

The Sociological Analysis of Women's Social Identity
A Qualitative Research in Hashjin City (Khalkhal)

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Abstract: *Identity and other issues related to it is one the most important matters in human's life. Identity is a complex and multi-dimensional issue; so studying it, considering its importance in different aspects of life, is rough. The main aim of this study is recognizing the effective factors on social identity as well as understanding the imagination and narration of women of themselves. With the use of qualitative method in this research we tried to explore and discover indices, concepts, factors and main compartments about women's identity in Hashjin city and utilizing grounded theory, we gathered the data from observations and performing qualitative in-depth interviews from 18 qualitative samples. The results show that women's understanding and imagination of themselves are generally religious and ethnic and the result of data analysis show that the core compartment of this study is submission. We can say that women have submission social identity and this sub missioning are more produced and reproduced through fatalism, determinism, beliefs, values and traditions.*

Keywords: *Social identity, submission, grounded theory.*

Introduction

Identity and other issues related to it is one the most important matters in human's life. Identity is a complex and multi-dimensional issue; so studying it, considering its importance in different aspects of life, is rough. Generally, the issue of identity in recent decades in sociological senses following the cultural debates, criticism of modern world, globalization and its reflections on identity is turning into a fundamental issue of modern ages.

Identity is the origin of meaning and experience for people or in simpler words identity organizes the meaning. Identity entails an obvious imagination of one's self or a conscious assumption of essence and individuality (Abdollahi & Hossien bar, 2002). There are different views surrounding the concept of identity. Most of them are common on identity having various factors and elements. Main dimension of identity consists of individual dimension (gender) and collective dimension (national, ethnic, familial, religious and racial) (Fakouhi, 2007). Individual identity refers more to difference and collective identity refers to homogeneity which is described with group membership. People in society find familial, religious, ethnic and national identity by joining a family, religion, ethnicity and nationality that each one of them builds up a part of collective identity.

Giddens describes identity as a matter which a person is aware of and consequently the continuity of his actions is not devolved to him so he should produce them continuously and day by day and in his reflecting and rethinking, he should protect and support them. Considering the importance of identity in life and people's social relations, it seems that this important matter has a significant difference between men and women (Giddens, 1998). This difference could be divided into two groups of countries. In developed countries the degree of difference of identity between men and women is lower than that of undeveloped and developing countries. Considering that Iran is a developing country, it seems that the amount of awareness of men and women of themselves is different. So if we consider the amount of development as an effective criterion, we could argue that men and women's identity in developed metropolises is different from that of small cities and villages. The results of empirical studies show that confronting gender clichés, having reflection, criticism and rethinking one's self and society, continuous amendments and more dialogues about one's self are less in women than men (Azizzadeh, 2008). Severity and febleness of this matter is different in modern societies and traditional societies.

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Considering the above-mentioned, Hashjin city falls in undeveloped regions and consequently is considered as a traditional society and women's imagination of themselves is different from men's. In fact women are affected by a patriarchal space and this matter is more severe in traditional societies and generally women are considered as the second sex. The structural changes through recent decades have changed the social roles and women's awareness. These changes were most in employment and education and we could argue that the resulting issue of this is the emerging distance between modern and traditional roles which results in the opposition of women's identity. On the other hand findings of Raf'at jah (2008) and Azizzadeh (2008) show that there exists a series of beliefs which entail the predominance of men versus women. The issue is that what factors has caused these thoughts and beliefs to exist in society?

Of all facts which reside in Iran society in general and in the sample society (this study) particularly which cause the emergence of identity issues among women consist of the following: the difference of emolument and assets, social inequalities regarding the accessibility of social assets, the existence of patriarchal culture and the spread of gender clichés and a kind of sexism in public culture which considers manly values over womanly values (Raf'at jah, 2008: 4). So the main questions which this study is trying to answer are: what is women's understanding and imagination of themselves (identity)? And what factors affect the women's social identity?

Generally, identity is one of human psychological needs and it is a necessity of social life as significant relationships of people with each other and society is not possible without it. So finding the women's identity and its educative and educational effects is obvious in the whole culture of society which declares its importance and necessity.

