

Challenges of motherhood in the twenty-first century

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Abstract

Mother, the word itself is fortified with emotions like care, multitasking, responsibility, sensibility and sensitivity and when such emotions are supported with intelligence, education and employability it becomes empowered mothering. Today when we are over with the phase of radical feminism and they are provided equal workplace rights women have started feeling secured in moving out and reaches for their dream jobs where they are able to showcase their potential. Working women not only support the family in the financial stability and growth but also act as a strength pillar and role model for their children. Studies say women opt out of the workforce while others focus on getting ahead in their career sometimes at the expense of family relationships and personal well-being. However, some women have gone on to create unique solutions to integrate career and life by continuing to work and yet meet personal as well as family needs but doing so they face challenges. In meeting the office deadlines and fulfilling the expectations at the personal front somewhere she overlooks her physical and emotional requirements that lead her to poor health. This chapter will speak about the women struggle to find success in juggling their numerous work and family responsibilities.

Introduction:

Authors have the power to show how empowered mothering improves society, whether they utilize this opportunity or not is up to them. Andrea O'Reilly began using the term empowered mothering in the early 2000s to refer to the theory and practice of mothering that recognizes that women, children, and society at large, benefit when women live their lives as mothers from a position of agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy. Empowered mothering means that women do not follow gender roles that say women should remain in the home and take care of the family while the men go into the world and make an income. Empowered mothers show their daughters through words and example that women and men are equal and that the major key to becoming empowered is education. Earlier feminists argue that current ideals and expectations of motherhood are socially constructed as a patriarchal institution that demands all mothers be “good” mothers and that all mothers parent in very specific ways. In this construct, all mothers are expected to be the primary caregivers of children due to their supposed innate capacity to provide birth to a child. The paper throws light on some of the famous literary mothers those helped in keeping the foundation of empowered mothering and to discuss the challenges faced by others in today’s scenario.

Mothers in literature:

Literature that shows fulfilled people living their lives in a way that is not influenced by society’s rules improves society because it inspires people to ignore

stereotypes and just live their lives how they want to live them. An example of this is the film, *Antonia's Line* by Marleen Gorris. In the film, Antonia, the main character, never takes a husband even though she is proposed to and she is obviously the head of the house. Her family is large and includes people who are not related by blood. However, it shows how Antonia and her whole family live happy and fulfilling lives because they ignore the rules of society. They are good people and they all end up feeling satisfied with their lives. The same cannot be said for people who do follow society's stereotypes. The real reason empowered mothering improves society is because children and other members of society become more confident and do not feel they have to live up to anyone else's standards, they just become the best people they can be. History is full with the stories where mothers have shown gravity in expressions.

The most remarkable mother in literature is considered to be a woman who begged the king Solomon, King of Israel, who was known for his wisdom, to not cut her baby into two halves and give it to the other woman who was claiming to be the mother of that child. Her decision which was loaded with motherly compassion proved her the justified mother of the disputed child and King Solomon gives her the child. There are examples that show that motherhood is not only the biological relation, but an expression, an attitude. In Bertolt Brecht's play in a court scene, there was a case that has to decide the true mother of the disputed child, and wherein each woman has to pull one of the little boy's arms. The woman named Grusha, refuses to pull the child apart was judged the true mother although she was not the biological mother but a peasant girl who had rescued the baby during an insurrection when his mother fled without him.

Before we travel too far from literature's ancient roots, let us pause to acknowledge a pair of notorious mothers. Medea, in Euripides' play of the same name, skewers her two children because Jason, her husband, wants to marry to the other lady. Then there is brave mothers like Clytemnestra, who is infamous in Greek mythology. Aeschylus' play *Agamemnon* portrays her as outraged because her husband, Agamemnon, has sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia in hopes of stirring the gods to send a fair wind to his becalmed ships. So she slays her husband on his return from the Trojan War. Perhaps the most tortured mother in all literature is Sophie Zawistowska, whose life is forever frozen in time after the SS officer at Auschwitz demands her to keep one of her two children. The other one will have to go. And she has to decide which one she has to keep, indeed this is a difficult decision. Let us not forget Mrs. Bennet, the worried mom in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. She is graceless and small-minded—such a social embarrassment, indeed, that Mr. Darcy, rich admirer of her daughter Elizabeth, recoils from the idea of marrying the young woman. Counterbalancing Mrs. Bennet's social clumsiness is her love for her five daughters. She fears the life of humiliation and penury that awaits them if she cannot marry them off. She does what she must to find them husbands. That alone makes her a good mother.

