of out-of-school children in Pakistan (Strohlic, 2013). The story in Chitral District, however, is more optimistic, in large part due to the Ismaili people's respect for the leadership of Aga Khan and the financial support of the Aga Khan Development Network. In Chitral, a female literacy rate of 2.3% in 1981 rose to 22.09% by 1998, and some gauge the Chitrali female literacy rate today as high as 40% (Nadeem, Elahi, Hadi, & Uddin, 2009). Female literacy has been calculated close to 100% in some Chitrali villages among girls and women aged 20 or younger (Aga Khan Rural Support Program, 2007).

While international development agencies emphasize the human and economic development benefits of educating girls and women, limited research in Chitral suggests there are some indigenous arguments for educating girls. Pardhan's (2005) data reveal that women in Chitral's geographic area of Booni Valley describe the value of education in terms of language proficiency. Women in Booni who had never attended school recognized that their knowledge of only their native language, Khowar, limited their interaction with anyone other than Khowar speakers. Educated women, however, with the ability

to read and write in languages other than Khowar, were more comfortable in their interactions with non-Khowar speakers. Although Khowar is the main language in Chitral, there are other tribal languages and dialects spoken in the region. Furthermore, Pakistan's national language is Urdu, and English is informally recognized as the language of the educated class in part due to Pakistan's history as a British colony. Pardhan's participants also reported that the biggest barrier to gaining further education was social convention that prevents them from leaving their homes (Pardhan, 2005). Even with literacy skills, women cannot go into public spaces, such as the market, a place reserved for men. Educated women in the study said they wanted to seek employment once their education was complete but reported that they were mostly unable to do so because they are confined to their homes afterwards. Women can be educated; only through primary school or all the way through college, but an education does not necessarily release them from accepting their traditional gender roles afterwards.

Liljegren (2002) also observed positive attitudes towards women's education in Chitral. Some families said educating a daughter increases the bride price that her parents can ask from the groom's family. A daughter's increased bride price not only helps to recoup some of the financial outlay of a daughter's education but also becomes a point of marriage negotiation between families to keep an educated daughter from having to do heavy agricultural labor for her husband's family in the likely event that they are farmers.

In sum, education has not been a priority in Pakistan due to traditional tribal, social, and religious values,

combined with harsh geographic and economic realities, and a changing political climate. Nonetheless, in Chitral, Ismaili Muslims have materialized their value for education into higher literacy rates both for women and men. In the case of women, however, despite their hopes and dreams for using their education, a conservative society keeps women bound to home and family. The value of girls' education is tied to bride price and family status. At the same time, development experts tie the value of women's education to monetizing health and home for the greater social gross domestic product and to improving the health and welfare of future citizens whom educated women produce as offspring. Amid these competing arguments on behalf of women, Pakistan in recent years has witnessed increasingly narrow and violent interpretations of Islamic law, enforcing even more restrictive rules for women. This includes some religious groups banning education for women and persecuting those who advocate on behalf of education for women. Indeed, this work has always been and remains dangerous. Moreover, we know very little about the first-person educational experiences of women in this region as few have thought to include them in the conversation.

Theoretical Framework: Third Space Feminism

Described in terms of Anzaldúa's (1987) "borderlands" and attributed to Sandoval's (1991, 2000) U.S. Third World feminism, the origins of third space politics emerge from both postcolonial critiques of Western imperialism (Bhabha, 1990) and Chicana feminist articulations of social erasure (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bañuelos, 2006;

Pérez, 1999; Sandoval, 1991, 2000; Villenas, 2006). In this essay, we argue that the narrators' stories illustrate the third space, which is a mostly invisible social location occupied by marginalized people. Furthermore, we contend that the narrators' descriptions of their own activism are compatible with third space feminism, which enacts social change from the third space.

One can think of the third space in material terms, first, as the embodied performative improvisation required to survive in "borderland" circumstances, and second, as a kind of interpretive sense making that navigates "borderland" existence (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bañuelos, 2006; Khan, 1998; Licona, 2005; Pérez, 1999; Sandoval, 1991, 2000; Villenas, 2006). Khan (1998) writes that the third space "helps to explain how individuals negotiate the contradictions and polarities of their lives" (p. 464). People who live in third spaces develop tactics for maneuvering and thriving in such circumstances, and these tactics "rupture" and "displace" former social practices and structures (Bhabha, 1990; Pérez, 1999).

Third space feminism builds on the third space as lived experience and political action. Pérez (1999, p. 33) notes that "women as agents have always constructed their own spaces interstitially, within nationalisms, nationalisms that often miss women's subtle interventions," and this kind of intervention is what she defines as third space feminism. Pérez's "decolonial imaginary" becomes "a tool that allows us to uncover 'interstitial' and 'rupturing' space between the colonial and the postcolonial that is also the space of oppositional agency for women who have been erased from history" (p. 96). We argue that the oral history narrators' stories of

their educational journeys illustrate third space feminism where the voiceless embody quiet revolution.

Method: Feminist Oral History and Thematic Analysis

This essay draws on our thematic analysis of oral histories that were audio-recorded via Skype interviews in 2013 and 2014 with seven Ismaili Muslim women attending college in Chitral, Pakistan. The oral history project focused on collecting first-person accounts of college women's educational histories. Oral history is a valued feminist method for allowing people without formal power to narrate their own biographies, which are then meant to become part of the historical record (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Reinhartz, 1992). In the present case, the purpose of the oral history project was to listen to the testimonies of women from a part of the world where women rarely express their thoughts in public forums. Using the transcripts of the narrators' oral histories, we first report three themes that emerged from the narrators' stories. Across these themes women described negotiating third space tensions that undermine oppositional binaries (such as dutiful Muslim daughter versus college-educated woman) to build unexpected and unique perspectives on social justice for women. Thus, in this essay, after we report the transcripts' narrative themes, we add an additional third space feminist interpretation to frame our explication of the seven oral history narratives.

The narrators were recruited by snowball sample from a women's student hostel in Chitral, Pakistan; the hostel is the equivalent of independent student housing

serving students attending several local colleges. The hostel is not associated with any particular education institution. The matron of the hostel agreed to the project and introduced it to the residents by distributing the recruitment letter, which invited interested residents to contact the first author directly via email. Once each volunteer narrator formally consented in her preferred language through the IRB-approved process, she chose her own pseudonym. Table 1 provides basic information regarding the backgrounds of the seven narrators, demonstrating their mostly rural backgrounds and financial insecurity. All other identifiable pieces of information have been disguised for personal security and to maintain confidentiality. The individual oral history interviews were one-time open-ended conversations that asked about the narrators' educational histories and experiences. Each student narrator chose whether to participate in English or Urdu, as the first author is fluent in both.

Although each oral history narrative is its own primary documentation, no voice is unmediated by the research process, including the researcher's research agenda and the co-constructed relationship between researcher and participant that emerges during the research process (Golombisky, 2006, 2010a, 2010b; Golombisky & Holtzhausen, 2005). Additionally, in the present case, given the dangers of making the narrators' identities public, these oral histories are further mediated by pseudonyms as well as translation, transcription, and editing. Our interpretations of the narrators' stories for academic audiences further mediate the recordings and their transcripts, which once collected represent a historical record and, it is hoped, one day will become public

history at a safer point in the future. As academics, one from Chitral and one from the United States, we are self-conscious about interpreting the narrators' stories,

but our goal is to honor the narrators as witnesses to their own lives.

Table 1: Description of Narrators

PSEUDONYM	COLLEGE YEAR	BACKGROUND	AGE	FUNDING SOURCE
Samina	Sophomore	Rural	21	Charity
Falak	Junior	Rural	20	Charity
Alyla	Senior	Town	22	Charity
Afeefa	Senior	Rural	25	Charity
Nabiha	Senior	Rural	22	Charity
Musarat	Senior	Rural	22	Government Scholarship
Shabana	Senior	Rural	23	Charity

Narrative Themes: Hardship, Sacrifice, and Empowerment

Narrators' early memories of school described hardship due to the geographic distance between their homes and their schools, suffering in the winters, and resentment towards corporal punishment. Narrators also shed light on the familial support that they received from mothers, sisters, fathers, and brothers. Last, when talking about the impact of education in their lives, the narrators shared that,

through education, they have become aware of their rights as women, and they wish to share this awareness when they return to their villages.

Distance from School

In South Asia, the distance between a girl's home and the school remains one of the reasons for low enrollment among girls (IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, 2008). In the present oral history narratives, a recurring theme was distance

to school because of traveling on foot, regardless of weather, and encountering “social evils” along the way. Alyla described her discomfort walking to school through the town’s marketplace:

When I was small it was fun. I used to look at all the toys and candies in the stores, but by the time I was in middle school, it became very hard for me and my friends to walk through the bazaar as we would be harassed with very sexual comments from some of the shopkeepers as well as other men in the bazaar.

Once she began to be harassed, Alyla told her mother that she did not want to go to school anymore. So, at age 13, Alyla went to live with an uncle in another village where she did not have to cross a bazaar on the way to school.

Falak comes from a village where there are no schools for girls after fifth grade. So, she walked an hour and 45 minutes each day to attend a boy’s school in a neighboring village. The emotional toll was as great as the physical:

I felt as if... I was committing a crime, like a theft or robbery or something. People used to stare as if I was going to school not to be educated but to learn how to be an ummm... a bad person. The worst stares were from male members of my own family, like my uncles... My uncles even came to my house to stop me from going to the school. They did not care about the distance; they cared about the fact that I would be exposed to boys and might end up having an affair and bring shame to the family.

Narrators had to contend with family members who did not accept the idea of women leaving their homes. Once a girl or woman starts traveling to school, she creates tension among kin and community.

Getting to school without transportation was exacerbated during winter. Narrators shared a loathing for going to school in the winter as well as for

the corporal punishment they endured once they arrived, both of which left visible and invisible scars. Afeefa described wearing so many layers of clothes for warmth that walking to school became difficult:

I used to take at least two to three falls by the time I got to school. By the end of winter, almost every year that I can recall, I ended up with an arm or leg fracture [laugh]. It was not fun. In short, I hated going to school in winters.

At school, teachers were not considerate of the fact that some students needed time to warm up before beginning their schoolwork. Alyla’s teachers punished her for not being able to write with numb fingers during morning classes. Samina’s story of punishment involved firewood. Chitrali schools often require students to “donate” one log of wood every day to fuel fireplaces, although government schools receive funding for firewood. Samina said:

I remember one time during winter, when I was unable to take a log of wood for the classroom fireplace, I was beaten with a stick five times on each hand... And to add to the humiliation, I was not allowed to be near the fire the entire day.

Corporal punishment at school represented a theme common to the narrators. Falak, with scars on her hand and near her right eye as a result of beatings by teachers, views corporal punishment as dehumanizing:

We were beaten as if we were livestock. Even my mother did not use as many sticks on our cow to keep her within the boundaries of the house as much as our teachers used on us to “discipline us.” To this day I still do not understand why they could not just talk to us, why we were treated like untamed animals.

According to Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, each year 35,000 high school pupils in Pakistan drop out of the education system due to corporal

punishment (IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, 2008).

Familial Support and Sacrifice

A family's socioeconomic status factors into educational outcomes, and poverty typically affects girls more negatively than boys (Chudgar & Shafiq, 2004). In Pakistani culture, sons are the ones who take care of their parents in old age, so the education of sons becomes a retirement investment for aging parents (Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2008). Among the narrators, six attend college supported with charity funding; the seventh is funded with government scholarships. Still, the narrators' families scrimped and sacrificed financially and socially to educate their daughters.

All the narrators shared stories of how their mothers had supported their educations. In Afeefa's case, her mother dreamed of sending her five daughters to college. However, after her father abandoned the family, Afeefa's mother and sisters lived in poverty. Afeefa, the oldest daughter, tells the story of her mother's sacrifice: "She...sold her most prized possession, her cow, so I could at least move to the town and get enrolled in college." Afeefa said that her mother went years without buying herself clothes and shoes so that she could pay for her daughters' schooling. Before Afeefa could find funding, she took college courses independently at home, which required sending her assignments to the college, an 8-hour drive away:

The only way to get my assignments to the college was through the taxi drivers from our village who make the trip to the town two to three times a week. They used to leave early in the morning, and my mother used to wake up with the morning azzan

(call to prayer) and stand on the main road so she could give my assignments to the drivers. Sometimes she would have to stand on the road for hours in the freezing winters just to make sure she did not miss the taxi.

Nabiha credits her stepmother: "She never asked me to help her with the household chores. She always asked me to study, do my homework, and excel at school." Nabiha recalls occasions when her aunt and women from the neighborhood would tell her stepmother to make Nabiha do more household work. Nabiha's stepmother always replied, "No, I want her to make something out of herself, not end up like me, illiterate." Nabiha said that her stepmother had wanted to become a teacher but never attended school. Now Nabiha wants to become a teacher to fulfill her stepmother's dream.

Parental support is important for girls' participation in school, given traditional community beliefs that discourage education for girls as not only a waste of scarce resources but an affront to social propriety. Shabana comes from a community where a majority of the girls either never go to school or leave school after fifth grade. She laughs that she is the old maid among her childhood friends. Shabana calls her father a "hero" for supporting for her education because, she says, the men in her village criticized him for sending her to school. "Now that I am in college, I do not know what he goes through. He never tells me what other people in the village say." Shabana said that her father is proud when she reads and translates newspapers for him. Once he cried with joy when a neighbor asked Shabana to read his medication prescription. Shabana's father wants her to work in a bank after graduation so everyone will respect her. Shabana believes she is

gaining respect in her village, but it will take time for people to express it out loud.

In Musarat's case, her father's financial support for her education ended after he was disabled in an accident. She said his first response after the accident was sorrow that he could not fulfill his promise to send her to college. Musarat became determined to complete a degree and start a career to support her family as her father supported her. "He does not understand much about my course work, but still he wants to know about every course that I am taking," she said. "Every time my father calls, I am more ambitious. I am re-energized, and I work harder."

Siblings also supported the narrators' schooling. After Falak's father died, Falak's sister leveraged her marriage on behalf of Falak's education. Her sister refused to get married until their uncles allowed Falak to continue with school. Eventually, the uncles relented. Falak said:

She accepted my brother-in-law's proposal only because he was from the (local) town area. She told me she did this so she might be able to continue with her education after marriage and, in future, I could live with her and continue my school. That is what I did; I lived with my sister and her family for my 11th and 12th grades. She supported me.

Nabiha said her older brother's sacrifice enabled her to attend college away from home:

After high school, my father wanted to send my brother to Peshawar for higher education. ...Sending my brother to Peshawar meant a huge burden on our family's finances. We knew it would be impossible for my father to afford to send any other child to college. My brother convinced my father that he would

continue his studies at a (less prestigious) college in Chitral, which would cost less, so I could attend college as well.

Samina also is grateful to an older brother. When Samina was not allowed to attend school anymore after one of the girls in her school eloped, her brother was the only male family member who supported Samina's education. Samina said:

If it was not for my brother, I do not think my family would have ever let me rejoin school. Even now, he was the one who bought me a small cell phone so we could keep connected and know what is going on in each other lives, as we get to see each other only once in two or more years.

It is a sign of trust that Samina's brother bought her a cell phone since community members generally believe that a young woman's access to cell phones will lead to illicit relations with men and thus impugn the family honor.

Alyla has strong opinions about women bearing the honor of the family and society. She says the society supports double standards. On one hand, people are ready to punish girls to the greatest extent possible—in some cases unto death—if they dishonor their family by even talking to a man. On the other hand, adult men—someone's fathers, uncles, brothers—sexually harass girls walking to school. Musarat also described how the men in her village opposed her achieving higher education, yet when those same men needed help with reading, it was she they approached for assistance. Inspired by family members, all the narrators are eager to improve their families' economic circumstances and keen to raise their communities' consciousness regarding women's issues, including education.

Education as Empowerment

All the narrators see themselves as empowered because of education. They all expressed a desire to work for women's rights and education, in addition to their desire to have careers that afford economic security for their families. Stable jobs with income will enable the narrators to take care of their parents and younger siblings, representing a gender role reversal in Pakistani culture.

Shabana wishes to earn a master's degree and work with an educational organization to educate girls in her village. Musarat hopes to teach after college and ultimately earn a graduate degree. Musarat said: "I am very well respected not only in my family but in my community as well. My thoughts about any matter in my extended family are respected." Narrators described changing roles from being simply college students to being women's education activists when they visit their villages. However, the narrators said they bear in mind their identities as women from villages and try to honor their families and communities.

College has also made the narrators determined to spread the message of education for girls. For example, when Shabana visits her village, she says she avoids flaunting her education. "That is not going to do me any good." Instead, she matches her dress and speech to the other girls and women in the village, which means speaking pure Khawar with no Urdu or English which would mark her as an outsider. She says, "But I always try to educate the women and men around me about educating their daughters, as they are

the ones who will up bring our future generations." Echoing development rationales about educating the mothers of future citizens, Shabana presents herself and interacts with the people in her village in the way that everyone expects a young woman to behave. By spending time with them, Shabana builds coalitions and focuses on using her knowledge to change people's understanding and attitudes.

Similarly, Nabiha said that she avoids imposing her education on others, but she always takes advantage of opportunities to talk about how women benefit from education. "Education has given me the ability to think critically," she said. "It is through education that today I can read and write about women's issues." Nabiha also wants to work with community-based organizations that support the girls' schools in her village and villages close by. She said, "I want to do it because all the women need to be aware of their basic rights."

Alyla, too, wants to be a women's rights advocate and fight against discrimination against women. She said, "Because of my education, I have access to all the knowledge in the world." Alyla says it disappoints her when educated men speak against women's rights. "I have heard some of my male teachers lecturing our male class fellows about not letting women outside of her Chadar¹ and Chardiwar², and it disgusts me."