Research Goals

- Investigating and recognizing the imagination and narrations of Hashjin's women of themselves.
- Recognizing the dimensions and elements of women's social identity of Hashjin city and the effective factors on it.
- Recognizing and assigning strategies of Hashjin's women towards identity issue.

Research Literature

Theories of identity could be categorized in two modern and postmodern approaches. The modern approach consists of social psychology and sociology theories and the postmodern approach is generally affected by literature, linguistics and semantics which are recognized by discourse theory. The modern approach which contains sociological theories is more considered in this study and these theories are the theoretical framework of this research. According to this approach, the analysis of identity is more about filling the gap between individual and society, action and structure and a kind of agency and structure. The theorists in this field consider the processes of finding and creating identity in modern ages with regard to bilateral effects of individuals and social structures. Giddens and Jenkins are among these theorists which noticed the structural and cultural backgrounds in shaping and redefining the individual and collective identities and explained the inherent characteristics of contemporary ages (Giddens, 1998; Jenkins, 2002).

Generally, the sociological theories of social identity could be placed among functionalism, conflict and symbolic interaction schools of thought. Considering this important matter that most sociologists believe in component-like social identity, but their difference is that some believe that society is the producer of social identity and the production of societies' dominion on individual whether in a positivist form or an extortionist way, and others believe that social identity is the production of interaction between actor and society and in other words between agency and structure. Some theorists directly theorized in the social identity sphere like Tajfel and Giddens. 'many social identity theories deal with intra-group relations as they see themselves as a member or a class in comparison to other out of the group' (Tavassoli, 2009). In regard to component-like existence of social identity, Tony Yu et, al. in investigating national identity as a kind of social identity emphasize that 'national identity is a mind production of its owners which occurred in the process of socialization, they believe that national identity is a social construct which is reproduced, reconstructed and demolished and a nation as an identity is changing continuously' (Tony yu & Man kwan, 2008: 34-36). Durkheim is a functionalist sociologist who completely believes in social determinism and the domination of social institutions on the individual and argues that 'Humans take a human form only in social dimension and it is through society what they become human in a whole meaningful sense' (Coser, 1998: 198). Parsons believe that 'it is in a successful socialization process that norms and values are carved in actors' mind or becomes their conscience'. He also believes that in a four sub-system society 'economic, politic, cultural and social system function as reconciliation with

environment, reaching the goal, maintaining patterns and norms and integration respectively' and consequently he introduces himself as a cultural determinist (Ritzer, 2003: 136).

Tajfel (1971) is another theorist who based his social identity theory on group membership. In his opinion he believes that 'social identity consists of the people related to each other based on their status and power and the structure of this group relationship is important in shaping of identity' (Delphani, 2005: 52). In Tajfel's opinion is a part of that person's 'self-define' which is originated from his awareness of a social group. He believes that social identity is not constant and changes depending on group's intra-cooperation. Tajfel's social identity theory counts four processes in shaping the social identity: social classification, awareness of social identity, social comparison and social differentiation.

Social identity theories, altogether, know intra-group relations as a key in shaping identity. The main instruction of this theory is that identity results in recognizing and getting aware constructing components of 'self' through group membership and explains the behavior of people whom dominating norms of their reference group are defined. But if group membership is weak then group norms don't affect the behavior of group member (Reed & others, 2007: 274).

The theorists of conflicts school also believe in social determinism like functionalists. But they have a positivist view in this matter and they generally try to criticize the social domination on individuals but they don't believe that human beings are free from social structures.

Marx as an economic determinist believes economy as an infrastructure for other aspects of social life such as culture, art, policy and so on and states that 'the development of social, political and intellectual life is dominated by the material way of production, it's not human awareness that determines their existence but on contrary it is their social existence that determines their awareness' (Aaron, 2005: 171). He believes that human cannot reach his defining independent from material production system and identity as the main 'self-define' in human existence originates from his awareness and this awareness is permanently related and dependent on economic system.