Motherhood is not an easy job. Difficulties with childbirth are only the beginning. Focusing on your child can keep you sane, as we see in *Room*, by Emma Donoghue. Five-year-old Jack narrates the story of his life inside an 11-by-11-foot room. His mother has protected him from the horrible reality that she has been imprisoned by a very bad man for seven years in the room where Jack was born and is being raised. Ma is the best

mother imaginable at making a terrible situation normal thus an idol for her beloved son. She is portrayed as ideal a mom as a child could have.

Wonderful mothers abound in literature, under normal and not normal circumstances. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, tough Ma Joad brings her family through the trials they must face on the road from the Dust Bowl to California during the Great Depression. Gentle Marmee holds her family of little women together as their circumstances become straitened during the absence of their father during the Civil War. There are example of spirited mothers, the one like Sethe, in *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison, actually cuts her 2-year-old child's throat to protect her from slavery, a desperation born of her own motherless childhood and her experience of the horrors of slavery. This makes her a literally eerie mother, though one with an overwhelming need to protect her other children from the slavers.

Frannie Lancaster, in *The Fault in our Stars*, by John Green, has a teenage daughter named Hazel, expected to die of cancer. Frannie learns to stop hovering over Hazel and to let her go, so that she can live her own life. Crisp and curt Marilla Cuthbert, of *Anne of Green Gables*, by Lucy Maud Montgomery, never expected to be a mother. In their middle age, she and her brother, Matthew, ask for a boy orphan to help around their place on Prince Edward Island. When 11-year-old Anne shows up instead, Marilla intends to send her back. She reconsiders, having fallen under Anne's spell. The dedication of an old maid made her believed she knows more than an old bachelor. And this old maid turns out to know quite enough about how to wisely and lovingly bring up a child. The most reassuring and loving mother imaginable is the rabbit mom in *The Runaway Bunny*, by Margaret Wise Brown. The picture book, first published in 1942, features an adorable bunny who tells his mother that he wants to run away from her. His understanding mother counters all his fanciful escape plans with her own determination to keep him and told him that if he becomes a bird and fly away from her she will become a tree to which he can come home. Her creativity wears him out, and he decides to stay and be her little bunny.

Cultures and motherhood:

Cultures around the world have different expectations of what motherhood should be in there culture. In many parts of the world, mothers that are different from the cultures stereotyped expectations are looked upon negatively. In an article "The Content of Mother Stereotypes" written by Lawrence H. Ganong and Marilyn Coleman say, "In general, adults and children in nuclear families are viewed more favorably than adults and children in other family structures (divorced, remarried, never married), and voluntarily childless people are viewed differently than parents."

In western cultures, the perfect structure of motherhood is to be married to a husband and to dedicate their life to the nurturing of their children. In the article, they describe "... a motherhood hierarchy in which mothers in first marriages are placed at the apex (i.e., "most appropriate" mothers). According to DiLapi, North American culture defines the "most appropriate" mothers as heterosexual, stay-at-home mothers in first marriage, nuclear families." Mothers that do not fit these requirements are looked upon society negatively; such as not normal and unethical. Mothers who are divorced, single

parents, lesbian or gay are cultural stereotyped as not being an appropriate mother to raise their children. In addition, mothers that work in the work force are stereotyped as not spending their time to raise and develop their children and husband.

In Eastern cultures, like Asian cultures women devote their life and time to being a mother. The cultures of eastern worlds are strict on motherhood, even more than those in western cultures; women in these cultures are demanded to nurture and raise children without any outside distractions or activities. For thousands of years women have been prepared and told that the main job of women is to be a mother and nothing else. In this culture, any mother who does not devote every second of time to nurturing their young is viewed by society as a bad mother. The impact of culturally stereotyped motherhood across the world influences societies, for the most part, negatively. Among these cultures, any mother who breaks the cultures stereotype is discriminated against socially, marital, and overall unethical. The views of culture's expectations of motherhood on devotion, marital status, and relationships are not always correct, such as a mother who divorce from a controlling husband who conflicts with the well-being of the mother and their children. In these cases, this unorthodox motherhood (single mother) should fit the basics principles of motherhood, as she is creating the best situation for her children to succeed. The evaluation of motherhood, the marital status or family structure, should not assume a positive or negative influence by the mother.