The narrators indicate that they are still bound at times by the traditions and customs of their villages, but they are proud when men in their families support their education. Approval from those who hold the power is important. They also

¹ Cloak to cover the entire body and part of the face (veil)

² The four walls of the house

acknowledge the acts of agency in opposition to the status quo that their mothers perform to improve the life circumstances of their daughters. These daughters, because of their education, find themselves in a borderland where they do not perfectly fit into the cultural and tradition-bound roles prescribed for women. They cannot fully express their newly educated thinking in public, either. They don't reject their ethnic traditions or religion, but they see no reason not to question their rights as Muslim women or to advocate for women's rights.

Interpretation: The Decolonial Imaginary and Third Space Interventions

Third space feminism, according to Pérez (1999), requires a "decolonial imaginary" to get at the intangible places where women have always been more than mere victims, but instead "survive and persist" (pp. 6-7). The decolonial imaginary as a lens reveals the invisible and silenced, who, it turns out, are nonetheless present and active, even subversive, such as the oral history narrators *and* their families. Bañuelos (2006) writes, "Emma Pérez's (1999) third space feminism is the site of negotiation from which marginalized women speak and their 'agency is enacted'" (p. 96).

The decolonial imaginary as a method, then, pries apart interstitial spaces—third spaces—between normative symbolic and material categories, including, for example, college-educated Chitrali woman. Beyond the thinness of academic literature on women's education in Pakistan, let alone Chitral, research and scholarship on gender issues in education

tend to exclude the voices of girls and women. Moreover, the seven oral histories included stories, experiences, and feelings that the narrators had never thought about before or shared with anyone. The narrators said no one had ever asked them before, and it had not occurred to them to reminisce on their own.

More than lacking privilege, but rather mostly ignored as irrelevant, existence in third spaces requires interpretive strategies for reconciling contradictions. For example, girls walking to school through the bazaar are often sexually harassed by fathers, uncles, and brothers who locate their family honor in the chastity and obedience of their own daughters, nieces, and sisters, who must walk through the bazaar to attend school... and so on. Villenas (2006) describes the third space as "where political, social, and cultural dilemmas are always in the process of being worked out even as the lessons of the body, of everyday ritual, and of the spoken voice both clash and conspire" (p. 152).

Making sense of such dilemmas, as well as surviving their material consequences, is an achievement, which in turn becomes a kind of pedagogy passed on inter-generationally (Villenas, 2006). Indeed, the fact of survival, while ordinary, is itself a form of resistance. Afeefa's mother, abandoned by her husband, as a single-mother in Chitral Pakistan, reared and educated five daughters. Afeefa's recognition of her mother's strength is a sign that Afeefa has had another kind of education from her mother about what women can accomplish. Afeefa, combining these lessons with her college education, espouses an organic kind of third space feminism addressing the specifics of the society in which she lives; including the

need to educate women, not only for the sake of girls and women but for society as a whole.

Third space tactics may not be in direct opposition to the status quo because such opposition can be dangerous; instead, third space tactics are more subtle and stealthy, surviving codependent with the dominant power structure and over time transforming it into something else. One tactic Bhabha (1990) describes is “translation,” “a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense” (p. 210). For example, Shabana performed the role of an obedient daughter when her father’s neighbor needed help deciphering the instructions for his medicine. The irony was not lost on Shabana, but she did not eschew the opportunity to demonstrate the value of education to her community, while disguised as an obedient woman using her skill to serve men, per gender custom. Similarly, Pérez (1999) describes “doubling,” which seems to mimic the social order’s rules while changing them. Both Musarat and Nabiha, like Shabana, are strategic about how they present themselves when they interact with their extended families and village neighbors; the narrators do their best to fit in and avoid drawing attention to the fact of their differences due to education; they mirror or “double” tradition. However, these narrators also mentor their younger sisters, cousins, and nieces, and try to persuade people about the importance of education for girls. Shabana also described a doubling tactic when she said, “I am one of them; my education does not change that, but what I can try to change is the attitude towards girls’ education.” She embraces the existing order (“I am one of them”) as she changes it (“I can try to change...the attitude towards girls’ education”).

Over time, the results of such tactics give “rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211.) The narrators’ stories demonstrate a different kind of formerly undocumented third space activism and promise a hopeful future for women’s justice in Northern Chitral. Bhabha (1990) writes, “This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (p. 211). Of course, it remains to be seen if the narrators, and their college peers, can find employment outside the home, whether as teachers and education advocates or, for example, bankers. Thus, it will be important to continue to research the educational experiences of women from this part of the world, not to mention support the causes they deem important.

Conclusion

Third space feminism has been described as the site of negotiation from which marginalized women engage in practices that displace dominant ideas (Bañuelos, 2006; Bhabha, 1990; Khan, 1998; Pérez, 1999; Sandoval, 1991, 2000; Villenas, 2006). As a tool or method, the decolonial imaginary reminds us to recognize the interstitial, where the limits of binaries are transcended (Pérez, 1999). The decolonial imaginary also troubles Western feminist perspectives and should make feminists uncomfortable with drawing easy conclusions about women while simultaneously obliging support for indigenous women’s perspectives and agendas.

In the present case, the Chitrali women who narrated their oral histories live in a largely isolated, rural, conservative,

and religiously and tribally patriarchal society where many rely on subsistence farming. These women also attend Western-style colleges in the tradition of their country's colonizers. As their transcripts show, they see nothing extraordinary about being both practicing Muslims and activists for progressive social change on behalf of women. For example, as Alyla said:

The more I attain knowledge about women's rights from different parts of the world, the more I am aware of the lies and double standards of our society. Men never tell us about our rights but will drum into our heads that the family's honor is dependent on us.

She combines what she learns from "different parts of the world" with "our society." There are no social scripts or cultural narratives for living with these apparent tensions; nevertheless, the narrators do live with them quite successfully. Indeed, if third space feminism ruptures old ways of thinking, then the narrators are third space feminists who deploy savvy strategies that change attitudes about women and women's education. They accomplish this without drawing censure (or worse) in a country where education (especially Western-style education) is increasingly viewed with suspicion and where it is literally dangerous for girls to go to school. ■

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Bringing home the bacon while staying out of the fire: Communicatively negotiating the working mother identity

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Abstract

The desire to work outside the home and the communication strategies of employed mothers when confronted with comments from coworkers and associates about their life choices to work outside of the home are examined through the perspectives of two types of working mothers: the wage-focused mother and the career-focused mother. Qualitative interviews of twelve working mothers were analyzed. Themes emerged related to reasons for working, personal desires of the working mothers, and the types of comments they received from others about their choices related to motherhood and employment. Employed mothers chose passive or aggressive strategies when responding to comments based upon their perceptions of the situation and direction of the comment. Overall, wage-focused mothers appear to receive a “pass” for working out of necessity to help provide for the family while career-focused mothers appear to be viewed as selfish for not choosing to stay home to raise the children.

Keywords

communication strategies, life choices, motherhood, work, career

Introduction

Women have historically worked in and out of the home; however, their working identity has evolved, particularly during the 1970's and 1980's with focused attention on professional and working mother's identities (Everingham, Stevenson, & Warner-Smith, 2007). Regardless, expectations about the role of motherhood have remained relatively constant (Raskin, 2006). Tracy and Rivera (2010) found most male executive participants stated family was more important than work and that childcare responsibilities should be

shared. Even though this was not the reality in their own work and family practices where they preferred their wives stayed home to manage the household and majority of parenting duties.

Cultural expectations of working women and economic circumstances for women and families continue to shift and evolve. In the not so distant past, most women grew up expecting to be mothers. Acceptable employment (teaching, nursing, office work, retail work, and hairdressing) was to provide financial support for themselves between leaving their families of

origin and marriage (Bulbeck, 1997; Everingham, Stevenson, Warner-Smith, 2007). Returning to the workforce once children were older was also acceptable, as long as it did not interfere with the family's home life (Gibson, 2003). As it became more difficult for families to survive on one income, financial well-being became the main reason for women's employment. Today, almost 70% of mothers are employed or looking for employment (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

The current generation of women are leaving high school expecting to work in some capacity and also become mothers (Everingham, et al., 2007). Unfortunately, idealized work/life expectations are violated in the workforce. Women are inundated with media images depicting the myth they can "have it all," a career and family (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Additionally, women are led to believe that organizations care, encouraging work/life balance and implementing family leave policies; however, advancement implications may exist for utilizing the policy (Golden, 2009; Kirby, 2006; Kirby & Krone, 2002).

Women may be subjected to, and often are confronted with conflicting views about their choices to balance employment while raising children. Some women may feel the need to defend their working mother status through communication strategies that reframe the discourse of a socially acceptable good mother image to a good working mother role while simultaneously participating in intensive mothering strategies which requires being ever present in children's lives (Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, & Robinson, 2012; Buzzanell, et al., 2005; Damaske, 2013). Although it is a misconception, in general, society typically views women as homogenous in their desires to be mothers; however, motivations for work and family

can vary greatly among women. Understanding how women communicatively navigate societal expectations of their varied desire to balance employment and motherhood serves as the focus of this study.

Conceptual Framework

Employed mothers experience various identities and assume multiple roles. In addition to the tasks that must be performed as a mother and a professional, women must defend decisions and motives about raising children concurrently with employment and/or career goals (Buzzanell et al., 2005; Damaske, 2013; Sutherland, 2010). This study examines these situations of identity navigation with coworkers, acquaintances, friends, and family members.

Identity theory links role identity to behavioral outcomes, and acknowledges some identities have more self-relevance than others (Stryker, 1968). A woman may perceive her role identity as a mother as more important than as an employee, while another may value her professional identity. When work/life issues interfere with the performance of what a woman perceives her ideal identity should be, stress occurs (Wieland, 2010). Buzzanell, et al., (2005) found women who desired to be identified as a good mother and a good worker negotiated the dialectic through reframing the socially acceptable good mother image into a good working mother identity. However, the good working mother image was found to be very fragile and easily damaged by what they may consider a failure (e.g., missed quality time with family), causing more stress and identity negotiation.

Expectations of motherhood roles have remained somewhat traditional. Stay-at-home mothers have been considered the

norm and essential to raising healthy, well-adjusted children (Hattery, 2001; Stebbins, 2001). However, the Great Recession prompted a shifting of the ideal “norm” as the employment of both parents became necessary for the income security of families (Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, & Robinson, 2012). Approximately 70% of mothers were working outside the home in 2015 (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Many are in the workforce out of economic necessity while others regard their career as the motivating factor (Raskin, 2006). Perceptions of working mothers are still mixed. Regardless of dialogue supporting equality for women in the workplace, male executives revealed they personally preferred to have their own wives home with their children, referring to women’s employment as a choice. Although men understood the need for women to work for economic reasons, they preferred women to manage the home if possible (Tracy & Rivera, 2010). Therefore, it appears it is more socially acceptable for mothers to work, as long as it is economically necessary. Regardless, some may desire both a family and a career.

Research by Everingham et al. (2007) found young women entering higher education did not consider paid work a means of achieving independence until marriage and they held multiple meanings of work based upon their career path. Employers have recognized the need to implement family policy to help employees achieve work/life balance. Unfortunately, sometimes employees feel taking advantage of a family leave policy could be detrimental to career goals (Kirby and Krone, 2002). The fear of being passed over for a promotion or advancement opportunity may hold some women back from successfully fulfilling motherhood duties, causing stress and forcing

renegotiation of motherhood identities. A possible response found in previous research was reframing the good mother role to a good working mother role by arranging quality childcare, becoming unequal partners at home by taking on the majority of the childcare duties, and by taking pleasure in working mother roles (Buzzanell et al., 2005).

Women with breadwinning roles have faced gendered identity conflicts of control, independence, pressure, partner contributions, career ambitions, and guilt and resentment. Navigating tensions related to deviation from traditional stereotypes and norms of women causes stress (Meisenbach, 2010). Working mothers experience tensions of conflicting identities as a good mother and a good worker or professional. Tensions may be amplified by comments forcing women to communicatively negotiate identities.

All women do not share similar work and family desires. Women with more education and higher paying jobs tended to wait longer to have children and were less likely to believe the homemaking role was more important than other roles (Raskin, 2006). Conversely, lower wage-earning women were more likely to place greater importance on family and community while considering work as a job, not an aspect of identity. A focus group of working-class young women expressed anger for their loss of choice not to work, viewing staying at home with children a luxury (Everingham et al., 2007).

With this conceptual framework in mind, the following research questions emerge:

RQ1: How do mothers perceive work and their choice to be employed and/or working toward a career?

RQ2: How do mothers respond to comments about their choice to be employed and/or working toward a career?

Methods

The data were collected through 12 semi-structured interviews with employed mothers from small and mid-sized communities in the upper Midwest. This number of interviews was determined to be sufficient once it became evident phenomenological saturation had occurred and gathering further data would add little to the conceptualization or categories of inquiry (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Typically, saturation is reached around 15 interviews plus or minus 10 (Kvale, 1996). Recorded comments of participants made during the interview process were reflected upon periodically in relation to all comments. After six interviews, comments appeared repetitive, depending upon if the primary motivation for employment by the participant was wage driven for economic reasons or career driven for reasons related to personal desire. As the interview process continued, participants began to cluster around one of these two distinct groups. Upon completion of 12 interviews, no new perspectives were being introduced.

Digitally recorded semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted to allow for exploration of additional questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Participants were asked to describe their current work and family situation and reflect upon comments they had received, both inside and outside their work environment related to their career and life choices. Interviews lasted ten to thirty minutes. Transcription resulted in 58 pages of single-spaced text for analysis. Each participant was given a pseudonym which was used to reference quotations reported in the findings.

Participants

Participants were heterosexual white females living and working in the Upper Midwestern United States a minimum of 40 hours per week in an hourly or salaried position. Participants were recruited through a snowball sample technique. All participants self-identified as employed mothers, were between the ages of 20 and 50 with a mean age of 34. Each had one to four children ranging in age from 6 weeks to 12 years. Three participants were divorced or never married, and nine were married. Occupations of participants included: administrative assistant, community development, pharmacy assistant, funeral home director, construction manager, university administrator, associate professor, and extension agent.

Analysis of Interviews

Interview transcripts were read twice to get a comprehensive sense of the data. Next, every significant statement relevant to the topic was highlighted, giving each equal value (Creswell, 1998) and analyzed for emergent themes through open coding (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002). The women fell into one of two groups with distinct differences. The first group consisted of women focused on earning a wage above all else in order to help support their families. The second group consisted of women who were dedicated to advancing their careers. While both groups of women were employed mothers, upon closer examination, variations were found in age, number of children, level of education, salary, motivation for employment, and personal goals. A descriptive overview, reasons for working, desires, and comments received is provided below for both types of

women followed by an analysis of the similarities and differences between the two types of working mothers.

Two Types of Working Mothers

Wage-Focused Mothers

The women interviewed for this study who fell into the category of Wage-Focused were in their mid-twenties with one or two young children and hoping to have more within the next few years. These women had some college, held a vocational degree, or held a bachelor's degree and all earned less than \$30,000 per year. Overall, they enjoyed their jobs and colleagues but reported their work was not their passion. If their families did not need their income, they indicated that it would be nice to stay home to raise their children. A similarity of the women placed into this category was how they discussed the topic of work.

Discussion about working. When discussing work, the wage focused mothers did not think twice about why they worked and spoke in a very matter-of-fact style. Christina said, "I work, there is really no other option but to work. There's not much for staying home income-wise." Beth also pointed out, "you just kind of assume everyone works, and everyone works because they have to." Participants also described how sometimes people are surprised by how much, and how hard they work considering they have children. Kathy recalled when her baby was born, "I was ten days late, I worked up until my induction date." Similarly, Jamie mentioned, "(the guys at work) seem sympathetic that it's busy having kids and working, but they understand because most of their wives are employed."

Conversations in the workplace tended to focus on the fact that it was the

status quo to be a parent working outside the home with limited options for alternatives. Jamie explained, "I think most everyone is aware that the economy is what it is and that in order to get by in life a lot of families have to have both parents working." Christina mentioned, "most of the people I know, their wives or girlfriends work that have kids, they're all working outside the home." Beth noted her family needed her income so desperately that after her daughter was born "I didn't take a lot of maternity leave. I would bring [baby] in and I just stuck her underneath the desk." Overall, wage-focused participants indicated women working outside the home was not an important topic of conversation, as Beth noted, "we don't really talk about it [working]."

The wage-focused mothers in this sample also reported they felt staying home was a poor choice. Nancy said, "I would feel guilty... if I wasn't contributing, if I was home when I should, could be out earning money." Participants reported that they felt judged as being selfish by others if the family needed the income, but they chose to stay home. Jamie explained, "I had a friend who stayed home for a few years with her kids when they were small, and they made the comment that she needed to go out and get a job to help support that family and not expect her husband alone to carry that burden."

Desire to stay home. Wage-focused participants in this study revealed they would have liked to stay home and have a more active role in raising their child(ren). Despite the desire, Kathy pointed out, "we're just not in the financial position to only have one income." She went on to report that like her, most of her friends also "really hate work, but most of them, their husbands tell them they have to work." Wage-focused participants also reported

that they felt guilty as a parent and believed they were missing out on a lot of quality time at home. Christina said, "I feel like I'm gone too much, because I work a lot of hours, I'm gone about 50 hours a week generally, so that adds up when you leave so early in the morning, get home at 5:30 or 6:00 some nights; supper then it's bath and bed, that's it." Jamie also stated, "I feel like in order for me to be working outside of the home, I have to say we aren't going to be participating in every activity." During their interviews, these women continuously reaffirmed the fact that they had to help put food on the table, clothes on everyone's backs, and provide shelter for their families. These participants reported a desire to stay home and raise the child(ren) with comments such as, "it would be nice to have more of a hand in how she is raised, the day-to-day stuff, that'd be a benefit" (Christina).