As opposed to functionalist and Marxist theorists, the intellectuals of interactionism don't believe in social determinism and consider the relationship between individual and society as a dynamic process with permanent dialectics in which no one trumps others and human behavior and shaping the character also known as social identity is the production of individual and society relations. 'Generally, the interactionism view emphasizes on the dynamics of social interaction between individual and society and its consequences' (Tavassoli, 2000: 268). Guffman is another theorist who belongs to interactionism school and can be considered an heir of Mead because he introduced the approach of performing a role from individuals, but he doesn't believe in actors' 'self' belonging and recognizes it as a production of demonstrative interaction between the owner of the role and the audience. In this Guffman presentation, the actor should always makes himself potent of building an effective relationship with the audience which is the environmental society, he should behave according to social norms and be as the society expects and tries to be acceptable to others as he is to himself. So as Guffman argues the actor has a head in himself and a head in society and in other words, 'self' is completely drawn inside the interactions. The sociological approach of identity in three schools of thought is tabulated as follows:

The matrix of theoretical studies of identity

Row	Theorist	School of Thought	Theory	Main Concepts
1	Durkheim, Parsons	Functionalism	Social determinism and dominion of institutions is dominating the individual beliefs and believe that humans take shape of humans only in a social dimension; they turn completely human only through society.	Social identity, social determinism, agencies, social, cultural, political and economic sub-systems, norms and values
2	Mead, Guffman	Interactionism	Social identity is the result of someone's understanding of him/herself and what others think about him/her.	Identity, mind, self, society, potential identity, de facto identity, role

				distance
3	Giddens	Conflict	There is a relationship Between micro levels of society (personal understanding of self and identity) and macro levels (state and globalization) and can't be understood separately.	Social identity, intermediate trust, self-satisfaction, the expansion of relation network, the amount of intellectuality

The matrix of empirical studies of identity

Row	Researcher	Space / Time	Theory	Main Concepts
1	Share' poor & khoshfar	Tehran / 2002	The relationship of cultural capital and social identity	Religious identity, national identity, cultural capital
2	Sarukhani & Raf'at jah	Tehran / 2004	The effective sociological factors on the redefinition of women's social identity	Ground variables, religious beliefs, maintaining the body, values and attitudes, way of life and consumption, fundamental trust
3	Mohammadi Telvar	Sanandaj / 2008	The effect of life style on social identity	Leisure time, body management, social values, life style
4	Almal	Iran / 2011	The facet of social identity of Iranian youth	Gender, base, leisure time, school, family, social trust, social cooperation, tendency toward culture, unity and commitment

Research Method

Because of human actors' especial conditions like human will and authority, Social life has various and complex dimensions as the mentioned conditions are not easily testable and empirically measurable. Basically, there is a major difference between natural sciences and humanities which is the topic of study. The intellectuals and researchers of human sciences are searching for appropriate methods in order to recognize and study of social phenomena. This matter is particularly important when quantitative data about the phenomenon is at hand. Quantitative methods perform mostly in the positivist manner and try to test the theory in context. But qualitative methods are mostly to find a problem and finally reaching a theory. Qualitative methods give precise information about phenomena which quantitative methods hardly describe those (Azkia & Imani, 2010: 3). So the phenomenon which we are studying in this research is a social and human phenomenon and we have a little information about it in texts and in fact about the essence of the problem and consequently we collected the data using a qualitative method and also for analyzing them.

In order to analyze social identity in a sociological manner, we have used grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and qualitative in-depth interviews, observations and researcher's inferences. The interviews of this study were performed with the women from the age of 21 to 78 years old of Hashjin city in 2011. The interviewees formed a qualitative sample of 13 women and 5 men whom were selected voluntarily and by researcher's judgment in order to cover all strata. The data were collected with the use of tape recorder and taking notes. In order to preserve the ethical issues and maintain personal information in interviews, coding is used instead of names.