The negative assumption of motherhood in cultures creates negative views among the members of society having a negative impact on society. In addition, the stereotype of motherhood brings to much responsibility on the backs of mothers in a family. Cultures demand that mothers be the primary responsibility of the development of the children, but this takes away from the need of the father figure in the family. In a nuclear family, balance between mother and father is key for a successful future of their children but if the father has to work to provide support(more than if both parents worked) for the family, the father figure diminishes from the family and the burden is applied to the mother. In many things in life there is no certain way or correct way to do something there are many, culturally stereotyped motherhood directs one correct way of motherhood that negative impacts those who do not fit those stereotypes.

Education and motherhood:

A mother is one of the largest influences in her child's life, and with that power comes great responsibility. Not only does the care and love she provides mold them into the adult they are destined to become, but her own education and financial success has great affect on their future. If she is well educated and has a successful career, her children will be more apt to have financial success in their lives. They will see their empowered mother, and look to her as a role model for their own life. However, if the mother is uneducated, holds a mediocre job that does not help provide sufficiently for the family, and is barely there to spend time with her children, she will raise children that will lead similar lives to her.

An uneducated mother provides an inadequate life for her children. First of all they will take precautions to have fewer children. The opposite is true for an uneducated mother, who has more children and is unable to devote her time and show love to each

individual child. These mothers are less likely to give their children proper vaccines for their health, and provide them with healthy meals that are nutritionally beneficial. An educated mother will definitely take care of nutritional value in the diet of their children meals. Healthy children with fulfilled nutritional needs are linked to their cognitive achievement and early school enrolment. A mother with a sufficient education will affect her family in a positive manner, more so than her husband. Not only does a mother's education improve the lives of her children, it will also improve her relationships with them. A mother who is educated, has a successful career, and is empowered is more likely to earn the respect of her children. This mother will have power over her children, and be able to control them in a positive manner. She will protect her children by providing suggestions and through her positive examples, she will lead her children to a better life. An un-empowered mother, who does not have control of her life, will raise her children to be reckless and view her without respect. They will not see her as a strong force in their lives, which will consequently lead them to respect her less, and not listen to the advice that she offers and disregard the discipline she tries to enforce. Children respect those who they believe are more empowered than they are, and when they view their mother in a negative light, they will not respect her in the way that she deserves, which will be harmful to their growth. Education is so important for men and women, but it is especially beneficial for the empowerment of women. With a proper education, a woman will become a better mother, and not only empower her life and improve her situation, she will empower her children and be a good role model for them.

Current Scenario:

According to the review of Suzane Ketler on the work of Martha McMohan in the book "Engendering Motherhood: Identity and Self-Transformation in Women's Lives," states that the concept of motherhood starts with two categories of how women come to be mothers in the first place. Ketler points out how women from a middle class family approach the idea of motherhood as a way to show that they are in the right relationship and are proud of what they have accomplished. The second point is that women from working class families decide to be a mother as a way to show that they are now adult women. It seems as though the approach to motherhood can immediately influence how the child's life will be affected.

Challenges:

It is been observed that multitasking or a woman with multiple role is reported with better health issues, as they enjoy motivational stimulation, self-esteem, disciplined life style, and energy burst rather than a woman with fewer jobs. However, multitasking has also lead women to lots of physical and mental health issues like depression, high stress levels and any more. Working mother is an establishment in herself she has to aim high to achieve success in professional front while she has to nurture her child and has to meet all his emotional demands to accomplish motherhood.

Stereotypical thinking:

Still in the society that stereotypical attitude prevails where men is looked upon as the head figure of the family. Study shows that at present, the stereotypical thinking of

the society is undergoing change and women are plying more independent roles. They are now considered as a strong part of the decision making body anywhere and hence their voices are being listened too. Empowerment and work are positively related. And women feel that their career give them self-esteem, confidence and they feel independent. Career plays a vital role in up bringing the status of the women in the society. Most of the working mother agrees that their career give them job satisfaction. Their presence is valued by the society as they are working. At present, people have started to accept the fact that with the little cooperation working mother cannot be stopped from going to offices and work just because of they have to balance work life, and the people are starting to look at this perspective in a more positive manner.