Comments from others. The wage-focused mothers reported they perceived people sometimes felt they had a right to comment about their motherhood. Beth had one child at the time of her interview and stated others with more children often told her she was "lucky to only have one child because raising one is so much easier than raising two or three or more." On the other hand, the participants with only one child also reported because of this, others expected them to be available to volunteer for everything. Jamie noted, "they know I'm good for that or that I will be dependable and show up and everything." Beth also stated, "I get stuck with a lot of things that are supposedly volunteer" at church and with other organizations such as scouts, etc." These participants noted that although they did not appreciate the comments or expectations, they often said nothing and volunteered as much as possible.

Participants further noted they have received unwelcome advice about how to care for their child(ren). For example, shortly after her baby was born, Christina and her sister went shopping on a Friday evening for baby supplies.

We stopped back downtown so I could have my first beer afterwards and I was like 'woo hoo'... so we went in and we had one and someone came up to me and said, 'well aren't you breastfeeding,' and I'm like 'no.' 'Well you should be, it's way better for the child.' And he's like a friend of my parents ...I was so mad I had to leave (Christina).

Participants noted there never seemed to be a shortage of advice or opinions offered about how to care for their child(ren) when they were not working and that the comments often aggravated them. Despite all the unsolicited parenting advice they received, they did not mention anyone offering advice about working less or quitting their jobs to stay home with their children.

Overall, participants who fell into the category of Wage-Focused Mothers reported that they worked because they had no other choice due to the economy and out of financial necessity for their family; they would prefer to stay home in order to have a more active role in raising their child(ren); and they received what they considered to be value-laden comments from others about their parenting abilities. Next, attention is turned to the women who were identified as career-focused.

Career Focused Mothers

The women who fell into the category of Career-Focused were in their mid-thirties with two or three school-aged children. Most had graduate degrees and held professional positions earning over \$40,000 per year. They reported they were very career focused and loved their jobs. They also reported that they were dedicated

to their children, but felt they were better mothers because they had a career. The women in this category discussed their work as something intangible and beyond employment.

Discussion about working. Career-focused participants reported their employment transcended income for the family. To be clear, these participants did not report that they did not need the income, nor did they say they would be willing to give up their income; however, they did report more reasons for working that went beyond food, clothing, and shelter. As an example, Nichole pointed out:

I would be unhappy staying home. After my maternity leave, I was ready to get back to work. I went to school way too long and I usually tell [people] that I'm a much better mother as a working mother... I have that other outlet where I can go to work and use my intellect and do some of those things at work and then come home and really dedicate my time to [my children].

Similarly, Erin noted, "I think probably if I had a job that was just a job to pay the bills, then I probably would feel a lot differently than I do, it wouldn't be worth it." Participants reported they felt they were making a difference working in their career while also providing for their families, giving them a greater sense of fulfillment with comments such as, "I'm providing my family and others with hopefully, something that's good for them" (Erin). Participants enjoyed having a family and having a career and as Allison stated, "I can't imagine any other lifestyle."

Desire to continue working. Career-focused participants in this study reported an interruption in their career path could be detrimental. Allison remarked, "I'm gonna figure out how I can work with the children and my career to keep both." Nichole pointed out, "my mom quit her

professional career when she raised my sister and I and she continues to this day to career hop because she just really couldn't get back into the working world... I vowed... I would never do that." She went on to explain:

Professionally that's probably one area in society we aren't really supported as women. If you do take time off and then try to get back into working, into a career they're gonna ask you why you have that year gap, or three-year gap, or whatever, and are you still as up-to-date as you should be in all of your skills. (Nichole)

Participants reported the balance can be challenging. Similar to the wage-focused mothers, Sara said, "there have been a number of people who would comment about 'how do you get it all to work?'" However, unlike the wage-focused participants, career-focused participants in this study indicated that some people still believed a woman with children could not function in certain job positions. Lisa described a situation at her previous job where her co-worker asked when she was going to start having children. Lisa had not disclosed she was leaving for graduate school:

So, I'm like well, it will probably be a year or two you know then we'll maybe start thinking. Well my boss comes rearing out of his office, he's like 'you're pregnant?! ...'you can't be pregnant and do this job.' I was dumfounded... it was really interesting that he felt that that was not appropriate. There was nothing in that job description that prohibited you from being pregnant. (Lisa)

Participants in this study on the career path reported facing additional trials with their career interfering with their spouse's career. Lisa explained that their child was born with health issues and could not attend daycare. Since her husband was just finishing his graduate work and she was already established in her employment, they made the decision for her to continue

working and her husband to stay home with their newborn child. She stated that it worked great for them, but others felt the need to point out the “unusual” situation. “One individual, ...once said ‘how’s that feel since you’re not providing for your family?’” (Lisa). This comment annoyed Lisa and her husband. Similarly, Sara’s husband did not work for a few years while they were having children. She commented that people “just didn’t understand why he would choose to not work... so he got a lot of ribbing from his friends and got really irritated with that.” Nichole’s husband had always worked but also had to help with childcare responsibilities, while most of his colleagues had wives at home or working a job that allowed them to be responsible for most of the childcare. Nichole shared:

His boss will make comments to him about, ‘I suppose you can’t do that because your wife works; oh, I suppose you have to pick up the kids from childcare.’ And there’s been one promotion that he was looked over, he definitely was qualified for, but because his boss felt since I worked he’d not be as committed, he didn’t get the promotion. (Nichole)

The women in this study reported they felt they were not the only ones being value judged for pursuing a career, their spouses were also impacted. Participants reported feeling annoyed and irritated by others’ perceptions, actions, and comments.

Comments from others. The career-focused participants reported they perceive they have endured negative comments about choosing to continue on a career path while having children. While pregnant with her third child several people asked Sara if she was going to be staying home once the baby arrived, which was very upsetting to her. She said, “I don’t see men being asked, that I knew of, ‘are you going to be staying home after you have this third child?’ And it seemed very clear to me that I was focused

on a career as well as a family, so that wrangled.” Although Sara was clearly upset about the comments, she reported holding back her true feelings and calmly answered the questions about her intentions to return to work.

Participants shared what they considered to be negative, naïve, and ignorant comments received from others. Melissa stated, “I have had to take days off for my daughter... [and] other women in the office told me [male supervisor] said, ‘this is what you get for hiring a woman.’” Melissa was upset with her supervisor but reported she did not approach him but rather vented to others she trusted. Lisa also shared, “our son had a lot of GI issues... having him be breast fed for a long time would be very beneficial for him, so I made that conscious decision... and so I pumped.” She also pointed out that periodically men in the office commented about how “gross” it was that she was storing the milk in the office refrigerator. She said to one, “so the cow’s milk that you’re getting out of the grocery store, that’s not gross? It was just uncomfortable” (Lisa).

Based upon participant comments, it appeared there was no problem with the career-oriented participants working; the problem was the employment they had chosen. Nichole pointed out, “I think maybe if I was a secretary, it might be better and considered OK to keep having babies.” Rachel vividly recalled when she was a graduate student and informed her mentor she was expecting her second child:

Our relationship changed, the environment became very tense, and he stopped offering me research opportunities. I kept getting comments from him that I would do really good at a small, liberal arts college. I did find out later that he told one of my fellow grad

students that because I was having babies I was not a serious scholar. (Rachel)

Rachel went on to note she learned a valuable lesson from her experience in graduate school:

I don't really talk much about my kids and my life because I don't want to be seen as not serious. And I just don't ever want anybody to question my abilities. And it's hard for people to see women both as smart and capable and successful, and as moms.

Career-focused participants in this study often reported feeling annoyed by the way they felt others treated them because of their desires to advance in a career. For the most part, participants reported allowing the comments to pass with little to no response and moved on.

Overall, participants who fell into the category of Career-Focused Mothers reported working because it was personally fulfilling and a part of their perceived identity; felt they were better mothers because they had a career; and believed they had received value-laden comments from others about their career ambitions while also being a mother. Following is an overview of how both wage-focused and career-focused mothers reported responding to the comments they received from others related to their motherhood and their employment choices.

Responsive Strategies

Both wage-focused and career-focused mothers reported receiving comments from others inside and outside of the workplace. Participants, regardless of their motivation for working, reported responding to the comments they received from others passively or directly in a way that appeared to be dependent upon how she felt the comment impacted her identity as a mother and/or professional.

Passive Response. Passive response strategies included ignoring comments or simply not offering any type of response. The passive strategy was often chosen when there was no perceived threat to either type of working mother's identity as a mother or as a professional. Many times, both categories of women participants reported they perceived the comments to be unworthy of a response with reported comebacks similar to Beth who replied, "I just smile." Jamie justified her silence to a perceived undesirable comment stating:

I didn't really react to [the comments] because everybody's opinion is what it is and it's not going to change my course of events. My husband and I will make a choice for what's best for our family... And you get annoyed by it [but] I don't get too mad. (Jamie)

Both categories of women also reacted in a passive manner if they felt confronting the individual could be detrimental or carry greater consequences than annoyance or anger. Melissa noted even though the comment, "that's what you get for hiring a woman" made by her boss angered her, she remained silent because he was her boss. She excused his behavior stating, "we get quite busy around here and don't have enough help" (Melissa). In another instance, after her graduate defense was successfully defended, Rachel's mentor, who had criticized her for having children commented to her colleague, "I didn't think she had it in her." Rachel went on to explain "I was so upset. [but] I didn't confront him, I mean it wouldn't do any good, it's not gonna change his mind. He is a really arrogant man, and ...he's said some really horrible things to some of the females." Overall, the participants in this study reported they usually approached undesirable comments with a "choose your battles" mentality and remained silent when they perceived saying something

would do little to make the situation better or change the attitude of the individual making the comments. Participants also noted there were times they felt speaking up was necessary.

Direct Response. Direct response strategies reported by participants included confrontation or inviting discussion. Although both types of working mothers sometimes remained silent, they did speak aggressively when they felt their position needed clarification for the individual making the comment. Christina told the person who asked if she would quit playing softball, “no, not in this lifetime.” Likewise, when Lisa was faced with “that’s so gross” comments about breast milk in the refrigerator, she simply asked, “is there something else that I could do because it is really important,” inviting discussion and opening the lines of communication to put the solution back on the commenting individual. All working mothers interviewed in this study indicated they sometimes said things along the line of, “Well, I’m not sure why that’s really an issue, that was the choice that was best for us’ versus launching into [an extended explanation]” (Lisa). The women also noted some things are no one else’s business.

Overall, regardless of the motivation for employment by the working mother participants in this study, both passive response and direct response strategies were utilized when confronted with comments related to their motherhood and employment. What is interesting is that both types of working mothers (wage-focused and career-focused) reported implementing similar strategies for responding to undesired comments directed toward them for similar reasons. The working mothers in this sample also

provided some insight to the differences between the wage-focused mothers and the career-focused mothers.

Comparisons of Working Mothers

Through the examination of each of the interviews and comments given by the two types of working mothers identified in this study, three contrasting themes emerged: 1) One was driven to work for a wage to provide income for her family, while the other was motivated to work for her career advancement; 2) one viewed her employment as less desirable than staying home with her children, while the other desired work to enhance self-fulfillment; and 3) one received more value-laden comments about her capabilities as a mother, while the other received more value-laden comments about her career ambitions.

Purpose of Work

The two types of working women in this sample reported different purposes for working. Some participants reported working to provide for their families while others reported possessing career ambitions. Undoubtedly, a difference between the two types of working mothers in this study was how others view their roles as working mothers. In a society experiencing economic challenges, women are expected to work to help provide for the family; however, career-focused participants appeared to be less accepted in the workplace. Women with the capacity and desire to have a fulfilling professional career are often confronted with resistance, not only by men, but also by women both in and out of the workforce due to their supposed prioritization of career over family. The media has pushed the notion that a woman who puts too much effort

into her career cannot also be a “supermom” so she should forgo her career to focus on her children (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Therefore, some may expect women to choose raising children over a career, which is consistent with previous research where male executives framed women balancing home and work as problematic, while women’s choices to stay home were applauded (Tracy & Rivera, 2010). Based upon the reports by the small sample of women in this study, it almost appears as though society in general is accepting of women in the workforce only when economically necessary.

Personal Desire

Both types of working mothers in this study also embraced different personal desires. Wage-focused mothers expressed the desire to be able to stay home with their children rather than punch a clock forty hours each week. Career-focused women, on the other hand expressed the desire to advance in their career. A distinct difference between the wage-focused mother and the career-focused mother was the way they viewed their identities and roles in the workforce. One was content in her job; she desired a more self-fulfilling role she believed she could be performing at home raising her children. The other considered her career integral to her identity. She was a mother and a professional feeling both roles fulfilled different needs. She was also painfully aware a break in her resume could be detrimental to her professional goals. Coverman (1985) found women experiencing role conflict also experience decreased job satisfaction. The wage-focused mother may feel less content in her job than the career-focused mother because she feels her role as an employee conflicts with her role as a mother.

Characteristics of Comments

Both types of working mothers have endured opinion-based comments about their motherhood. The comments directed toward the wage-focused mothers have manifested around her abilities as a mother telling her she should be breastfeeding her infant or should give up playing softball, while the career-focused mother has received comments directed toward her abilities as a professional telling her she should consider a smaller, liberal arts college rather than pursuing a position at a research institution. Plainly, a difference between the two types of working mothers was not that they received opinion-based comments, but the direction of the comments. Research has shown while it may be acceptable for mothers to work as long as it is only work; when the job becomes a part of her identity, criticisms shift to her ability to be both on the career path and have children (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). The research appears to be consistent with the reports of working mothers in this study of perceptions of comments directed toward them regarding their ability to have both a career and a family.

Discussion

The first research question asked how mothers view work and employment choices. Previous research on working women indicates “not all women occupy the same standpoint, or live the same experiences” (Buzzanell, 1994, p. 353). When applying this statement to the women in this study, the differences in their socio-economic levels may have affected their outlook as to why they work outside the home. The wage-focused mothers work outside the home because the family “isn’t in the financial position to only have one

income” (Kathy). The career-focused women, on the other hand, work outside the home because it “gives me satisfaction that I’m doing both, I’m providing for my family and doing what I love” (Erin).

The working mothers hold distinctive meanings of work. Many societal messages related to the meaning of work are contradictory, especially for women. Some emphasize the importance of a fulfilling career and others emphasize the importance of family above all else (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006). It has been argued those who are able to provide for themselves and/or others will experience greater feelings of accomplishment and self-worth than if they have to depend upon someone else for their basic survival needs (Kant, 1775 [1963]). Work can be tied to personal worth through an individual’s sense of status and feelings of contribution to community and society. Likewise, individuals who experience work as enjoyable and feel a sense of reward from their work often do not distinguish a difference between work and free time (Csikszentmihali, 1997). On the other hand, work can be viewed as confining. Minority and low-income women may see work as a means of survival rather than as liberating (Williams, 2000). Consistent with previous research, based upon the reports of the wage-focused working mothers, they do not view work as liberating while the career-focused working mother reported finding their careers rewarding.

The differences between the two types of working mothers also affect comments they receive. The wage-focused mother does not receive comments about her job. In fact, she reported that everyone she knows is in a similar situation so when they do talk about working outside the

home, it is usually to validate their position and express the wish circumstances were different. When the wage-focused mother receives comments, it is usually about her parenting choices. Conversely, the career-focused mother is more likely to receive comments about her desire to succeed professionally. One reason for the difference in the comments may be because Western culture accepts women working outside the home but views being career-focused a male-gendered characteristic less acceptable for females (Tracy & Rivera, 2010). The reports by participants in this study imply women who must enter the workforce force out of economic necessity are given a “pass” because they have no other choice, whereas women privileged enough to have the option to stay home may be viewed as selfish or senseless for not desiring to be a homemaker.

In identifying the communication strategies of women responding to comments about their choice to have a career and a family, the findings for the second research question suggest that the perceived identity threat and nature of the comment determines whether passive or direct response strategies are used. If either type of working mother feels the situation might escalate into something that could be detrimental to her employment, or the comment is unworthy of response, she uses passive communicative strategies, often remaining silent. On the other hand, when confronted by comments that challenge what she believes to be important aspects of her life and identity, her strategy is direct justifying her position and/or inviting discussion. The women participants in this study reported they felt the need to defend their choices; this action further supports the traditional socially constructed roles of women as stay-at-home caregivers.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

This study sheds light on two different types of working mothers and the communication strategies they use when confronting comments about their choices. The results provide evidence that employed women who choose to have children must be prepared to confront the comments about their choices. The results also provide a glimpse into the meaning of work for women of various social classes and the reasons mothers may choose to navigate a family and a career.

One study limitation is the decision that saturation was reached after 12 interviews. While the two classifications of a wage-focused mother and a career-focused mother clearly emerged, the participants lack ethnic and geographic diversity. Despite these concerns, the lived experiences of the employed mothers as described in this study gives value to scholars looking at women functioning in real-life situations.

Future research should focus more on a variety of employed women from various socio-economic, religious, cultural, gender, and geographic backgrounds and their identity as a working mother. Examining all types of women allows insight into each woman's experience. Understanding the differences between employed mothers along with their motivations and the values they hold can only benefit work environments, family life, and society. Knowing what matters to a mother working outside the home may allow organizations to reconsider how employee needs are met, allow for the development of effective family policy, and guide social and political movements. ■

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The Tentacles of Neoliberalism: How the Master's Tools Became a Vehicle for Activism

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Abstract

The United States (US) is an economic superpower that attracts immigrants from less developed nations due to their desire to improve their living conditions. Immigrant laborers have been and are subject to a wide range of structural inequalities in the nation. Nevertheless, the United States implemented and hegemonically promotes neoliberal ideals centered on privatization, reduced social spending, and idealizing self-determination in the workforce. The economic theory is modeled on identity-blind assumptions that make the obstacles people face due to discrimination based on their gender, race, sexuality, economic class, immigration status, ethnicity, religion, and other identity traits invisible. In response to the subjugation minorities endure, over the years a significant increase occurred in the number of nonprofit organizations. However, (perhaps unconsciously) nonprofits often model their projects to align with neoliberal ideals despite their oppressive nature. Using discourse analysis, the publication below examines this trend in the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), which is a coalition of approximately sixty nonprofit organizations that strive to empower workers who are in-home caregivers, childcare workers, and domestic laborers. Likewise, this publication closely examines a decades long project which was spearheaded by one of the coalition's prominent members: Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA). The article proves that despite NDWA members' and MUA's goal of empowering subjugated populations, their projects often reinforce neoliberal ideals that oppress their clients.