Generally, the stages of study considering the grounded theory method are as follows:

Preparation of initial questions; reviewing references and performing exploratory interviews; analysis of results and preparing the theoretical design of problem statement; using grounded theory method for data collection and analysis; discovering and comparison; conceptualization; compartmentalize of the data; development of micro categories using open, pivotal and selective coding; theoretical saturation; building a paradigm model; discussion and conclusion and story narration. And of course between all of these stages, there was a reciprocated path (Safiri, 2009: 297; Azkia & Imani, 2010).

Of many scientific and pragmatic obstacles of this study are: complex and multi dimensioned topic; diffuseness of views and opinions; most of the researchers using quantitative methods; most researchers noticed the national and ethnic dimensions of identity and lack of empirical studies and resources about gender and familial dimensions of identity; restrictions in using a tape recorder in interviews for all participants.

Research Findings

Code	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Education	Occupation	Income (Rial)
1	38	Female	Married	Diploma	Barber	5000000
2	21	Female	Single	Associate	-	7000000
3	34	Female	Married	Diploma	Homemaker	8000000
4	26	Male	Single	Associate	Employee	7000000
5	26	Male	Single	Bachelor	-	8000000
6	78	Female	Single	Illiterate	-	6000000
7	52	Female	Married	Illiterate	Homemaker	7000000
8	60	Female	Married	Illiterate	Homemaker	6000000
9	29	Male	Married	Bachelor	Self-employment	5000000
10	57	Male	Married	Illiterate	Farmer	7000000
11	36	Male	Married	Bachelor	Teacher	8000000
12	43	Female	Married	Illiterate	Homemaker	6000000
13	22	Female	Single	Student (Term 1)	-	7000000
14	30	Female	Married	Bachelor	Homemaker	12000000
15	23	Female	Single	Associate	-	7000000
16	72	Female	Married	Illiterate	Homemaker	9000000
17	45	Female	Married	Elementary	Homemaker	8000000
18	25	Female	Single	Bachelor	-	10000000

Conceptual Narration of Issue

Concepts, Categories and Propositions are three basic components of grounded theory and in order to reach each one of these elements, we need to analyze the information which is the main axis of grounded theory. Generally these three elements emerge in the process of open, pivotal and selective coding and connect to each other. So regarding these, the conceptual narration of women's identity and conditions affecting their identity is as follows:

Considering the results of research findings the image that women of Hashjin have of themselves is generally religious and ethnic. They talked about religious rituals so we can understand the degree of importance there is of religion and religious beliefs in their social lives. Severity and feebleness of religious beliefs which are the foundation of identity in a collective mode and a sense of belonging, dependency and fidelity to it, is different among groups of women with different age group, education and life style. Although the amount and severeness of this difference is slight, which is the result of living in a small city and equality of socio-economic base, but the results show that religious beliefs of older and not educated women and women with a traditional life style is stronger than young educated women with a slightly modern life style as one women said:

Religion and religious beliefs is the first and last step in our lives and an irreligious person is empty, hollow, meaningless and aimless. We should be thankful of what god gave us and count on him all the time and in this manner everything is going to be fine (Code 17).

Concepts and indices like 'our religion is the most complete one', 'our religion is the best one', 'everything is in god's hands', 'he who doesn't believe in god always faces troubles', 'I'm satisfied with God's decisions', 'you have to be with god' and many others existed which from these, categories of religious identity is deduced.

One woman stated that 'from my opinion, the religion which we accepted and believe in it by heart is the best and most complete religion' (Code 7).

Another category which makes the foundation of women's identity in Hashjin city is ethnic and regional beliefs which fairly entail strong sense of belonging to elements such as land, local language, traditions and regional traditions. Religious and ethnic identity are two main dimensions of women's collective identity which proportionately stronger than sexual, familial and national identity.

Concepts and indices such as sense of belonging to mother tongue, obeying traditions, liking the native land, liking the mother tongue, liking the folk music, liking values and ethnic-regional beliefs, strong sense of belonging to birthplace and reviewing past memories shape the ethnic identity.

One of the interviewees talks about a sense of belonging and dependency to ethnic and regional culture:

I absolutely obey my regional and ethnic traditions and I like to preserve them forever. I think he who can't maintain these traditions, which are the creators of culture, changes into a human with no identity. These traditions and also preserving the language and religion gives us humans, identity (Code 14).

