

RIGHT TO CHOOSE

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Abstract: There is a constant dilemma when it comes to the career of women. A working woman is questioned constantly about where she sees herself once she settles down. This paper will try to focus on the statement that the real empowerment of women can be achieved only when they are provided with the freedom to make their own choice.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Choice, Professional Life.

Introduction: There is a constant dilemma when it comes to the career of women. A working woman is questioned constantly about where she sees herself once she settles down. The cup of frustration is now overflowing and it can be seen, as more and more women are taking to social media to shun these questions. There is an overload of qualifications, expectations, and choices for the modern women, which leads to the development of the female identity.

The notion of *choice* places a great deal of responsibility on the individual. This seems rational, because everybody ultimately makes their own decisions. Moreover, there seems to be always options available, if one has enough patience and courage to see or find them. It could be possible to break down the unwritten rules of society and the norms set for different gender roles. Happiness can be created through one's own choices and not by leaning on the comfort, protection, or social power of others.

This paper tries to focus on the statement that the real empowerment of women can be achieved only when they are provided with the freedom to make their own choice. The right to choose makes a woman confident and more empowered, they should be free to make choices in any aspect whether its choosing a profession, marrying someone or being a singleton all her life, choosing motherhood or not, the choice should be hers.

Highlighting the impossibility and undesirability of being a Superwoman, Genz observes that "in attempt to juggle job and family, women jeopardize their feminine appeal and sign up to an exhausting existence filled with pain and guilt" (55-56). Life has never been easy for women. Having the right to choose and in using this right in their lives freely, are two different things. Although feminism purports to have given women the so called equality, the actual scenario is quite different. Those women, who opt for a professional life, always receive criticism. Career oriented women are considered to be selfish, and are seen as damaging to the 'natural' order of women staying at home and raising children, taking care of family while the men went out to work. Irrespective of the fact whether a woman has a family or not, or is

single, Genz observes that working women focusing on their careers, have suffered condemnation, and are viewed as "a figure of evil and neurotic psychopath ...She is the epitome of Otherness and insanity, standing in direct antithesis to the virtuous housewife and threatening the traditional family unit" (105). It was, thus, acceptable and expected for men to go out to work and maintain their role as the family breadwinner, women's priorities had to lie with their home and family. Women, who gave equal or much importance to their career, were seen as a threat to the natural order of the society. Walter comments, "Working women were vilified, made into monsters that destroyed their children and caused their husbands to run off with other women, and summarily punished for their deviant ways" (138-39). As Whelehan explains further:

Women with careers would continue to be seen as oddities, and by the late 1980s they were often portrayed as selfishly putting their own needs before that of their family. There would be no straightforward way for women to gain access to the top of their professions without the perception that their success had cost them dear in personal terms. (141)

Women have faced so many problems to find a place for themselves in this male oriented society. They have failed many times but have never stopped their efforts to achieve their rights. Still today, career aspirations and professional success are one of the main priorities for women all over the world. As Greer says, "many women still need a room of their own and the only way to find it, may be outside their own homes" (361). One major problem for women, then, is how to be successful in a male-oriented world. According to Greer some women "who have arrived, at power in a man's world has done so by adopting masculine methods" (130). That is, some women decided that the best way to get along with men is to act like men, referring to de Beauvoir exploration of psychoanalytic theory which stated that "man is defined as a human being and woman as a female- whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male" (83). Now discussing about exercising the right to choose on whether to be single or not? Singleton is seen as the epitome of the ideal modern woman who "is unwilling

to compromise on her job and relationship ambitions and despite discouraging setbacks, perseveres in her attempt to realize her utopian project” (Genz 108). Imelda Whelehan argues that, “being single is something that can be enjoyed and enthusiastically preserved” (24). Singletons find themselves content in their single lives by the end of the novel and this situation of enjoying singleton life can be compared to Maroula Joannou’s description of the single women as “someone whose lifestyle was to be sought after” (26) rather than the orthodox of the “mid thirty single woman desperate for a man” (Levenson 166). Being single is not seen as a problem rather it is seen as the power of women, as an identity which is to be enjoyed. Singleton gives them enough courage to understand their independence and to follow their dreams.

The choice of choosing motherhood or not, prominent contemporary motherhood theorist Andrea O’Reilly defines the “good mother” as “while, heterosexual, able-bodied, married and in a nuclear family... she is altruistic, patient, loving, selfless, devoted, nurturing, cheerful... good mothers put the

needs of their children before their own ... and are the primary care takers of their children... and, of course, mothers are not sexual!” (38). A “good mother” is often described as one who must be self sacrificing, with the child’s well being occupying her every thought. There are certain rules which society lays down for a “good mother”. Society holds the “good mother” accountable for her child’s success, the “good mother” seeks out parenting advice that will allow her to align herself with the gendered roles that society places on her.

Therefore choice can be made in anything. Every decision one makes for himself/herself makes them empowered, whether its choosing between public/private life, choosing marriage or choosing a life of a singleton, or choosing motherhood or not. Choice is an act of independence and its legitimacy should not always be measured against the standards that a society has set. The dignity, self-consciousness, and the intention with which the right to choose is exercised are as gratifying as the choice itself.

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