Keywords

neoliberalism; empire; imperialism; hegemony; immigration

Introduction

The United States (US) is a global hegemonic empire that designs its policies based on neoliberal principles that concretize and expand socio-economic power hierarchies in the country and abroad. In order to increase competition

and minimize transaction costs, neoliberalism's key components are free trade, deregulation of markets, reduced social spending by governments, and privatization of economies. Supporters of the theory argue that without government

intervention the market will naturally stabilize due to supply, demand, people's self-determination and their interest in personal economic gain (Harvey, 2005). Due to the American empire hegemonically supporting this model, laborers must migrate from less developed countries to industrialized countries because of the concentration of wealth in those nations (Zabin & Hughes, 1995). Immigrants are drawn to capital gain out of the desire to have greater consumption power and monetary resources for themselves and their families. However, after they move their labor is vulnerable to exploitation (Inderpal, 2005). In response to the hardships minorities endure, a body of nonprofits and coalitions of nonprofits with shared interests has formed. Yet, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often become carriers of dominant neoliberal agendas promoted by the US nation state (Wallace, 2004).

The National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) is a coalition of over sixty nonprofits throughout the United States that has a shared goal to advance the rights of low income workers in the fields of in-home caregiving, domestic labor, and childcare. This article proves that in addition to mobilizing for increased rights for people in the three professions (which are predominantly occupied by immigrant women of color) approximately one third of the nonprofits in the coalition train and/or place these women into the exploitive working environments. Furthermore, the evidence presented in this paper proves that among the organizations in the coalition, Latina immigrants are overwhelmingly more likely than other identity groups to be targeted to occupy the jobs. After identifying these trends in the coalition, I closely examine a project of one of NDWA's members, *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* (MUA), which has been a

prominent leader in the coalition. For over twenty years MUA spearheaded an initiative titled "Caring Hands" that trained and placed Latina immigrants into in-home caregiving, domestic labor, and childcare employment. I investigate how MUA and members of the National Domestic Workers Alliance are implicated in furthering the US empire's imperialist neoliberal ideals.

The United States' Role in Transforming Labor and Capital Flows

Globalization and the unequal distribution of capital and labor it entails did not occur spontaneously; instead it was a product of a history of imperialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007). Although birth of this imperialism dates back centuries, this section highlights its most recent occurrences. In 1942, the United States and Mexico constructed a series of diplomatic agreements and laws referred to as the *Bracero* program. The program allowed Mexican migrants to legally work in the United States, for the agricultural industry in order to boost the US's political economy and produce capital in Mexico in the form of remittances. The program created a transnational network of labor recruiters to locate people who could fill the positions, however, by 1964 the program ceased to exist when the United States shifted from active migrant labor recruitment to passive labor acceptance; nevertheless, the majority of previous *Bracero* workers remained in the United States (Brick, Challinor, & Rosenblum, 2011; Durand, Massey, & Parrado, 1999). Shortly after World War II, American "officials undertook large-scale spending and investment to generate income and eliminate bottlenecks in production; at the same time, they erected barriers to the entry of foreign goods and services, thus creating

internal demand that national producers—both public and private—could satisfy to initiate and sustain industrialization” (Durand et al., 1999, p. 518). The policies, combined with the *Bracero* program, instigated decades of expansion in migration from developing countries to the United States (Durand et al., 1999).

During the 1970s the US population shifted from a white majority to a “numerical threat to white supremacy represented by unorganized, but densely concentrated” populations of people of color; meanwhile the development model implemented after World War II was abandoned (Durand et al., 1999, p. 518; Gilmore, 2007, p. 42). The post-World War II policies were replaced with a neoliberal political and economic model that worked to secure the power of the economic elite. Neoliberal policies are based on privatization of economies and international trade, national deunionization, reduced trade tariffs, reduced public spending, and aspirations of increased global competition (Brick et al., 2011; Durand et al., 1999). The changes and the expansion of global economies led to stagnated wages in the United States for low income workers, rises in unemployment in the country, and increased economic inequality (Durand et al., 1999). While wages in blue collar jobs decreased, “growth in service sector employment fueled demand for low skilled immigrants” (Brick et al., 2011, p. 4). Among these jobs were in-home domestic labor, caregiving, and childcare positions.

Demand for workers in the three professions also rose due to women in middle income households increasing their participation in the paid workforce. By the 1980s the number of undocumented Latin American immigrants in the United States expanded substantially because of newly imposed numerical limits on legal

immigration into the country, availability of jobs in the service sector, and global trends of reduced transportation costs (Brick et al., 2011). California’s labor force particularly swelled and a large percentage of newly arriving immigrants settled in the San Francisco Bay Area, where *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* was founded (Gilmore, 2007).

Between the 1970s and 1980s immigration from Mexico and Central America to the United States doubled, and by the 1990s the immigration tripled (Brick et al., 2011). To date, immigration from Mexico to the United States is the “largest sustained flow of immigrants anywhere in the world” (Cerrutti & Massey, 2001, p. 187). Since the 1970s “at least 6.8 million Mexican immigrants have entered into the United States, with or without documents and an increasingly large share have been women” (Cerrutti & Massey, 2001, p. 187). Although there are a number of reasons why Latinas immigrate, common reasons are family responsibilities and the search for employment (Cerrutti & Massey, 2001). By 2008 there were approximately 11,600,000 legal immigrants and twelve million undocumented residents in the United States (Varsanyi, 2008). Yet, due to the neoliberal policies of United States, wages in the country continue to decline while workers’ productivity levels rise (Seguino, 2011). A substantial number of immigrants send remittances to family members in their home countries; correspondingly, decreased wages in the United States can be economically stifling to people receiving the monetary resources (Hernandez & Coutin, 2006). Despite policies that prompted labor and capital movement and reduced wages, the state assumes little costs or responsibilities for immigrants or their families’ livelihoods.

When the Drive for Monetary Gain Trumps NGOs' Activist Agendas

In the late 1990s, budget cuts for social spending and public welfare were initiated in response to the continuous economic downturn in the country (Duggan, 2003). This created a substantial rise in the number of NGOs in existence due to diverse people's desires to address the government's failure to protect residents vulnerable to exploitation (Wallace, 2004). A spectrum of NGOs strove to reach the poorest sectors of society, something which the government often failed to do (Black, 2007). The increase of low wage domestic work positions, which were often exploitive, assured immigrant women who were considered low skilled workers had access to employment once they immigrated to the United States. However, the lack of legislative protection for domestic workers as well as the likelihood of them living in poverty prompted a breadth of activist nonprofits to form, many of which are currently members of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, including *Mujeres Unidas y Activas*.

In most states, domestic workers are excluded from the right to overtime pay, a minimum wage, regular breaks, unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation (Burnham & Theodore, 2012). Live-in workers are separated from their families and friends and can have their lives interrupted at any time by their employers (Boris & Nadasen, 2008). Wage theft in the industry is estimated to equate to approximately one hundred billion dollars per year (Burnham & Theodore, 2012). In addition, the majority of domestic workers are excluded from timely notice of termination of employment, retirement benefits, paid vacation, and employer provided health insurance (Burnham & Theodore, 2012). The

government fails to grant these labor rights to domestic workers in order to provide affordable domestic labor to middle and upper-class households out of the perception the classes are "productive, contributing, and consuming 'citizens'" (Gupta, 2003, p. 78). Exclusion of domestic workers from these rights allows the United States "to avoid the cost and responsibility for care by securing a pool of privately hired and affordable care workers for working families, an act that also allows states to avoid the need to expand welfare provisions" (Parreñas, 2008, p. 58).

Undocumented domestic workers are likely to endure exceptionally exploitive working conditions because they fear losing their source of income and/or being deported if they file formal complaints against their employer. Employers often intimidate undocumented workers in relation to their immigration status in order to exploit their labor. Although the government categorizes immigration status, it in part "transfers surveillance functions to the employers, who, since 1986, have been legally responsible for checking their employees' work authorization" (Gupta, 2003, p. 80). Due to this law "private employers begin acting as the arm of the state" while the "state privatizes and outsources its gatekeeping functions" (Gupta, 2003, p. 80-81).

Governmentally designed structural inequalities reinforce the exploitation of domestic workers. In response the National Domestic Workers Alliance was founded in 2007 to lobby state governments to implement labor laws that protect domestic laborers, caregivers, and childcare workers. Due to their commitment and collective action, seven states, including Oregon, Illinois, Hawaii, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and California passed a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights to more adequately protect the laborers

(National Domestic Workers Alliance, 2006). In California, *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* was at the forefront of this lobbying. One year prior to NDWA's founding, MUA significantly contributed to the passage of the Household Workers Protection Bill AB2536, which was promptly vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger. By 2013, MUA and NDWA's efforts led to the passage of California's Domestic Workers Bill of Rights which is still active. Nevertheless, the only increased protection provided by the bill is overtime pay if the employee works more than nine hours in one day or more than forty-five hours in one week.

MUA's and NDWA's mobilization for increased rights for domestic workers combats neoliberal ideals that promote unregulated markets, yet the organizations' legislative achievements are minimal compared to the expansive power of neoliberalism. For example, California's Domestic Workers Bill of Rights that grants overtime pay does not address the wide range of other labor related systematic prejudices domestic workers endure or their inability to access adequate public services. The law enables effected workers to possess greater consumer and economic power by increasing their financial earnings, however, granting overtime pay does not significantly dismantle the neoliberal system.

Like MUA, most members of the National Domestic Workers Alliance lobby for structural changes in labor laws to further protect their clients. However, creating political change is a slow lengthy process that does not produce immediate results. Moreover, lobbying for legislative change requires a significant amount of economic and social resources. Therefore, a common trend among nonprofits in the NDWA collective is to actively train and/or place vulnerable populations that visit their

nonprofits into domestic work, regardless of exploitation in the labor field. Table 1 (see below) lists which organizations participate in this training and/or placement, which identities are targeted for the positions, in which states the nonprofits are located, and for what types of jobs each nonprofit trains and/or places people. Out of approximately sixty nonprofits that are members of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, approximately one third of the organizations conduct training and/or job placement. Approximately seventeen conduct training and placement, four conduct training only, one conducts placement only, and one organization conducts referrals for training and placement.

Out of the one third of approximately sixty organizations in NDWA that trains and/or places women into domestic labor, Table 1 proves that the overwhelming majority of people targeted for the jobs are Latina immigrants. Fifteen of twenty-three organizations in Table 1 targeted this identity group, while other groups targeted are Nepalese immigrants, Brazilian immigrants, African Americans, African immigrants, Chinese immigrants, and Filipino immigrants. Given the substantially higher rate of organizations that train and/or place Latina immigrants in feminized exploitive labor, and the history of immigration of Latinos to the United States, a profound exploration of one of the nonprofits focused on Latina immigrants in Table 1 is warranted. The case study of *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* is explored below.

MUA was founded in 1990 by two immigrant women, Clara Luz Navarro and Maria Olea, to cater to the specific needs of Latina immigrants in the Bay Area in California. Within the first two years of opening, the organization expanded from eight members to sixty. The nonprofit

(which obtains the majority of its funding from private foundations) strives to increase Latina immigrants' power. One of MUA's economic empowerment projects referred to as "Caring Hands" was launched in the mid 1990s and was active for over twenty years. The project trained and placed Latina immigrants into in-home caregiving, domestic labor, and childcare. "Caring Hands" allowed MUA to obtain funding due to the prompt "success" stories it enabled MUA to statistically report to its donors. The project also allowed MUA to promptly supply Latina immigrants with outcomes from the nonprofit's work. The pages below problematize how "Caring Hands" framed economic empowerment of Latina immigrants (similar to a range of organizations in the Domestic Workers Alliance) in a manner that was implicated in US promoted neoliberal principles. Despite MUA recognizing domestic work as exploitive, the nonprofit designed the program as an economic empowerment strategy for Latina immigrants.

In the 1990s, activism became professionalized due to the rapid increase in NGOs. The organizations needed to solicit funding which prompted many organizations concerned with creating long term equality based structural changes having to design initiatives that could produce prompt results that would satisfy donors (Gilmore, 2007). Development strategies such as "Caring Hands" allowed organizations to meet donor requests to report prompt quantitative "improvements" in target populations. Training and placing immigrant women in jobs is more impressively quantifiable for donors than the lengthy process of passing legislation. The economic development strategy allowed MUA and similar projects associated with the National Domestic Workers Alliance to provide regular statistics about the number of women

"positively" impacted in order to provide evidence of their "success" as NGOs. Even if the economic development strategy is not ideal for the nonprofits' clients, they must frame the projects' strategies and outcomes as successful in order to be competitive for funding (Smith, 2007, p. 10). Similarly, foundations rarely meet with organizations they fund to discuss the incompatibility of the donors' demands with the goals of the nonprofits (Flower, 1996). This is particularly dangerous because it assures that economic empowerment strategies which funders approve are not assured to be sustainable, effective, and long term.

The Heavy Hand of Neoliberalism Infiltrates MUA

The United States government shapes its economic policies around neoliberal principles in order to produce its vision of an ideal national futurity that is predicated on self-determination and self-reliance rather than people's reliance on government public programs. Simultaneously, the United States is an international hegemonic empire that uses its economic strength to coerce other nations into adopting neoliberal principles (through initiatives such as structural adjustments) which champion self-determination over government social protection schemes. MUA also champions self-determination as a path to empowerment. MUA's mission statement promotes self-determination and the organization describes how self-determination enables "each woman to make the right decision for herself, live free from violence and discrimination, and have access to ample opportunities during the different stages of her life to achieve economic security, health and safety for her and her family" (MUA, 2017). The

nonprofit frames self-determination as a core necessity for economic empowerment.

This ideology that is reflective of neoliberal hegemonic values was reinforced when MUA promoted “Caring Hands” as a suitable economic development strategy for Latina immigrants. “Caring Hands,” as a self-determination strategy, encourages Latina immigrants to feel empowered when they become laborers; even if their employment is exploitive, low paid, and discriminatorily protected by labor laws. While MUA aimed to increase Latina immigrants’ economic power by training and placing them in jobs, the organization endorsed a socio-economic ceiling for the women’s empowerment due to them working in professions rife with discrimination that is implicit in US ideologies about race, class, and gender. Through the promotion of “Caring Hands,” MUA refused to acknowledge that domestic work will continue to be an exploitive form of employment. Even if workers are granted equal protection under labor laws, domestic work is low paid, feminizing, and racial labor where, in many cases, employers can manipulate employees due to their immigration status.

Despite MUA’s efforts, it is improbable that Latina immigrant domestic workers will ever thrive in a neoliberal economic system. Neoliberalism was designed blind to prejudices that are embedded in the workforce and in the market. Neoliberal theory assumes that all people possess human dignity and that individual freedom is a fundamental principle of the system; this freedom is described as guaranteed by free enterprise and private ownership (Harvey, 2005). This proposed “freedom” has increased identity-based inequality and increased divides in class power. The neoliberal subject that its founders envisioned while designing the system was a specifically

middle to upper class Western male whose autonomous individuality was predicated on the subservience and dependence of women and the exploitation of the labor of people of color (Harvey, 2005; Kingfisher, 2002). Neoliberal ideals naturalized unpaid reproductive labor into women’s personhoods, which signifies that they may never fully be the masculinized, capital driven, and independent subject who exists in the public sphere. The theory resists recognizing personhood in the private sphere, for full personhood is framed in terms of market competitiveness and self-determination in the market (Kingfisher, 2002). In neoliberalism, domestic workers are rarely treated as legitimate workers that are worthy of labor law protections due to their market productivity being feminized labor, that is considered a natural element of women’s identities.

Neoliberalism is predicated on capital accumulation and the preservation of masculinized power of male elites (Harvey, 2005). Karl Polanyi has mockingly phrased the theory’s claim to individual liberty as giving humans “the freedom to exploit one’s fellows, or the freedom to make inordinate gain without commensurable service to the community” (Harvey, 2005, p. 36). America’s hegemonic support of neoliberalism organizes the global political economy in terms of gender, race, sexuality, economic class, immigration status, ethnicity, and religion, with groups outside the idealized neoliberal subject being vulnerable to exploitation and subjugation by the dominant group. How the theory classifies “human activity and relationships *actively obscures* the connections among those organizing terms” (Duggan, 2003, p. 3). Therefore, in neoliberalism, the “free” individual whose actions are rational products of their self-determination is a very specific individual that is highly

exclusionary of classes of people who do not fit within the Western middle to upper class white male mold. While subjects outside of the mold are deemed by neoliberalists as uncontrollable, immoral, dependent, irrational, and perpetrators of disorder, the neoliberal global system promoted by US policies coerce immigrants from Latin America and other regions in the Global South to immigrate to the United States for economic gain; their stigmatized personhoods and labor are then exploited and subjugated by economic power holders for their own benefit (Kingfisher, 2002).