Attending religious rituals, believe in oblation, pilgrimage, everything is in god's hands, prayer, life is not without reckoning, everything was better in the past, I'm satisfied with God's decisions, God must help the youth are among indices and concepts extracted from interviews, observations and life story narrations of women that shows determinism and fatalism.

Two of the most important characteristics that shape the people's identity and are the basis of most beliefs and imaginations are determinism and fatalism which are a kind of complete surrender to all events and happenings of social life. In this manner intellectualism and willfulness have no place. In this study, the interviewees were too determinist and fatalist.

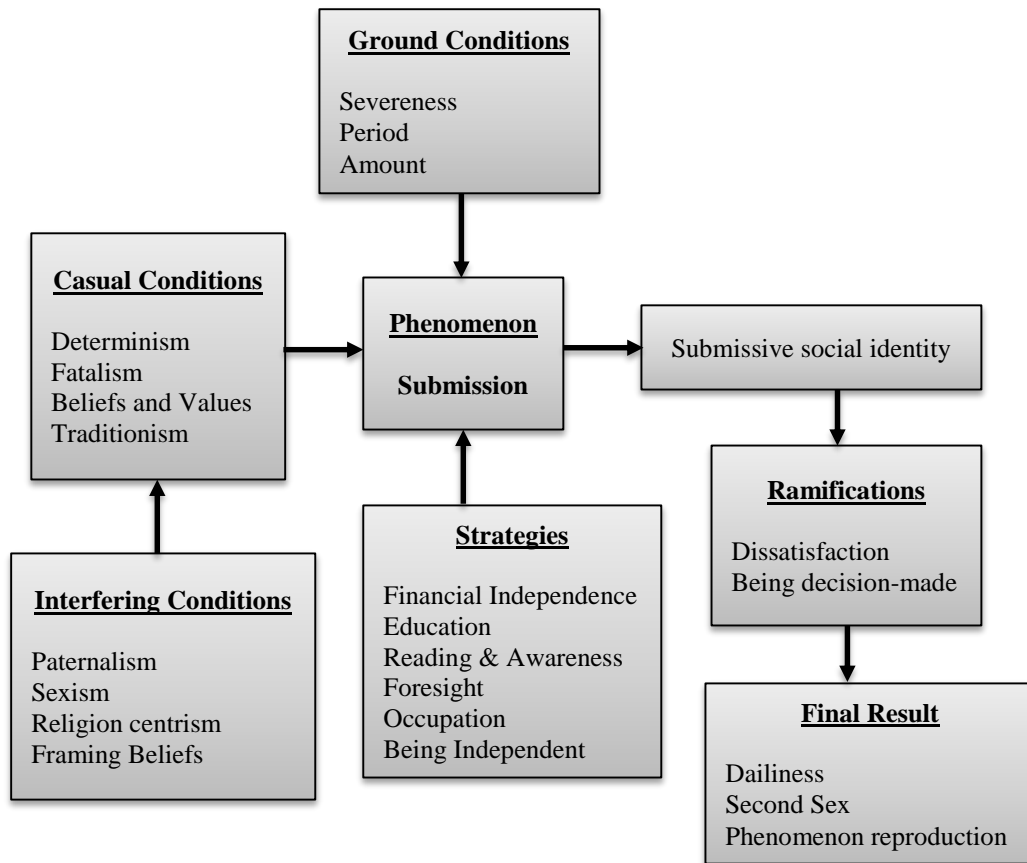
Everything is in God's hands and he is the determining one, he will help one whom he believes is decent and on contrary we can't do anything against his will and we should hold against anything in our ways even if they are unpleasant and sorrowful. We have to be thankful of God and count on him in every respect (Code 18).