Career Aspiration:

The high powered business professional are the mothers who had put significant effort into her professional development and is good doing justice with her work. Such mothers become admirable figure to her children as a set a message that a strong, confident and successful woman can be an achiever and someone to be looked upon. According a study about forty percentage of the women possess above average Career Aspiration, whereas the percentage for low career aspiration is zero. This is directly influenced by literacy rate. When the women are educated their career aspiration also becomes high. Second important factor that influence the professional growth of women is the role played by family and community. Spouse support to a working mother is very important for her focus at work. If a woman is experiencing conflicts or unsatisfactory relationship with her spouse or the rest of her family members it directly affects her workplace behavior. Thus, it is important to have peaceful and supportive attitude from family members. Because of their busy schedule majority of the women feels that their children are neglected most of the time. Most of the respondents face problems in managing time between personal and professional matters and they don't have time for themselves. Then there is lot of socio-economic restrains. Most of the women feel that the moral values of the society is a big hurdle in their way. Even when the women are educated, most of the women choose their present career because of financial problem and a very less percentage of women seem to have the present career of their own interest.

Financial dependency:

Though women are working yet most of the families are headed by the husbands or father-in laws, which reflects the typical stereotypical mindset is still prevailing. Though they are earning still they don't have full control over their income. The data shows that maximum women have savings. As they are earning themselves then too they are not able to do much saving for herself. And in case if they have savings most of them don't have any assets in their name.

Time management:

Women are generally unable to give proper and quality time to households, kids and family. Child rearing problems are always faced by working women. Female workers who identified having difficulties balancing work and family indicated that they had too

many work and family responsibilities and sometimes they did not have time to accomplish everything effectively. To them, time management was the biggest challenge.

Guilt ride:

Majority of the women feel guilty that they are unable to give time to their family because of their work pressure. Half of the women are still confused whether they should choose one or both as there is great need for both. In overall, domestic help is available to the women sometimes only. Which implies though they are working still they have to do all the household work. Women feel that their husband and relatives shares their responsibility sometimes and most of the women are of the opinion that that their responsibility is never shared. It means their responsibility is shared sometimes only and not always. More than half of the working women never follow her schedule for themselves which eventually leads to their poor health and lifestyle diseases.

Suggestions:

Partners can be more sensitive to each other's priorities. Husbands can provide trust support to their wives by counter tradition and helping their wives perform daily tasks and take care of children. Stereotypical mindset should be change. Steps are needed to provide the women a sense of security. Additional research is also needed to compare the both men and women because experiences may be differ with regard to work and family balances and also helps to find out more consequences of work and family conflict. In order to attain in-depth understanding of one's work and family life, researchers has to study multiple perspectives such as job stress, quality of life, mental health and work demand. Strong policy statements are needed ensuring women's security. On the other hand child care facilities and child care leave for working women should be provided by every organization. Flexible timing and possibility to work from home, should be taken under consideration, this will give them the emotional strength as they will able to look after her children and thus, will able to focus on her professional targets. It will help women to aspire in their career. To avoid the family barriers, organization can also help working mothers by offering day care centers. Mothers faced several challenges to balances work and family. Both private and public sector has to reframe the policies in order to help the women to balance family and work life.

In a patriarchal society like India, even today when we talking of equality for women by all means still there exist a particular rule book for working mothers, and any step beyond it, people start maligning them. This actually happens because people have limited imagination for working mothers. Something that in against the traditional thinking, like going out for jobs, dressing up professionally, talking freely with male members etc., immediately they are branded as loose women. To counteract such psychology mothers must work to overcome the individual barriers and try to emerge as a more confident, self-esteemed person. She has to develop that strong trust in herself that whatever she is doing, her children will be benefited from having a strong career mother and that she is more than capable of handling all her responsibilities in work and life with great success.

Conclusion:

The word mother is often associated with commitments to work; family, household, and a social life appear hard to balance. The hard working mother of 21st century throws many reflections that teach us the upcoming generation some exceptional values. The thinking that still exists is whether women, who are crossing the four walls of their homes for jobs, are capable enough to compete with others, and at the same time appropriately balance between family and professional life. The mindset that only mothers should function as the emotional strength for their family should be changed. Even working mothers should raise their voice against burdens thrust on them.

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