Organizations in the National Domestic Workers Alliance that mirror “Caring Hands” as an economic development strategy do not effectively combat neoliberal ideals of exploitation. Rather, the organizations funnel vulnerable populations into forms of employment that have proven to be exploitive, ideologically deemed of low worth, and not recognized in the United States as deserving equal protection under labor laws. If MUA’s goals and the goals of the breadth of organizations listed in Table 1 were realized, meaning if their clients were placed in domestic work that is equally protected under labor laws, the women would still operate in an exploitive political and economic system. The women would still be in an undervalued and low paid profession that is naturalized into women’s identities due to them being appropriated as unpaid reproductive laborers. Their work would still be deemed unskilled despite the profound impact their work has on the lives of the people who employ them. Also, the likelihood the women would economically advance in their profession would still be scarce because domestic workers generally are employed by individuals or families. Activist organizations must reframe how they envision economic empowerment in order

to take into account neoliberal hegemonic ideals and the diverse forms of structural inequalities they create.

Lighting the Way to a Brighter Future Through Heightened Feminist Awareness

In order to advance Latina immigrants’ rights, as well as the rights of other marginalized groups, there must be an epistemic shift in how the groups are envisioned in relation to more powerful identity groups. Furthermore, there must be a shift in what types of careers nonprofits encourage their clients to occupy. The NDWA and MUA must strive to combat neoliberalism and its impacts on the global political economy. This effort must be primary rather than strictly trying to obtain equal rights and problematic job placement for subjugated groups within neoliberalism, which is premised on a gender-blind-color-blind model yet is an economic structure that promotes identity-based power hierarchies. Activist organizations must play a central role in deconstructing and dismantling neoliberalism. Social movements dedicated to increasing the political and economic power of vulnerable populations must interrogate and combat the discriminatory structures embedded in neoliberalism, which are supported by the US empire and privatized industries. Activists must lobby the American government to eliminate its neoliberal practices. An effective strategy is to model transnational feminist approaches that combat hegemony, racism, sexism, classism, imperialism, male supremacy, and other structural inequalities. Adopting transnational feminist initiatives would force activist organizations to “focus on new assemblages of power” and to examine how social movements have the potential to

redesign subjectivities (Inderpal, 2005, p. 14). The assemblages of power between NGOs, their funders, and the US empire are a multiplicity of force relations through which never ending struggles, transformations, confrontations, and shifts in power materialize (Foucault, 1978). While NGOs such as MUA and NDWA are victims of hegemonic control, they can also be leaders in combating such control and can be leaders in combatting identity-based power structures. To generate improved conditions for its clients, MUA and NDWA (along with other activist organizations) must advocate for anti-discriminatory macroeconomic policies and public services that are capable of positively effecting cultural transformation.

These policies must focus on promoting socio-political equality, equal income distribution, and full employment (Seguino, 2011). Although such changes can occur only if NGOs, civil society, and governments act in solidarity to promote equality, the strategies are the only method to ensure that sustainable development can be a reality for all groups. A strategy that activist organizations could adopt is to strive to assure US residents, *including* immigrants of all citizenship statuses, have access to occupational training programs that place people in fields of employment that are currently high paying, with an emphasis on degendering industries by training women for jobs that are predominantly occupied by men and vice versa (Seguino, 2011). The same strategy could be used in relation to employment segregation by race and immigration status. This would promote market productivity by making certain larger groups of minority populations enter skilled professions that generate increased income for them. It would also blur gender and race hierarchies in income. Nevertheless, even if women obtain increased access to high paying jobs,

as women they would still be socially appropriated as individuals who should meet their family needs privately and in privatized industries. They would still be appropriated into familial roles as the dominant unpaid domestic laborers within their own families. They would still likely face wage gaps in employment. Therefore, to combat the neoliberal system as well as gendered sexist socialization, activist organizations should also advocate for anti-racist, anti-sexist socializing initiatives and legislative changes, and for the federal government to provide public services to ease women's majority share of unpaid domestic responsibilities as well as their income-based needs. Furthermore, activists should launch educational campaigns for NGO funders to teach them about the slow process of making long term equality based structural changes. This effort could reduce the funders' desires to be provided prompt statistical proof of impacts nonprofits make, which are often "Band-Aid" solutions.

Next, nonprofits and individual activists must also combat sexist and racist socialization that homogenizes groups into monolithic identity categories. For example, although Latina immigrants are subject to intersecting forms of discrimination and subjugation, all people experience their lives differently, all people have unique factors that make up their identity and thus how they experience society. What unites immigrant women of color is not necessarily their ethnicity; instead, it is their common context of struggle and the interconnectedness among all beings (Mohanty, 2003; Marcos, 2005). In order to form a transnational feminist community and still acknowledge the diversities women embody, it is essential to construct an "imagined community" of "oppositional struggles— 'imagined' not because it is not 'real' but because it

suggests potential alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries..." (Mohanty, 2003, p. 46). A global movement of transnational feminist solidarity has the ability to begin redesigning the power systems in which people are interwoven by uniting people in resistance to adversities they personally endure while educating themselves about and actively contesting hardships their allies endure. People can work together in solidarity to assure an improved global future will come into fruition.

Like globalization, transnational feminism is in a constant state of metamorphosis. Unlike neoliberalism, transnational feminism is constantly questioning itself and redesigning itself based on new discoveries made by its practitioners. If activist organizations replicate this transformative design, they will be less wary of abandoning practices that perpetuate neoliberal norms and exploit vulnerable populations. The challenge still remains that nonprofits are subject to never-ending competition for funding. To obtain monetary resources NGOs must legitimize their work by reporting prompt statistical results about their programs and by validating their work as always successful. Forward thinkers are left to ponder:

How can people mainstream transnational feminist ideals into activist work in order to deconstruct and dismantle dominant political and economic structures that subjugate vulnerable groups? Also, how can activist groups safeguard against promoting political and economic agendas they intend to combat?

It is the responsibility of the advocacy groups and individual activists to continue asking these types of questions and to aggressively search for their answers. Activists must be acutely aware of the

failures and successes they continuously make through their activism and design their future endeavors in reaction to the discoveries. This must be done so activists and the nonprofits they are associated with do not become the bearers of oppressive ideologies. It must be done to assure that, instead of money, care and compassion remain the driving forces for activist projects. ■

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Table 1: National Domestic Workers Alliance Affiliates

Organization	State	Job Type	Training	Placement	Targeted Identities	Targeted Gender
Adhikaar	New York	Childcare; Domestic work	Y	Y	Nepalese Immigrants	Female
Brazilian Women's Group	Massachusetts	Domestic work	Y	Y	Brazilian Immigrants	Female
Carroll Gardens Association	New York	Childcare	Y	Y	African Americans; Latino Immigrants	Female
Casa de Maryland	Maryland	Not specified	Y	Y	Latino Immigrants	Not specified
Casa Freehold	New Jersey	Day labor	Y	Y	Latino Immigrants	Female; Male
Casa Latina	Washington	Domestic work; Manual labor	Y	Y	Latino Immigrants	Female; Male
Centro Humanitario	Colorado	Day labor; Domestic work	Y	Y	Latino Immigrants	Female; Male
Centro Laboral de Graton	California	Day labor; Domestic work	N	Y	Latino Immigrants	Female; Male
Chinese Progressive Association	California	Hospitality	Y	N	Chinese Immigrants	Female; Male
Cooperative Care	Wisconsin	Caregiver	Y	Y	Not specified	Female; Male
Domestic Workers United	New York	Childcare; Domestic work	Y	N	African and Latino Immigrants	Female
El Centro del Inmigrante	New York	Day labor; Domestic work; Construction; Manual labor	Y	Y	Latino Immigrants	Female; Male
Encuentro	New Mexico	Caregiver	Y	N	Latino Immigrants	Female
Filipino Advocates for Justice	California	Caregiver	Referral only	Referral only	Filipino Immigrants	Female; Male
Golden Steps	New York	Caregiver; Domestic work	Y	Y	Not specified	Not specified
Instituto de Educacion Popular del Sur de California	California	Day labor; Domestic work; Manual labor	Y	Y	Latino Immigrants	Female; Male
La Colectiva	California	Domestic work	Y	Y	Latino Immigrants	Female
La Colmena	New York	Childcare; Day labor; Domestic work	Y	Y	Latino Immigrants	Female; Male
New Mexico Direct Caregivers Coalition	New Mexico	Caregiver	Y	Y	Not specified	Not specified
NICE	New York	Day labor; Construction; Manual labor	Not specified	Y	Latino Immigrants	Male
Mujeres Unidas y Activas	California	Caregiver; Childcare; Domestic work	Y	Y	Latino Immigrants	Female
National Domestic Workers Alliance NY	New York	Domestic work	Y	N	Not specified	Not specified
Union Latina de Chicago	Chicago	Domestic work	Y	Y	Latino Immigrants	Female

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Discourses of Gender Identity and Transition in Later Life

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Abstract

There is a small but growing field of inquiry exploring the needs and experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming older adults (TGNC). While large, quantitative studies are useful for illustrating differences at the population level, in-depth qualitative research is needed to offer interpretations that reflect the complexity and nuance of individual lives and to better illuminate the reality of living as a TGNC elder. Guided by a social constructionist epistemology, this study reports findings from a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) of interviews with two older women who had undergone sexual reassignment or gender confirmation surgery to examine how these women talk about their identities and gender transitions, how their language might be informed by or resistant to their social context, and what they might possibly gain from using language in these ways. These two women presented their gender transitions in different ways, illustrating the potential for wide variation. While one conceptualized a gender transition as a critical aspect of one's identity, the other constructed it as a minor shift in the scope of a larger self-development narrative. They took up the roles of expert, educator, consumer, and transgender woman in differing ways and to differing degrees, demonstrating varied approaches to resilience and resistance. These findings are explored for their potential to inform direct practice and research with older transgender adults.

Keywords

transgender, gender non-conforming, gender identity, aging, gerontology, discourse analysis, narrative

Introduction

As the population size and proportion of older adults in the U.S. rapidly grows (AOA, 2016), healthcare and social service providers must be prepared to tailor services to the needs of an increasingly diverse aging population. In particular, LGBTQ older adults have been recognized as an understudied and underserved minority (Institute of Medicine, 2011). However,

there remains limited information available regarding the distinct, personal experiences of subgroups within this population (Fredriksen-Goldsen & Muraco, 2010). A small but growing body of evidence suggests that transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) elders face particular health-related challenges compared to their cisgender counterparts; these differences are associated with risk factors such as higher rates of victimization and discrimination,

higher reports of internalized stigma, fewer financial resources, and trans-specific barriers to accessing healthcare (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2014; Witten, 2016).

While these findings are useful for illustrating differences at the population level, in-depth qualitative research is needed to offer interpretations that reflect the complexity and nuance of individual lives, thereby shedding light on the lived reality of TGNC elders. Guided by a social constructionist epistemology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) method, this study reports findings from interviews with two older women who had

TGNC Elders

In recent years, the umbrella term of ‘transgender and gender non-conforming’ has been applied to a wide variety of identities that share a common bending, challenging, or disrupting of the limited, essentialist binary of traditional Anglophone gender options of “man” and “woman.” This umbrella term encompasses sub-identifiers such as ‘transgender’, ‘agender’, and ‘gender queer’ among others (Witten & Eyler, 2012) and these identities stand in contrast to cisgender identities, held by individuals whose sex assigned at birth aligns with their gender identity. It is worthwhile to note that individuals who identify as TGNC may or may not choose to undergo sexual reassignment or gender confirmation surgery and individuals who have undergone these surgeries may not identify as TGNC. In relation to the broader historical context, TGNC older adults have faced unique barriers to coming out and transitioning due to their age and cohort membership, as the broad array of

formerly undergone sexual reassignment surgery in order to examine how they construct their identities and gender transitions, how their language might be informed by or resistant to their social context, and what they might possibly gain from using language in these ways. This added depth of understanding is needed in order to illustrate what we might learn about *how* and *why* TGNC elders construct their identities in certain ways and what implications those constructions have for researchers and service providers seeking to promote the health and well-being of older TGNC individuals.

available and socially recognized gender identities has only recently grown to encompass more varied options and fluidity in the social construction of gender (Witten, 2016b). As the complexity of identities broadens to encompass more diversity, research is slowly accumulating to shed light on the lived experiences of these individuals in more depth.

Studies of TGNC elders have found that transitioning carries the risk of negatively impacting one’s employment opportunities, can be financially costly to undertake, and can expose a person to complex health risks, particularly for individuals living with chronic illnesses (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2014; Siverskog, 2014; Witten, 2016a). In the *Aging with Pride* study, the largest study of LGBTQ adults age 50 and older in the U.S., TGNC adults report poorer physical health, higher rates of disability and chronic illness, and higher rates of depression and anxiety compared to non-TGNC participants and these outcomes are significantly associated with higher rates of

experienced discrimination, violence, and internalized stigma (Fredriksen-Goldsen, et al., 2014). Older TGNC individuals also describe a lack of knowledge about TGNC identities among healthcare and social service providers, which puts individuals in the position of having to educate providers and can lead them to avoid accessing services in the future (Siverskog, 2014). In fact, 40% of transgender elders report having been refused or experiencing inferior health care services (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2014) and a similar proportion report fears of accessing healthcare outside of LGBTQ communities (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2011).

Given that TGNC identities are associated with disparate health risks and outcomes, it is crucial that the meaning and impact of these identities is explored in research and practice settings. In one recent study of older transgender- and bisexual-identified individuals, participants reported that being transgender was a more important or impactful for their overall identity than their bisexuality (Witten, 2016) and some qualitative studies have shed light on possible reasons that this might be the case. As a service provider who leads support groups with transgender individuals, Hakeem (2010) describes TGNC people as a marginalized minority within cisnormative societies as well as within the broader LGBTQ population. In this context, Hakeem claims that, “binary gender rigidity stands at the core of transgender status” (2010, p. 141) and argues that if essentialist gender assumptions were to be challenged, if we “could tolerate some fluidity” within our understandings of

gender, there may no longer be a need to physically transition, alter one’s gender presentation, or identify strongly as a man or woman. The basis of this framing relies on Judith Butler’s (1990) claim that gender is a performative effect of society rather than an innate property of individuals. In applying queer theory to conceptualize late life gender transitions, Fabbre (2014; 2015) also challenges cisnormative assumptions of “typical” life sequences and draws on Jack Halberstam’s (2011) text *The Queer Art of Failure* in order to critique the concept of “successful aging,” illustrating how transgender older adults might enact agency by redefining ‘success’ and ‘failure’ in later life. By failing to live up to normative ideals, transgender elders can explore unconventional paths to wellness, emphasizing the authenticity of one’s self-defined identity (Fabbre, 2015).

The Importance of Discourse

Findings from recent studies with TGNC elders point to the possible richness to be gleaned from theoretically informed and in-depth analyses of gender transitions and identities as constructed by TGNC older adults themselves. Discourse analysis (DA) is a particularly powerful methodological tool that has the potential to deeply inform this relatively new and growing body of literature. As a method, DA offers the benefits of exploring narrative possibilities in self-definition and meaning making within a specific societal and cultural context. In the present study, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), as described by Willig (2008), was chosen for the usefulness of specific concepts as theoretical tools, particularly including

discursive objects, or objects constructed through language, and subject positions, or the “positioning of subjects within relations of power” (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2011, p. 5). These concepts are especially useful for exploring the complexities of both gender transitions, as a discursive object, and TGNC identities, as a subject position. This analytic method also has the potential to reveal both the broad discourses and specific linguistic tools that older TGNC individuals draw on in making meaning out of their identities, allowing for an analysis of multiple levels of language use.

Discourse, from a Foucauldian perspective, refers to “the production of knowledge through language” (Hall, 1997, p. 72) within a particular historical context and Foucault (1978) saw knowledge as deeply tied to dynamics of power. Because discourse involves forms of communication and constructions of knowledge, discourse analysis has the potential to lay bare the assumed and implicit knowledge/power that is embedded in or revealed by language use (Hall, 1997). A Foucauldian perspective also offers a framework for understanding how power dynamics produce circumstances of domination and resistance (McLaren, 2002). Although both discursive objects and subjects are produced within and subjected to discourse (Hall, 1997), subjects can also influence their own construction by resisting the processes of description, recognition, and classification by which they are defined and socially located (Graham, 2011).

These Foucauldian concepts provide a useful point of departure for researchers and practitioners who aim to

increase their understanding of TGNC lives in the context of later life. By framing TGNC elders as subjects positioned within societal dynamics of power, we can account for the ways in which their identities and experiences are socially constructed, while also acknowledging the active role these individuals play in constructing the narrative of their own gender transitions and their lives more broadly. This analysis will contribute crucial information for researchers and service providers who seek to support older TGNC clients in developing strategies of self-definition, self-advocacy, and a critical awareness of their own role in constructing and making meaning out of their experiences

Method

This study draws on semi-structured interviews completed in the winter of 2013 with two women who participated in a larger study on older women’s sexual narratives (Jen, 2017). The original study criteria were that participants were age 55 or older and identify as a woman at the time of the interview. The study procedures were approved by the Human Subjects Division of University of Washington. Participants were recruited from an urban area through the distribution of study announcements using email lists of aging service organizations and social networks of service providers. Recruitment flyers were also posted in senior centers, retirement communities, and assisted living facilities. In order to increase potential for diversity among the participants in terms of their sexual identities, announcements were also distributed through the mailing lists of

organizations serving LGBTQ individuals. The full sample included 13 women whose ages ranged from 55-93 years. Semi-structured interviews traced each participant's experiences of sexuality over the life course, including how they perceived their gender, age, and living situation as affecting their sexuality over time. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for emergent themes. For a full description of the methods and findings, see Jen (2017).

Two of the 13 participants had undergone gender confirmation surgery after the age of 40. Their narratives showed both commonalities and distinctions from those of the other participants. This analysis allowed for an in-depth examination of their life narratives in focus, as case studies of later life gender transitions. Life narratives serve as a useful unit of analysis for examining identities, as they offer a means to "express our sense of self...and negotiate it with others" while also allowing us to "claim or negotiate group membership" over the course of one's life (Linde, 1991, p. 3). Therefore, examining language use in these two narratives allowed for an analysis of the ways in which participants constructed and performed their gender transitions and TGNC identities during the interview as well as how they examine these experiences retrospectively.