The Concepts such as traditionism, beliefs and values are measured in this society by indices like being a good mother, dedicated and forgiving, chastity, being representative, being tasteful, housewifery, raising children and taking care of their husband. These characteristics on one hand show a traditional society and in fact a traditional woman and on the other hand they shape the character, image and belief which gradually turn into value and norm. The understanding and imagination which these women have contain these elements. One opinion about these beliefs is as follows:

Of all important duties of women are taking care of the kids, the husband and the house. It is expected of women to do their responsibilities towards their children and their husbands and this is a value that women have to reach. I think with respecting these values and respecting chastity and virtue, women can be successful (Code 3).

Up until now we described concepts, categories and indices. It is the threshold to the main debate that is the analysis and definition of concepts and categories of women's social identity and the relationship between them. In the process of coding analysis, concepts such as fatalism and determinism, traditionism, beliefs and values were deduced as categories and the relationship between them led the researcher to pivotal category of 'submission' which is the most affective factor on women's social identity in Hashjin city.

Considering the iteration of 'submission' in the data, indices and categories, this phenomenon is chosen to be the main concept of this study. This choice has other reasons; this phenomenon has the power of absorbing in other categories, integration of other categories around it and theoretical predominance of this phenomenon in comparison to other concepts (Azkia & Imani, 2010). The theoretical-analytical model or paradigm model of this study is as follows based on the analysis of coded data from observations and interviews:



The theoretical model of submissive social identity of women

Conclusion and Story Narration

Casual conditions related to women's submission

Casual conditions contain events and happenings that result in the emergence or developing the submission phenomenon. The factors which cause the submission of Women in Hashjin city are fatalism, determinism, beliefs, values and traditionism. The concepts of women attending in ritual, a major belief in praying and considering humans without will and power in confronting problems are among those categories which confirm these women being determinist and fatalist. Traditionism, especially among older, married women with low education is strong. Beliefs and values which generally are harsh to women, also affect the submission. These beliefs are kind of accepted in the society and women, too, accept these images and understandings about themselves as these imaginations produced a series of characteristics and properties for women. Being sensational, weak, lack of foresight, uncertainty in choice, weakness in making decision are negative concepts and being tasteful, being precise are generally positive characteristics of these women. These positive aspects generally exist more among young educated women with a modern life style than older uneducated women with a traditional way of life. These casual conditions show that cultural and social structures have a major share in shaping and foundation of women's social identity and this is because of traditional structure of society.

The consequent phenomenon of casual conditions

The cultural and social structure of society or in other words categories like fatalism, determinism, beliefs and values has caused these imaginations and understandings about women to put them in a lower level than men and being considered as the second sex and on contrary, concepts such as obeying the husband, being weak and heading are symbols of a series of clichés and framing beliefs. These beliefs and mind images has caused this submission to be ingrained in society and in these women too throughout history.

The ground condition which submission strategies have developed in

Choosing and developing the strategies related to submission phenomenon is much dependent on the background of the phenomenon. The submission phenomenon exists among women with different amounts and depths; although this amount of submission is not very different among women. Most of these women had this submissive identity but the amount and severity of it was different among educated, young women with a modern life style than older, uneducated, married women with a traditional life style as in former the amount and severity of submission was less than the latter.

Effective interfering conditions on strategies

These conditions actually contain those factors that affect the submission phenomenon and also are involved in choosing strategies for women. Patriarchy, sexism and religion centrism are among interfering conditions. The more the amount of patriarchy, sexism and religion centrism among women, the less tendency there is for choosing strategies like getting educated, reading and being aware, getting a job, having financial independence, having a sense of foresight, environment change and immigration. And on contrary, the tendency toward these strategies among young, single and educated women are stronger and they believe choosing and performing these strategies is a step toward reducing submission in society.

Strategies concerning submission

Among the strategies concerning emancipation from submission, the following were considered by women:

Education, financial independence, reading, awareness, the ability to foresight, being independent, having a job and environment change which is related to immigrating from small to main cities. These strategies are different in two groups of women; one being the young, single and educated women with a modern life style and the other being older, married and uneducated women with a traditional life style. The tendency toward these strategies is stronger in the former group.

Ramifications

The ramifications could be explained in a process which is the dissatisfaction of life and being irresponsible are the consequences of submission which their results are dullness, shaping framing beliefs, being considered as the second sex and the reproduction of the submission process.

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