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Women's Power and Resistance in the Iranian Family: Women's Narrative of Cultural Resistance Strategies in the Family

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ABSTRACT

In the Iranian family sociology, the dominant approach is based on this general idea that the family is the center of patriarchy. Based on this view, women at home are in subjugation and under male dominance. To support this idea, a lot of researches have been conducted in recent years. However, the present study does not seek to identify the patterns of female subjugation; rather it is in the process to identify the patterns of their resistance to male dominance within the home. As such, the study seeks to answer the question as how women use "culture" as a tool of resistance as well as to change the balance of power in the family. In this regard, 36 married women were interviewed. Findings showed that women use the strategies such as "struggle for meaning", "reverse decoding", "resistance to gender stereotypes", "resistance through tradition" and "appearance of obedience but hidden resistance within family" to resist the male dominance. Through these, they try to control male power in the home and balance it accordingly. Various resistance strategies indicate that women's "resistance sources" in the family are numerous, which take place in different domains and in different ways.

Keywords: power, resistance, family, gender culture, patriarchy, symbolic violence, women's studies

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, there had been a lot of transformation in the position of women in the Iranian family has transformed a lot, with many young women today attaining higher university degrees and entering to workplaces. The employment rate of women and their cultural capital are increasing. But the dominant approach in Iranian family studies still relies on the idea that women remain powerless inside the home environs because the family is the center of patriarchy. As it is widely believed, patriarchy is a structure of gender dominance that is very pervasive and can't be easily abandoned. However, so far, less attention has been paid to the strategies of women's cultural resistance in the Iranian family structure.

PURPOSE

The main questions in the present study are: How young Iranian women use "culture" as a tool to resist against male power in the family? How can they change the power structure in the family to their advantage through culture? The purpose here is to identify the patterns of women's cultural resistance in the family.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach has been adopted in this research. 36 married women were interviewed in Tehran, the capital of Iran. The sampling was done using "targeted sampling" method, with the process being based on themes that could emerge during the analysis. The data collection and analysis were performed sequentially. Coding and analysis were performed immediately after each interview. To analyze the data, a thematic method was used which sought to identify different themes from the text of interviews.

FINDINGS

One of the centers of women's resistance within the family is the confrontation with the patriarchal discourse. Unlike previous generations, young women who are principally educated, do not give up easily in the face of the exercise of power by a prevailing patriarchal culture, rather they resist in different ways. In this regard, they try to create meanings and values that serve their interests. In other words, they try to impose their desired values and meanings on their husbands as "natural" values.

In some other cases, women's cultural resistance to the dominant gender culture is not possible through direct confrontation rather through new interpretations and the production of desirable and arbitrary meanings of

the same. In this regard, women try to change its meaning through new interpretations and readings of the content of dominant messages. In other words, reverse reading and producing new meaning are important tools for changing power relations at home.

Sometimes, women resist men despite the fact that there isn't need for "overt resistance". However, they sometimes show "obedience" i.e. seemingly accept and obey something in order to neutralize their husbands' sensitivity, but in practice, they do something else. Overt obedience but covert resistance refers to secret politics of women in everyday life. This policy refers to the apparent obedience of women to gender ideologies but at the same time having hidden resistance to the same.

Another method of women's cultural resistance is against "gender stereotypes" which have been the cause of many restrictions on women. For example, women struggle against the stereotype that they should stay at home and avoid working outside. With a change in this stereotype, women can have a paid job and achieve economic self-dependence and gain more power at home.

CONCLUSION

The present study is a narrative of young women who try to weaken men's cultural dominance in the family by using different strategies. Women's cultural resistance may be underestimated, but in reality, this resistance leads to the weakening of unequal gender culture in the family, changes to rules of division of domestic work and the development of women's individual freedoms, and even the production of wealth and property for women. In this way, young women can be partially free from the dominance the women of previous generations experienced in Iran.

Increase in women's education in recent years and their access to new media (such as satellite networks and social media) have gradually led to an increase in gender awareness among women. This has also put their cultural resistance at a much higher level than the previous generations. Today, young Iranian women are, by no means, passive in the family rather they are constantly struggling to achieve their desired goals. These indicate that the complete male dominance in the Iranian family is on the decline, at least in the new generation of women.



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