There are inherent limitations in generalizability or transferability when examining the life narratives of two participants; however, expanding these findings to the larger population was not the intent of this analysis. Rather, these interviews offer in-depth portrayals of

language use among two women who drew on very different discursive strategies in constructing their gender transitions and identities. The analytic method was guided by four questions that were adapted from Willig's (2008) six-step approach to FDA and were applied to each interview: 1) How does the participant construct gender transitions as a discursive object? 2) To what subject positions does the participant actively orient to or take up? 3) How does the participant situate her own narrative within broader discourses of gender transitions and transgender identities? 4) What could the participant possibly gain from these discursive strategies?

In presenting the findings, I first summarize notable characteristics of each participant and how I came to interview them. I then present a narrative version of the findings, describing the discursive object of gender transitions, key subject positions each participant does or does not take up, how these constructions might be interpreted in the context of surrounding discourses, and what might be gained by using language in these ways. In the transcript excerpts presented below, the interviewer's comments are preceded by 'I' while participants' comments are preceded by initials of their assigned pseudonyms ('A' for 'Alice' and 'G' for 'Gretta'). Underlined portions of the transcript indicate segments that are of particular interest for the analysis.

Findings

Alice

Alice introduced herself as a transgender woman in her first email to me. Our interview lasted 2.5 hours and it

seemed that Alice was practiced at sharing her life story as she easily spoke for long periods without interruption or prompting. Alice had struggled with depression and suicidal ideation earlier in life, issues that she connected to confusion around her gender. She had attempted suicide as a young adult, leaving her with ongoing issues with pain and physical limitations. Alice had been married to a woman for 20 years, but this relationship ended in divorce due to several marital conflicts, one of which was Alice's choice to transition. Alice was in her late 60's, Caucasian, and living alone in a condo at the time of the interview. She was also in the process of exploring polyamorous relationships, but had one primary partner at the time, another woman who was also disabled. As Alice identified as transgender, I use this term in interpreting her interview.

I was led to believe that being transgender was an important identity for Alice, as she introduced her transition as a discursive topic within the first two minutes of the interview:

Excerpt 1

A: Before that I lived in [city] and I lived there for 14 years.

I: Were you also living alone there?

A: No um, I transitioned from male to female, I mean well, there isn't one moment in time when there is a transition, there's a lot of steps and uh, before I transitioned I was living as a male and I was married and my wife and I lived in that house.

She constructed her transition as a process that unfolded over time, but with specific turning points throughout. In particular, she described two specific moments, a spiritual retreat and reading an article about a well-known transgender woman, and it was in these moments that "the eggshell wrap around [her] gender got a crack in it." Alice portrayed these moments as activating a three- or four-year process of self-reflection through engaging in therapy, discussions with her wife, and experimenting with living and presenting as a woman:

Excerpt 2

A: I saw the psychiatrist for 3 years. Maybe it was 4. And at about the 2-year mark, it was all just talk still and the reason was that I was scared to step out into the world, presenting as a woman. And he basically said, "You know we can talk about this and you can read about it all you want, but you're not going to know what the actual experience is like until you try it." And that was good, but I wasn't quite ready. But then I got to the point where I was out...uh, and I loved it. And I was scared the first time and a little less scared each consecutive time, but I loved it. And very quickly couldn't get enough of it and some people call this going from gender dysphoria to going to gender euphoria. And I got to the point with the psychiatrist that I found that I was teaching him more about gender than the other way around.

In Excerpts 1 and 2, Alice constructed her own transgender identity, transition, and related experiences against the backdrop of a broader, shared transgender narrative. By referencing “a transition” as opposed to “my transition” and referring to what “some people call” gender euphoria, she also constructed her own experience of an ongoing transition process as being an accepted or common way that transitions occur. By using conversational tactics of referencing gender transitions at large and clarifying how her story aligns with a common narrative, she subtly took on the role of educator or expert, sharing her own knowledge of transitions with her interviewer, paralleled by the expert role she describes taking on in therapy. Unsure of my level of knowledge of transgender issues, Alice also placed her suicide attempt in this broader framework:

Excerpt 3

A: Well the next year, my wife and I went to a human development workshop and um... I was able to unwrap some shame around a new topic, which I will now introduce: my suicide attempt [...]. So, um, you may know this or maybe you don't, but transgender people especially young ones have a very high rate of suicide attempts and I didn't know it at the time.

By referencing what I may or may not know, Alice contrasts her own knowledge with mine. She also contrasts her current knowledge with her past awareness, stating, “I didn't know it at the time,” positioning herself as an expert at the

time of the interview. At the locutionary, or surface level, we can see Alice's conversational tactics as those of a good storyteller (Austin, 2014). By providing contextualizing details, she adds coherence to her story, fulfilling my assumptions as a conversational partner that her speech will remain relevant and provide the information necessary for understanding.

Another possible reading of Alice's narrative is at the perlocutionary level, accounting for power dynamics implicitly embedded in language (Austin, 2014). This reading might portray her coming out and transition as an ongoing process of increasing education and self-awareness whereby the experience of transition makes one an expert in transgender experiences. In this way, Alice's performance of an expert subject position in the context of this interview might align with the goals of empowering and participatory research, in which participants are seen as experts in their own experience (Cameron et al, 2010). However, Alice's orientation to an expert role goes beyond her own experience to those of a larger marginalized population. This discursive strategy is likely shaped by the broader discourse around transgender individuals having to educate both their own social networks as well as service providers they interact with due to a societal lack of awareness, the maintenance of harmful misconceptions, and limited exposure to transgender individuals and narratives (Siverskog, 2014). Alice may have found it helpful in the past to portray herself as an expert in order to embrace or find meaning in taking up the necessary role of educator, to deflect contrary claims or definitions of her experience, or to take

ownership of her story. She may also find comfort or meaning in placing her story within a broader discourse of transgender lives, in order to give herself a sense of community, belonging, and support.

While Alice's transgender identity is closely linked to the position of an expert, Alice's construction of herself as a woman reveals that she may perceive the need to justify, explain, or defend her claim to womanhood and her authority and expertise when speaking as a woman. One possible strategy to validate her claims to womanhood is to rely on essentialist notions of biology and her physical embodiment of a transition through gender confirmation surgery. For instance, Alice described her post-surgery orgasms in detail:

Excerpt 4

I: So you found out you *can* have orgasms.

A: Yeah. In fact I have very good orgasms. And I have long, I have female orgasms. Well I've been on hormones for six years now. So the orgasms I have are, they go up for a while, plateau, stay there for a while, orgasm, come back down to a plateau, maybe orgasm again or just sort of one continuous orgasm, sometimes it's hard to tell when you're in that state. My therapist is a gay guy and you know, I've described some of this to him and he's like, huh, jealous.

In this excerpt, Alice illustrated three possible strategies to validate her

sexual experiences as those of a woman or female-bodied person. First is the simple act of labeling her orgasms "female orgasms," a naming which may imply that she and I (as a young woman) would have a shared understanding of what that means. Second, she goes on to describe her orgasms in detail, as if to prove our shared understanding. Third, she contrasts her orgasms with the experiences of her male therapist, who she describes as being "jealous" in response. We might see these justifications of female orgasms as Alice's response to having her gender identity questioned, attacked, or dismissed as untrue or unstable in the past. In the context of this interview, she might also be read as taking advantage of a rare opportunity to share about and celebrate her womanhood and sexuality in a way that may not arise in daily conversation.

Gretta

While Alice's straightforward style of storytelling allowed for very little confusion on my part as the interviewer, Gretta's interview was more complex in terms of coherence. Gretta and I had spoken briefly on the phone to arrange our in-person meeting and she did not inform me that she had undergone gender confirmation surgery at the time nor did she identify herself as transgender. I remember she seemed almost amused by my project, saying she was interested to see what I would ask her and what she would say. When we met in person she was instantly friendly and we bantered easily while I walked her through the consent process. We talked for a little over an hour. Gretta was in her early 70's, Caucasian,

single, and living alone at the time of the interview. She first walked me through her sexual attractions to girls and women in early life and then described significant sexual relationships with women in adulthood. This included her marriage of over 20 years to a woman from whom she had been divorced for several years. This narrative led me to believe that Gretta had identified as a lesbian or a woman-loving woman for most of her life. However, more than halfway through the interview, Gretta informed me that she had undergone gender confirmation surgery in her 40's and that, similarly to Alice, her gender transition had been a key factor in initiating the divorce. It was at this point in the interview that I had to reassess my previous assumptions of Gretta as having been perceived as a girl or woman in her earlier life, requiring that I reorient myself to her early life experiences. Gretta explicitly stated that she does not identify herself as transgender, therefore I do not identify her with this term, although her story is contextualized within the broader discourse around TGNC identities and gender transitions.

After discussing Gretta's current living situation, her early sexual attractions, and important intimate relationships of her early life, I began asking questions that revealed my assumption that she had always been perceived as a girl or woman:

Excerpt 5

I: So you knew that you were attracted to women early on in your life?

G: Mmhmm. I've always been attracted to women.

I: There was never a question about it for you. Have you received a lot of support?

G: Yes, especially here, [City]? Come on. [City]'s a good place for all of us and our chosen family.

My line of questioning constructed Gretta as a woman attracted to other women who might have varied experiences of support around identifying with a marginalized sexual orientation and she did not challenge this assumption in her answers. One might expect that Gretta would introduce her gender transition at this moment to ensure my own understanding of her story, but for many possible reasons, she chose not to. In this moment, our interview lacks coherence, as I, as an interviewer and audience, did not have all of the necessary information to properly interpret her story (Bublitz, 2014) due to my own mistaken assumptions. The possible expectation that her gender transition would be relevant information to ensure coherence on the part of her audience renders Gretta's silence on the topic a noticeable and interesting one.

Gretta introduced her gender transition and the way she identifies her gender in the context of explaining her divorce:

Excerpt 6

I: Yeah, so what was your marriage like? You say it started out exciting

and then kind of fizzled...after a while...

G: Well the marriage itself was good. It was okay. And probably at this point in the conversation I should point out to you that I had a gender reassignment in uh, [year] which was...two years after the divorce. Um...and that was the reason for the divorce. Um, [my wife] didn't want to be a lesbian. And, I don't know why not. It's perfectly good.

By describing her surgery in the context of a relationship, she framed her gender confirmation surgery not so much as an event in and of itself, but as part of the larger storyline around a significant relationship. Gretta also used indirect or non-specific language to describe the effect of her surgery on her body and sexuality. For instance, when asked how her sex life had changed, she stated that "obviously it's a geographical change" and when describing her orgasms post-surgery she described with little detail a slow, building process "rather than fireworks and cannons going off." One might assume that speaking bluntly about sexual experiences and one's genitals is considered inappropriate in the context of conversation with a stranger and while we may interpret Gretta's imprecise language as abiding by social norms of conversation, we might also see her use of language as revealing that she does not see the specifics of her "geographical change" as central to the issue at hand. Throughout her narrative, she frames her sexual experiences

in the context of relationships and self-discovery, emphasizing interpersonal dynamics and her own individual development rather than the physical aspects of a transition.

In contrast to Alice's orienting clearly and definitively to the identity of a transgender woman, Gretta stated that she does not consider herself to be transgender while discussing her previous experience in a public position that had made her story a topic of local media:

Excerpt 7

G: ... my gender reassignment was blasted all over all the newspapers everywhere, I had nothing to hide anymore. There was no little secrets [...] I just figured everybody knew and everybody does. And everybody realizes and this, this you can quote this too, I do not consider myself transgendered.

I: Okay.

G: That was during the four and a half hours of surgery. That was when I was transitioning. I'm on the other side now. I'm not transitioning. I'm a designer model now. [laughs]

I: [laughs] It's good to know where you stand.

Gretta couched her rejection or denial of a transgender identity within a political narrative, thereby positioning her identity as a political statement. One could argue that the direct nature of her statement

as well as the lead in of “you can quote this too,” indicate that she expected that statement to be surprising and therefore, she delivered it bluntly, allowing time for me to respond afterward. My brief response of “okay” might be read as an interviewer’s punctuation, invitation to continue, or effort not to reveal any emotional reaction. However, I recall using it as a linguistic tool to confirm or validate an understanding of the importance of the statement. I expected, in the moment, that this statement was not only a rejection of a transgender identity, but also a claiming of an identity as a “true” woman that was important to Gretta’s self-expression.

Additionally, Gretta did not take up the role of expert or educator in quite the same way as Alice. She did not seem to be educating me about anything other than her own personal experience, although she did describe a lack of knowledge about transgender issues among healthcare providers:

Excerpt 8

G: But yeah, the acceptance is everywhere. The only time it gets, it gets a little difficult is when you have to go to the doctor and you know, I go to [medical provider] and every year it’s a different doctor so I have to educate another doctor, and “while you’re in there, check my prostate,” you know. I’ve had to argue with insurance companies that say, “well you’re a woman you can’t, you can’t, you can’t charge for this benefit.” Yes, I can. Trust me. So you know, ongoing education in

the medical field, but otherwise it’s fine.

I: Have you come up against very much un-acceptance? With the doctors you’ve seen, has educating been a good experience for you?

G: Um, I don’t mind them as long as they, I mean, you know, a lot of them are ignorant, but as long as they understand I am a customer, I pay your salary. The customer is always right, do it.

Although Gretta clearly educates the service providers she interacts with and displays expertise in advocating for her own needs, she also appears to downplay her role as an educator as a minor hassle of daily life, as opposed to a role she embraces or performs intentionally. Instead, she approached the topic from the positioning of a consumer, which is similar to the way she spoke of her surgery. While she did not describe specifics of her orgasms to the same degree as Alice, Gretta did say of her first orgasm after her surgery that, “it confirmed for me that paying for the best surgeon is a good idea.” By orienting to the role of a consumer, Gretta highlights her right to receive high-quality services, constructing surgery as a product with economic value. Therefore, medical professionals may require education in order to serve her medical needs properly, but so long as they offer quality care to consumers, she does not seem to have a high stake in altering their awareness or understanding of transgender health-related issues.

Discussion

A discursive analysis of these two interviews allows for a critical reading of the ways in which women make discursive choices to actively take control of their own narratives in regard to the experiences around gender transitions and identities (Willig, 2008). By recognizing points of disagreement within their stories, we can also interpret ways in which their positioning “involves construction and performance of a particular vantage point” (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2011, p. 17).

The participants placed their experiences differently within a broader discursive context; while Alice’s story placed her own transition within a common narrative, Gretta positions her transition in the context of her own personal development. These constructions give different meanings to gender transitions as a discursive object. On one hand, Alice’s transition was drawn out over three to four years and may be read as a key event in her life, a defining moment in a longer process that quelled confusion and offered feelings of “euphoria.” While Gretta’s transition was also drawn out over several years, she provided almost no detail about what those years entailed, choosing instead to focus on other aspects of her life thereby placing the transition off-center in her narrative. These constructions have implications for the positioning of each participant. Alice’s construction of a shared experience among a community of individuals allowed her to be an expert in the transition process who acts as educator or ambassador to others, while Gretta, in contrast, downplayed her performed role of

educator and instead demonstrated expertise in her personal experience through self-definition and self-advocacy.

Understanding how these participants do or do not take up the subject position of transgender woman and what they have to gain from that action also offers an explanation of why each might have presented their transition and identity in particular ways. Alice named her transgender identity in our very first contact, perhaps giving me the opportunity to decide if my research would include her experience. This may appear to be a valid question, given that a primary and communicated goal of the study was to identify how a participant’s gender impacted their experience of sexuality and one might expect that individuals perceived as men for a significant portion of their lives would experience the impact of their gender in very different ways than those perceived as women over the full course of their lives. Gretta’s relatively late revelation of her transition did not present me with the option of ruling out her experiences as relevant to the study at hand; her identity as a woman was understood to justify her inclusion. These divergent presentations may serve as a lesson in the importance of self-definition and a cautionary tale for researchers and practitioners, like myself, whose assumptions of cisgender status as a default may obscure their understanding of the full context of the lives of participants and clients.

Alice’s construction is likely a more commonly understood approach to TGNC narratives, considering that large studies often assess the age at which individuals “came out” or transitioned, suggesting that

transitions are a key life event in and of themselves (Witten, 2014). However, Gretta's story reminds us that not all individuals who undergo gender confirmation surgery will identify as TGNC and this distinction may also be reflected in research methods, such as surveys that assess an individual's current gender identity, their sex assigned at birth, and their current sex as a means of identifying individuals who do not use the label of "transgender" but have undergone a gender transition at some point (Cook-Daniels et al., 2014). However, by continuing to focus on coming out sequences as a key life event, researchers may maintain the idea that coming out and gender transitions are important life events within the broader context of a life narrative, which may not be true for all individuals. Future quantitative research may also assess variation in the importance of transitions by asking participants to rate the importance of life events on a scale or assigning the order of importance when key life events are assessed in survey form. These insights related to identity measurement or operationalization may also be useful for practitioners and administrators seeking to reflect gender identity in paperwork, such as intake forms and biopsychosocial assessments. Additionally, practitioners should take care to assess the importance of a transition in the life of clients without making assumptions about how and to what degree this experience might impact the client's service needs.

Finally, we can assess what each woman has to gain from the way they construct and utilize gender transitions,

subject positions, and broader discourses. Both women offer possible scripts for enacting resilience and resistance. Alice seems to find comfort in her place within a community, creating new possibilities for her sense of belonging. By emphasizing this group membership, she is able to place herself within a counter-culture in opposition to cisnormative influences. While Gretta's strategy of denying group membership may appear to be a negative adaptation or a sign of internalized stigma, her rejection of this identity might also be interpreted as a rejection of categorization or radical resistance that allows for more creative possibilities of self-definition outside of normative expectations (McClaren, 2002). Both of these possibilities suggest future directions for practice and research. Providing education to counter internalized stigma, particularly among older populations, is crucial to supporting an individual's ability to embrace a TGNC identity while supporting one's positive sense of self, which is protective for mental health-related outcomes and promotes social engagement in later life (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2014). Additionally, exploring possibilities for resisting categorization indicates a need for added theoretical and conceptual creativity in informing research on later life, including lessons from feminist and queer literature that can account for the political implications of identity politics (Fabbre, 2015) within a perspective that balances social constructionism with materialism.

Conclusion

Throughout this analysis, I was reminded of Smith and Watson's (2001) suggested question to inform analyses of life narratives: "What is at stake historically (in the larger society) in having this text accepted as a 'truthful' account of life?" (p. 173). In this case, it may be worth asking what is at stake in having Alice and Gretta's stories accepted as 'truthful' accounts of life? As a social worker and researcher, I see the potential of these stories to reveal truthful accounts of the wide variation in experiences of gender transitions and believe that these accounts have important implications for social and healthcare providers who work with TGNC older adults. Service providers would benefit from an awareness of how individuals who have undergone gender confirmation surgery may self-identify in different ways and by acknowledging the role of social construction in developing and maintaining relatively fluid versus essentialist notions of how gender is and can be experienced. Embracing fluidity and enhancing an individual's right to self-identification requires widespread educational efforts to ensure that diverse narratives of TGNC individuals are acknowledged in practice with older adults. These narratives also reveal the potential for creative, resistive, and resilient adaptations in how women participate in constructing their own realities, offering a welcome balance to the emphasis on health risks and disparities that often drives research around marginalized elders' experiences. ■

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More Than a Womb: Recognizing and Protecting 'Gestational Motherhood' in India's Commercial Surrogacy Industry

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Abstract

The advancements in reproductive medicine over the past thirty years have redefined what constitutes parenthood, and more specifically motherhood. These improvements have fostered a global market around reproductive labor, most notably that of commercial surrogacy. Considering a case study of commercial surrogacy in Kolkata, India, this paper presents research on the question of how reproductive technology is redefining motherhood, and more specifically how commercial surrogacy has given rise to the experience of 'gestational motherhood.'

Although there are numerous issues surrounding exploitation of surrogate mothers in India, this research will focus solely on the need to recognize and protect gestational motherhood and the emotional labor it involves. Rather than examining surrogate-client relations, this paper gives voice to Indian service-side actors to better understand their rationales and concerns related to reproductive labor. Moreover, this discussion employs a constructive approach, aiming to utilize service-side actors' perspectives to inform policy approaches that can support vulnerable surrogate mothers and safeguard their emotional labor.

Keywords: gender, reproductive labor, fertility medicine/technology, surrogacy, gestational motherhood, emotional labor

Introduction

Fertility technology has advanced significantly over the past three decades, expanding the boundaries around achieving parenthood. Since its advent in the 1980s, In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) has become a common solution for those struggling with conception. In IVF an egg is fertilized with sperm in a laboratory, and the resulting embryo is implanted in the biological or surrogate mother's

womb for gestation. IVF has engendered a global commercial surrogacy industry, where women in certain countries can essentially lease their womb to those struggling to conceive. Although these gestational surrogate mothers do not share genetic material with the fetus, they provide prenatal nurture required to give it life.

Through a case study of a fertility clinic in Kolkata, West Bengal, India, this paper explores the changing definition of motherhood as it is shaped by gestational

surrogacy. Fertility clinics across India provide surrogacy services to Indian citizens (“Surrogacy Regulation Bill,” 2017; Nair, 2015). Most often, impoverished women serve as gestational surrogates for wealthier clients in exchange for monetary compensation. Although multiple studies have illustrated surrogates’ ‘gestational motherhood’ and attachment to the fetus, Indian clinics and clients remain legally unaccountable when it comes to addressing emotional afflictions of reproductive labor; as such, surrogates are not afforded adequate socioemotional support for their labor. Surrogates are bound to a financial contract, which reduces their emotional labor to a transactional exchange.

This research highlights the growing need to understand how advancements in reproductive medicine are redefining motherhood. Centered on narratives of surrogate mothers, recruiters, and clinicians, the analysis argues to recognize surrogates’ gestational motherhood. Moreover, by suggesting approaches to protective policies for surrogates, this research begins to address the issue of contested or ‘lost’ motherhood in reproductive labor.

Why India?

Focusing on India allows insight into a country that struggles with its position in the commercial surrogacy industry, which it legalized in 2002. Once poised as the global leader in providing surrogacy services to couples worldwide, in October 2015 India limited surrogacy services to heterosexual, married Indian couples; the currently pending Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) Bill proposes to curtail services further, prohibiting monetary compensation for

surrogates in addition to restricting who can provide and receive surrogacy services (“Surrogacy Regulation Bill,” 2017; Nair, 2015). Several politicians and scholars have criticized this proposed bill because it compromises surrogates’ agency to partake in wage labor and endangers their wellbeing without binding the exchange to a legal contract. Sharmila Rudrappa, a leading researcher on India’s surrogacy industry, critiques this bill, stating “This new bill will lead to far deeper exploitation of indigent women who are now expected to labor for free.” Her article emphasizes problematic emotional labor, wherein women are expected to labor selflessly rather than as wage workers. Rudrappa’s perspective highlights the importance of re-centering women’s agency in their labor, calling on India to better regulate the commercial surrogacy industry rather than ban women’s choice to perform reproductive labor (Rudrappa, 2016). Although India’s surrogacy laws are yet to be finalized, the industry is estimated to be worth US\$2 billion with thousands of clinics operating nationwide (“India Unveils Plans,” 2016; DasGupta et al., 2014, p.ix-x). Noting India’s developing surrogacy legislation, this paper presents insights from service-side actors that can inform protective policy for gestational mothers.

Additionally, considering female sexuality and motherhood customs, India represents a traditionally bound society that has fostered a thriving non-traditional reproductive industry. India’s successful surrogacy industry is largely due to the abundance of willing surrogate mothers, as the country is home to one-third of the world’s poor, with 21.2% of its population living below the US\$1.90-a-day poverty line (“Poverty & equity,”

2017). The majority of surrogates come from these impoverished communities, and the average income of US\$2,000-7,000 per surrogacy can be a life-changing catalyst for their upward mobility. In the clinic studied, surrogates made a base rate of US\$4,000 – earning approximately nine years of their daily wage in nine months. This financial allure is persuasive for poor women, rendering surrogates easily exploitable. However, unlike other research, this paper will not claim that commodifying one's womb is inherently exploitative, nor argue for India to ban commercial surrogacy. Rather, recognizing the reality that surrogacy is a viable opportunity for many impoverished Indian women, this paper argues to better empower and safeguard surrogate mothers.

Theoretical Framework

This paper builds underexplored scholarship that re-centers the surrogate and foremost recognizes the need to protect her wellbeing and agency to perform empowered reproductive labor. Accordingly, the theoretical framework grounds core issues regarding gestational surrogacy, and informs interventions that safeguard reproductive labor choices.

Non-Motherhood

Gestational surrogacy has transformed conventional reproduction, allowing women to achieve motherhood without needing to engage in intercourse or pregnancy. Today, rather than having two biological parents, a child can have up to five people involved its birth – egg and sperm donors, surrogate mother, and intended parents. Thus, as Amrita Pande (2011) discusses, motherhood is today

achievable through technology, where pregnancy is no longer a necessary component of motherhood and likewise biological connection does not entail parenthood (Pande, 2011, p.618-619). The rise of reproductive medical technology leads us to question what constitutes being a 'legitimate' mother, and whether legitimacy can be derived solely through gestational nurture.

Considering medical reproductive technology, Helena Ragone (2000) argues that motherhood is rooted in a series of social and cultural processes. Ragone discusses the centrality of the contract in creating biological motherhood and terminating social motherhood. She draws on the verdict from a California gestational surrogacy custody case that states, "She who intended to bring about the birth of a child that she intended to raise as her own – is the natural mother" (Ragone, 2000, p.60- 64). This verdict attaches the meaning of motherhood to child rearing and the intention to give it life. Here, it is neither the biological material nor gestation that create a mother, but rather the intention to become a mother to a particular child. Similar to Pande, Ragone illustrates the contested definitions of motherhood – that neither gestation nor biology are necessary or sufficient conditions to beget legitimate motherhood.

Class and Unequal Motherhood

Being that fertility treatments require substantial capital; one can question the ethicality of being able to purchase genetic motherhood through a process that delegitimizes the poorer gestational mother. Due to financial desperation, the Indian surrogate is easy to manipulate, as she prioritizes income

even though the process devalues her wellbeing. The vast socioeconomic difference between surrogate and client illuminates the class inequality that underpins India's commercial surrogacy industry. Along these lines, Rudrappa's (2015) *Discounted Life: The Price of Global Surrogacy in India* illustrates that although clients may be well-intentioned, the surrogacy exchange rests on a power imbalance in which the surrogate is neglected based on her socioeconomically subordinate position. Rudrappa notes:

Surrogacy agencies and infertility doctors are far more solicitous, attentive, caring, and alert towards client parents' physical and emotional needs than those of the surrogate mothers. The latter's mother-work in their own families, their rights to bodily integrity, to refuse or accept medical interventions, and their feelings about pregnancy and choice in childbirth are more or less disregarded. (Rudrappa, 2015, p.40)

Rudrappa describes the inadequate medical and emotional attention provided to impoverished surrogate mothers compared to wealthier clients. Surrogates' neglected medical experience also resonates in this paper, begging the need to better legitimize and protect gestational motherhood.

Ragone (2000), on the other hand, depicts class as a challenging but necessary tool gestational surrogates can use to emotionally distance themselves from the fetus (p.65-71). The surrogate is able to utilize the stark socioeconomic difference to rationally comprehend her lack of relation to the fetus. Interestingly, many global surrogacy programs look for

surrogates who do not racially represent clients, in order to deemphasize gestational bonding (Ragone, 2000, p.68, 71). Following Ragone's argument, the socioeconomic gap between clients and surrogates deemphasizes surrogate motherhood, while enhancing biological motherhood legitimacy. However, although a surrogate may recognize the biological detachment between herself and the fetus, she may still feel emotional attachment from the maternal gestational experience.

Women's Altruistic Labor

In *Circles of Care*, Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson (1990) analyze the trials and perils of care-work. Care-work or 'emotional labor' embodies an intense altruism that is the love for labor (Abel and Nelson, 1990, p.4). Abel and Nelson argue that the devaluation of women's work rests on a dichotomy between emotion and reason, where care-giving, being altruistic, is seen as unskilled work and is therefore underpaid. Being a surrogate represents care-work, as altruism and affection are important expectations of women's reproductive labor while they gestate a fetus (Abel and Nelson, 1990, p.13, 21). The surrogate is expected to act as a caring mother during pregnancy, but is denied recognition of motherhood to any extent. Clinicians entrust the surrogate with the maternal duty to nurture the fetus, but consistently reinforce her non-mother status. The emotional energy she commits to her care-work is immense, and immensely under-recognized as legitimate labor (Abel and Nelson, 1990, p.13).

Policy has largely ignored the needs of caregivers, focusing instead on the demands of recipients. Stereotypical

conceptions of gendered labor define care-work as a woman's inherent domestic responsibility, and thus see little need to adequately recognize such labor in the patriarchal labor economy (Abel and Nelson, 1990, p. 26, 35-36). This resonates in Rene Almeling's (2007) work on egg donors. Almeling portrays how clinic staff dissuade donors from negotiating higher compensation and advise women to construct donor profiles resembling altruistic values of wanting to help build families, reinforcing the 'nurturing mother' ideal (Almeling, 2007, p.329-331). Similarly, Pande (2011) stresses that the Indian surrogate is socialized to reinforce her role as a dutiful mother, rather than an empowered wage-earner, thus de-legitimizing her emotional labor (Pande, 2011, p.622). Empowered breadwinning is skewed into maintaining expectations of (unrecognized) maternal responsibility, where a surrogate is limited to being grateful for a financial opportunity, rather than negotiate contractual terms in her interest.

Alienating Motherhood

In his philosophical labor theory, Karl Marx (1978) articulates the despair of worker alienation. As the worker continues to produce, she eventually exists solely as a commodified means of production for an external force, losing a sense of her very self:

"The worker becomes an even cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. [...]. The alienation of the worker in his project means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him [...]; it means that the

life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien. [...] the worker's activity is not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self. (Marx, 1978, p.71-74)"

Donna Dickenson (2001) applies Marx's theory of worker alienation to surrogate mothers' emotional labor. With biotechnological developments "women are alienated from control over both the conditions of their labor – forced to accept the 'gift relationship' – and from any control over the profits resulting from it (Dickenson, 2001, p.213)." The surrogate provides a motherhood service, where she is valued solely as a womb, yet forgoes any recognition of legitimate motherhood. She is made to detach her womb from her personhood, as her reproductive ability is controlled for commercial production.

Noting issues of imposed altruism and alienation, reproductive labor discourses should re-center the surrogate's agency and wellbeing, legitimizing her meaningful maternal contributions. Accordingly, Catherine Waldby and Melinda Cooper (2008) stress that reproductive economies should be understood as clinical labor. They state, "The assumption of passivity seems to be a particular danger when analyzing women's bodily work," calling on markets to empower women laboring in the fertility industry as workers, not romanticized givers (Cooper and Waldby, 2008, p.66-67). Similarly, Dickenson (2017) problematizes the notion 'Vanishing Ladies,' where women are not considered active stakeholders in practices surrounding their reproductive labor, relegated to the sidelines while their

reproductive capacities become the object of debate (Dickenson, 2017, p.176, 178). These researchers illustrate the need to empower women's voices to safeguard their interests in the fertility industry.

Constructive Interventions

Although substantial literature addresses the hardship low-income surrogate mothers experience, there is little that informs interventions to protect willing gestational surrogates. This paper explores foundations for such interventions and urges further research into solutions that mitigate exploitation while supporting women's agency to partake in commercial reproductive labor.

In her dissertation on egg donation in the U.S.A.¹, Janette Catron (2014) discusses issues surrounding professionalism and ethicality:

Without any sort of regulation, there were no controls or standards for recruiting, screening, or educating donors. Since the internet provided access to a vast pool of potential egg donors, unscrupulous individuals could suddenly and with ease recruit women as donors, fail to educate them, and pay them vast sums of money [...]. (Catron, 2014, p.323)

Catron highlights the need to regulate the reproductive workers' recruitment and education process. She draws on SEEDS (Society for Ethics in Egg Donation and Surrogacy), which recommends developing standardized, professional systems that ensure women

are not coerced into reproductive labor and are adequately educated on the medical risks in order to provide informed consent (Catron, 2014, p.343, 345, 352). Applied to India, perhaps professionalizing the recruiter role and obligating staff to support and educate the surrogate would better safeguard reproductive labor.

Further, surrogate mothers require comprehensive health support. Research suggests that surrogates experience notable fear and trauma from feeling coerced to deny attachment to the fetus, managing stigma, being apprehensive about health issues post-surrogacy, and general pregnancy-related stressors (Eskandari et al., 2014, p.474-476). Interestingly, surrogates' emotional trauma is typically not related to separating with the child post-delivery, but rather coping with the complexity of gestating a fetus that they have no ownership over (Golombok, 2015, 130-135). Prior studies detail the need to provide surrogates with pre-pregnancy, pregnancy, and post-natal counseling support; however, they are yet to definitively establish the efficacy of such counseling, perhaps indicating that more longitudinal research is required to understand surrogates' mental health needs and inform industry best practices (Burrell and O'Conner, 2013, p. 116-119; Eskandari, 2014, p.476-478).

Methodology

The analysis below is based on in-depth interviews with surrogate mothers, recruiters, and clinicians at a prominent

¹ As of 2018, egg donation remains legally unregulated in the U.S.A.

fertility clinic in Kolkata. I conducted twenty semi-structured interviews in Bengali: seven with surrogates (women impregnated with clients' embryos), five with recruiters (women who connect surrogates with fertility clinics), and eight with clinicians (those who medically facilitate the surrogacy). Focusing on a single clinic allowed me to conduct a close examination within a tight-knit network; however, this also entails that procedural policies are unique to this particular clinic and Kolkata's social landscape. Nevertheless, the analysis of gestational motherhood and how to protect it can be applied more generally to India's commercial surrogacy industry.

Findings and Analysis

At Bright Futures², fertility treatment begins with a consultation to determine clients' needs. If surrogacy is chosen, the IVF Coordinators escalate the clients' requirements to recruiters who find a suitable surrogate mother, on average, in less than two weeks. After completing health screenings and contract agreements, the clinicians begin medical treatments to prepare the surrogate and client for the embryo transfer. Once the surrogate is pregnant, Bright Futures has completed its contractual responsibility. When the time comes an Obstetrician Gynecologist, not necessarily associated with the clinic, will perform a caesarian section³ to deliver the child. The clinic's recruiters often remain involved as a liaison and support system for the surrogate, and Bright Futures pays the surrogate upon delivery. As such, the clinic functions as a business with a well-

defined system for handling surrogacy requests and completing its main objective: to deliver babies for clients.

While the clinic is client-centric in providing surrogacy services, it is equally if not more important to address the needs of the surrogate, who is the bedrock of this industry. A major concern researchers and policymakers have pointed to is the emotional trauma – a sense of lost motherhood – a surrogate mother faces while carrying a fetus that is not hers (Eskandari et al., 2014, p.474-476). Not surprisingly, surrogates and clinicians are at odds when it comes to the legitimacy of gestational motherhood and emotional attachment between surrogate and fetus. However, recognizing gestational motherhood is crucial to developing protective policy that supports women throughout their experience as surrogates.

Denying the Basis of Surrogate Motherhood

The fertility clinicians and staff systematically deny gestational motherhood, even in its most basic form of emotional attachment to the fetus. They emphasize the financial aspect of the surrogate's role, claiming that she is only interested in the money. When questioned about the possible emotional trauma a surrogate might face, Ms. Ambika, an IVF Coordinator, was adamant in pointing out that the surrogate did not develop any attachment to the fetus:

No, no, no, no [...] (emotional attachment) doesn't happen. (The surrogate) already has two or three children of her own. She just wants

² All names are fictionalized to protect privacy

³ At this clinic, standard protocol required that all surrogates deliver through caesarian sections

this child to be ok, so she can give it to its parents and get her money. [...] There is no emotional stress. This is a business for her. (Ambika Interview, 2015)

Ambika's response represents that of almost all clinicians interviewed. According to clinicians, the surrogate only sees a financial transaction, where emotional attachment is not a factor worth consideration. This blatant denial of surrogate motherhood worked as a strategy to evade the burdensome concerns that perhaps gestational surrogacy did lead to deep emotional stresses. It seemed as though the clinicians' insistent dismissal of surrogate motherhood was a tool to avoid the very idea that it may be real.

Bright Futures also controls interactions between the surrogate and child to prevent potential for attachment. Among several strategies to decrease maternal affection, the surrogates are not allowed to deliver the babies naturally. This is partly due to the risks associated with natural births, and also because the surrogate mothers should not experience the afflictions of maternal labor. Chandrika, a recruiter who has also been a surrogate, states, "Our own children are made with our blood. Giving birth to them feels natural. These babies are not ours. [...] That's why they don't let us push them out (Chandrika Interview, 2015)." In addition, Bright Futures does not recruit surrogates who do not have biological children, fearing that the woman may become attached to her first pregnancy (Sayomita and Pushpita Interview, 2015). Furthermore, the surrogate is not permitted to see the child unless the client contacts her to do so.

Throughout the surrogacy process, even during initial recruitment, the recruiters and IVF Coordinators underscore to a surrogate that this is not her child. The clinic takes these precautions to emphasize detachment between surrogate and fetus. However, by instilling these preventative strategies, Bright Futures inadvertently illustrates the legitimate bonds of gestational motherhood as an unspoken concern. Even though clinicians do not admit that surrogates experience maternal affection, their efforts to prevent surrogate-fetus attachment reveal that they are wary of a sense of gestational motherhood.

Recruiters play a pivotal role as key intermediaries between surrogates, the clinic, and surrogates' communities. Chandrika has been a recruiter for ten years and has also served as a surrogate. Her account exemplifies the clinic's simultaneous denial and acknowledgment of surrogate motherhood. As a clinic representative, Chandrika emphasizes the lack of gestational motherhood; however, when discussing her personal experience with surrogacy, Chandrika portrays a very different image of maternal care:

There is no sadness or emotion attached to this baby. We think of it like we are doing a job and eight months later we will give this baby up, take our money, and we're done. I tell all the surrogates from the start that this is not their baby, they are simply responsible for giving birth to it. [...] We don't get to see the babies. But my client had shown me mine. My girl is now four years old.

She calls me aunty.⁴ I will never tell her that I carried her, but the clients still keep a relationship with me. (Chandrika Interview, 2015)

Recruiter Chandrika projects Bright Futures' narrative requiring her to deny gestational motherhood. However, when she reflects on her personal experience as a surrogate, her attitude shifts. She refers to the child as 'my girl,' and fondly recounts experiences with her clients. Chandrika continued to emphasize how fortunate she was to have clients that allowed her to maintain a relationship with 'her girl.' She discusses exchanging presents and feeling like she was a significant part of the girl's life. Although recruiter Chandrika asserts that there is no emotional bond between surrogate and child, the surrogate Chandrika is grateful to continue a relationship with 'her girl' and feel a sense of legitimized partial motherhood in being able to maintain these emotional ties.

The clinic purports a dual narrative of surrogate motherhood. On one hand Bright Futures' representatives are almost robotically trained to negate gestational motherhood, while on the other they implement mechanisms that seek to diminish surrogates' maternal bonds and may even sympathize with the surrogate's sense of motherhood. These competing notions illustrate that the emotional hardship a surrogate mother undergoes while navigating an intimate relationship with a fetus that is not biologically hers is significant and worth addressing.

The Medical Wall

Clinicians are very clear in underscoring that they only deal with the practical medical aspects of surrogacy fertility treatment. Clinicians also denied responsibility of having to counsel surrogates on medical procedures involved in their impregnation, instead directing surrogates to recruiters or IVF Coordinators. In effect, the clinicians willingly erect a 'medical wall' around their scope of responsibilities, restricting their availability to the surrogate on a personal level. This medical wall prevents surrogates from receiving adequate clinical support, highlighting a sense of socioemotional disengagement between the clinician and surrogate.

Dr. Marwa, Bright Futures' Principal Director, explains that a medical wall ensures there is no opportunity for a sympathetic or emotional involvement with the surrogate, as this could impede the standardization of the surrogacy contract:

I only have a medical relationship with the surrogates. [...] Most surrogates are interested in whether we can get them some more money, over and above the contract. They will put up stories about how they are in hard times, how their husbands owe money. But unfortunately, I have to be selfish and I put up a wall. My wall is absolutely medical. My questions are medical. My issues are medical. My assessments are medical. My judgment is medical. (Dr. Marwa Interview, 2015)

⁴ In India, children refer to adult women as 'aunty' out of respect. It does not indicate a familial bond.

The medical wall is a protective as well as a restrictive barrier. Clinicians use the wall to protect the boundaries of their job description, ensuring they fulfill their medical duties. However, in doing so, clinicians also intentionally restrict their job scope to avoid engaging in the emotional aspects of reproductive medicine, wherein lies the issue of neglecting gestational motherhood.

At Once A Mother and Non-Mother

Recruiters present the most eye-opening narratives on the complexity of gestational motherhood because they represent the clinic's position and also sympathize with surrogate mothers. As a mediator between clinic and surrogate, recruiters must find a language with which they can both complete their assignment of identifying reliable surrogates, as well as emotionally support the surrogates. As such, the recruiter completes a challenging job, where she must balance simultaneously denying and acknowledging surrogate motherhood.

When representing Bright Futures, the recruiters instruct the surrogate on how to nurture the fetus in her womb, while maintaining an emotional distance from it. They over-emphasize the financial transaction, reminding the surrogate that this compensation is her motivation and the exchange of the child is her professional responsibility. Recruiter Lakshmi represents a common approach for counseling surrogates:

This is how I explain to the women who want to be surrogates: 'imagine I am childless, but you are able to have babies [...]. All I am asking you to do is carry my baby for nine months. [...] Now, you have to think this baby is yours. In the

sense, you have to care for this baby like it is your own. However, you must never actually believe that this baby is yours, because it is mine. Think that you have taken surrogacy as a job, and you have to complete the job. Once you complete the job and give me my child, you will get the money. (Lakshmi Interview, 2015)

Lakshmi denies surrogates the basis of legitimate motherhood, which she reserves for the client who has initiated a financial transaction and who intends to raise the child; yet, she underscores the importance of the surrogate's maternal nurturing during pregnancy – perhaps allowing a parameter of prenatal, gestational motherhood based on the surrogate's intensive emotional labor. Additionally, like most recruiters, Lakshmi consistently reminds the surrogate that she has taken a financially compensated job, reaffirming her responsibility to the client and clinic.

However, when recruiters are not acting in official capacity, they are an immense support for the surrogate, as a confidante and guide through the medical process. Being from a similar socioeconomic background and often having worked as surrogates themselves, recruiters can sympathize with surrogates' challenge to reconcile gestational motherhood. Naina, a recruiter with six years' experience, had also attempted to be a surrogate once. Unfortunately, she suffered a concussion resulting in miscarriage, after which she decided not to re-attempt surrogacy. As a seasoned recruiter and surrogate, even for a short duration, Naina discusses the intense reality of carrying another's child:

Of course, the women are sad when they have to give the child up. Even though they know that this child is not theirs, it has lived in their womb for nine months. They can feel the baby move around, they know that it is living inside them. [...] The child is moving, kicking, feeling uncomfortable, and the surrogate mother, like a mother, feels all of this too. These nine months she has held the child in her womb, and after that when she is not allowed to see it after delivery this is extremely upsetting. [...] This sadness they usually discuss with us later. Many wish they could have seen the child, seen what it looks like. They feel very sad. They wish in some way they could have kept the child, even though they know it's not theirs. A lot of (surrogates) cry after the delivery. (Naina Interview, 2015)

As seen in Naina's account, although recruiters know the surrogate isn't the fetus' biological mother, they recognize the emotional hardship and loss (of motherhood) surrogates face. Recruiters' accounts illustrate that it is unrealistic to ask a woman to totally detach from a fetus in her womb, legitimizing the surrogate's sentiment of gestational motherhood. Despite biological difference, surrogates' crucial maternal contribution and emotional labor should be recognized.

Finding Motherhood as a Surrogate Mother

Surrogate mothers must learn to negotiate their place as a valuable gestational carrier, but not a long-term mothering figure. Aditi Das, currently pregnant with her second surrogacy fetus, struggles to navigate gestational

motherhood. Aditi considers her first surrogacy child to be an extension of her kin, and in remaining in contact with her clients she fulfills her duty as a partial and distant mother:

I asked (the client) for some money so that I could go to the temple and pray for the child that I carried and my children too. [...] This is a ritual that mothers do for their children. I know that this is not my child. I know (the embryo) was theirs, but still. The womb was mine, wasn't it? I carried her. Just like I love my children, I know that in some way that child is a part of me too. [...] I will never say that child is mine. I will never try to be like that to her. But I will show my love from above. I will do my part in my own way. (Aditi Interview, 2015)

Like so many others, Aditi feels a definite sense of love and motherhood. Aside from the financial transaction of being a 'rented womb,' most surrogates feel that they deserve the respect that comes with being a gestational mother. In efforts to mitigate their detachment and denied motherhood, surrogates describe various approaches to feeling acknowledged for their maternal contributions. Some, like Aditi, complete rituals for the child and 'show love from above,' while others simply want to maintain a relationship with their clients.

Surrogate mothers would not claim the child they delivered to be their own. They understand that their motherhood is restricted to the gestational experience. Still, the surrogate being involved in the child's life is left to the client's discretion. Thus, surrogates seek, often to no avail, to reconcile their maternal affections within a transaction that has repeatedly denied

them recognition of forming legitimate attachments. Although the financial transaction may seek to only compensate the woman for her womb, the surrogate mother desires recognition for her entire emotional being.

Protecting Surrogate Motherhood

Although there are several issues surrounding commercial surrogacy, this paper focused on recognizing gestational motherhood; the following discussion on protective policy will also center on approaches to support surrogate mothers in negotiating the boundaries of their motherhood. Most importantly, these recommendations give voice to surrogate mothers, recruiters, and clinicians, who are integral to the surrogacy process. Surrogacy as an exchange can be a mutually beneficial and empowering experience. A client receives the child they have longed for, and a surrogate can transform her life with a sizeable income. However, crucial to this exchange is the need to ensure that the industry has enforceable laws to protect vulnerable surrogate mothers.

Although these suggestions are based on a single fertility clinic, the overarching principles can be applied generally to national legislation. Indian parliament is currently considering the 2016 ART Bill, which seeks to eliminate monetary remuneration for surrogates ("Surrogacy Regulation Bill," 2017; Nair, 2015). The call to de-commercialize surrogacy is based on the notion that 'renting wombs' is inherently exploitative of women. However, many politicians, activists, surrogates, and clinicians throughout India, including some at Bright Futures, have argued otherwise,

calling for more regulations to safeguard the commercial industry rather than a ban ("India Unveils Plans," 2016; Rudrappa, 2016). Centralizing reproductive workers' agency in fertility discourses, this research agrees that protecting surrogates' interests can foster a safe, empowering, and sustainable industry.

Policy should recognize gestational motherhood to the extent that surrogate mothers do experience significant emotional attachment with the fetus and require support to overcome any emotional trauma. In order to legitimize and adequately address these challenges, protective policy should: (i) create a formal industry around surrogacy and professionalize all workers and (ii) establish comprehensive, longer-term health support for surrogate mothers.

Professionalizing the Industry and its Workers

Although Bright Futures functions well, there are gaps that put the surrogate at risk. In particular, the crucial position of the recruiter as an intermediary is largely underestimated. Recruiters are not only responsible for bringing surrogates to the clinic but are also the initial person who explains surrogacy to potential candidates. Although IVF Coordinators are trained to counsel women about the surrogacy process, recruiters typically fulfill this responsibility. Sharing the same socioeconomic background, recruiters also act as the surrogate's main support system for understanding their gestational motherhood.

Considering the recruiter's impact, they should be professionally trained on surrogacy medical procedures and counseling strategies – an intervention also presented in Catron's (2015)

discussion on regulating the U.S. egg donation industry. Recruiters need a more thorough understanding of the challenges and emotional trauma surrogates can face, and how best to address such issues. Clinics could require recruiters to attend accredited workshops to learn the technicalities of ART, complexities of gestational motherhood, and counseling techniques surrounding related trauma (Eskandari et al., 2014, p.474-478). Additionally, clinics should provide recruiters with a basic script to explain surrogacy to candidates, focusing on how the fetus is not related to the gestational carrier, and potential risks such as miscarriage or emotional trauma. Formalizing the recruiter's job would enhance her capability as an intermediary, empowering her with tools to assuage surrogates' challenges.

Even after professionalization it remains that recruiters are not medical experts. Thus, clinicians must take down their 'medical wall' and reinforce the information recruiters convey, ensuring accuracy in surrogates' understanding of the medical procedures and associated risks. The surrogate is eager to perform reproductive labor because of financial desperation and vulnerable due to lack of education. To best protect these women, clinicians and recruiters must work cooperatively to recognize and fully support the hardships of surrogates' emotional labor. Accordingly, ethical legislation should require clinics to provide emotional counseling throughout the surrogacy process, and ascertain that surrogates thoroughly understand the medical processes and risks, ensuring she is aware of what her consent entails.

A Healthy Surrogate, A Healthy Practice

Legitimizing a surrogate's gestational motherhood is integral to paving the way for mental health support that addresses the hardship of reproductive labor. Such counseling would help surrogates navigate emotional trauma and define the parameters of gestational motherhood (Eskandari et al., 2014, p.474-478). Accordingly, clinics and clients must be contractually required to provide the surrogate longer-term health support. Although the surrogate mother's role as a gestational carrier ends at delivery, her associated health concerns can persist after she has given birth (Burrell and O'Conner, 2013, p. 116-119).

Although there are some medical protections in place for the surrogate, these are not expansive or accessible enough. For instance, at Bright Futures clients purchase basic health insurance for surrogates, lasting a year post-delivery. However, the clinic does not monitor whether the surrogate accesses this insurance – indeed, none of the surrogates interviewed were aware of this entitlement. Clinicians also described maintaining a strictly medical relationship with surrogates. They absolved themselves of responsibility to provide non-procedural support, even if a surrogate was struggling emotionally as a result of the procedure. A further ethical concern was that Bright Futures, the central facilitator of the surrogacy, contractually disentangled itself after impregnating the surrogate. A fertility clinic must remain liable throughout the surrogacy process, which does not end at impregnation.

Currently, fertility practitioners are not required to support a surrogate

through pregnancy-related psychological or emotional issues. Clinicians adamantly emphasized that surrogates do not experience trauma; however, recruiters and surrogates painted a very different emotional aftermath. Echoing prior research, the surrogates interviewed also struggled with detachment and denied motherhood; even understanding the fetus was not theirs, the attachment from gestational motherhood was undeniable, yet unrecognized (Eskandari et al., 2014, p.474-476). Policy should require that clinics and clients provide surrogates regular group and/or individual counseling to cope with emotional trauma, during and in the year post-pregnancy (Burrell and O'Conner, 2013, p. 116-119).

By establishing a supportive surrogacy environment, the clinic will ground a sustainable practice while encouraging women to perform as surrogates. Moreover, providing counseling would enable surrogates to form a mutually supportive community. Recognizing and helping ameliorate surrogates' sense of 'lost motherhood' changes surrogacy from a plight that women conceal and endure alone to a legitimate sentiment that deserves care.

Conclusion

Although commercial surrogacy can empower impoverished women, as it stands the potential for exploiting surrogates impedes sustainability. While the industry becomes over-commercialized, surrogate mothers bear the brunt of lax regulations that do not consider their wellbeing. Accordingly, sustaining the surrogacy industry requires protective policies for surrogate mothers that recognizes their gestational

motherhood and legitimizes their emotional labor. As fertility technology redefines parenthood, it is crucial that each role in the surrogacy process be given due credit. For surrogates, this involves acknowledging and helping navigate gestational motherhood.

Commercial surrogacy in India has significant potential to transform the country's medical economy. Surrogate motherhood is one of few professions completely restricted to women. Similarly, being a recruiter is also a feminized position, as women can sympathize on matters of pregnancy and motherhood. Commercial surrogacy can position marginalized women as breadwinners for their families, perhaps providing greater gender empowerment in the workforce through a unique and revolutionizing approach. Since India's commercial surrogacy legislation is still underway, policymakers have an opportunity to mold the industry into one that is both ethical and economically successful. By informing policy that safeguards gestational motherhood rather than bans it, further research can strengthen reproductive workers' agency, prioritize their health, and promote a healthy, functional ART industry. Legislation that foremost protects surrogate mothers, as both the most vulnerable and crucial actors in the industry, will allow India to harness the benefits of reproductive medicine to mutually empower the surrogate, client, and nation. ■

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