

# Everydayness of Power: Understanding Experiences of Women Within Intimate Relationships

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**Abstract**—the aim of the paper is to try to understand the power within an intimate heterosexual relationship from the perspective of the woman and how the partners negotiate the social structures of patriarchy and caste. The paper looks at everydayness of power in the lives of women in relation to their intimate relationships. The concepts that have been discussed here are how time is a gendered concept, how women assert and negotiate their independence within an intimate relationship. Then I discuss the strategies that women use and the adjustments they make to negotiate with the wider patriarchal structures within their intimate relationships.

**Index Terms**— emotion work, everydayness, gendering of time heterosexual intimate relationship, independence, negotiation, power in intimate relationships,

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In this paper an attempt is made to understand the experiences of young women in heterosexual, intimate relationships in their everyday lives with respect to their intimate relationship and how its relation to their identity of everydayness shows us the particular 'way of being' along with the broader understanding of 'ordinary time'.

The emotion work is the activities that women involve themselves with to enhance the emotional wellbeing of their partners and by providing constant emotional support. (Erickson, 1993). For example, to offer encouragement, showing appreciation, closely listening to your partner and expression of empathy towards your partner's emotions on an everyday basis for years on end represents emotion work. Therefore, it can be seen that management and doing of emotion work is part of the everyday interactions of women in their intimate relationships.

One aspect of everydayness is the way of existence, perspective towards reality and what is defined as the 'natural' way of being part of the life- world. This also relates daily life to habit and routine and the assumption is that people unreflectively live in the everyday. But this can further be complicated by saying that every day is based on a composition of lives, places and people who meet and interact and through interactions modification of the world takes place. (Gardiner, 2000)

Like Smith (Smith, *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*, 1990) my main focus would be the everyday world, to look at the lives of women. Everyday world is constituted by the mundane but produced through skilled practices on the part of the women. The attempt is to understand how the daily life operates for women and how they are knitted 'in their intimate relationships and wider society. Attention will be directed towards the woman who is an embodied subject in a particular historical situation. (Gardiner, 2000)

'Located in the actualities of our everyday life, we cannot grasp how it is put together' (Smith, *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*, 1990). The critique to everyday is a way of inquiry of the everyday life in which we try to explain practices of doing, hearing and try to identify the relation between what we speak of and the practice itself. I will go beyond the account of women's own practices and try to link it to the wider ideological concepts yet also at the same time not create distanced categories. As Smith says everyday world cannot be completely understood within its own scope (Smith, 1987).

I will use Smith's 'primary narratives' to understand the articulation of women (Smith, 1990). These narratives signify the

social conditions as they are experienced and lived by women themselves. The construction of ruling relations is done primarily by men at the micro and macro level. The official discourses abstract from every day by the same ruling relations. According to Smith men usually occupy the formal and ideational whereas the women are associated with informal and affective.

Taking from Smith (Smith, 1987) I will attempt a women centered writing which upholds the integrity of everyday life, the lived experiences of women. The writing will take from the expressions of the women and present them rather than creating abstract texts.

I will use the investigative model of Smith where women are involved in co-construction of certain relationships and social patterns. The understanding regarding 'femininity' is influenced by broader institutional and structural contexts, like appropriate feminine behaviour constitutes dress, language used, demeanour and so on. These images are linked to the capitalist construction which influences the social relationships of women and their conception of the self. (Gardiner, 2000)

In this paper will try to understand the gendered everyday social practices and the wider socio cultural discourses. This will help us to understand how women embody social practices in their everyday life in real time and how these constructions go beyond space and time thus seeing gender as a social practice within a particular context.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in Delhi from July 2018 to September 2018. There were 7 women participants who identified themselves to be in intimate relationships. I chose to interview women in heterosexual relationships because I was interested in understanding the dynamics between women and men in intimate relationships. My understanding from the beginning was that there is politics of gender and sexuality working in these micro relationships. The women were selected from a similar social and economic background as the researcher, working in the development sector and having completed their masters in a similar field of study. Snowball sampling was used to select the women, the researcher contacted friends through LinkedIn and email and they gave references of their friends and colleagues.

One of the things that had to be kept in mind while conducting the research was that the intimate relationship was not something that could be observed. It was rather attempted to be understood in the way that women talked about it and expressed their feelings. Through the research, the researcher is in no way claiming to make a generalisation, the experiences of women are specific to these particular women.

### 3 GENDERING OF TIME

Gendering of time is a concept that is an integral part of everyday experiences of women and at the same time it can be linked to the socio cultural structures within which they are played out. The everyday is made of units of time but both the concepts and lived experiences are governed by the wider structures which I will try to understand in this part.

Here I will try to understand time as a social construct, to place the women's time within the patriarchal capitalist society. Here I am not attempting to create a dichotomy of time, between that of men and women, rather an experience of time that is fragmented and multi layered. I will broadly look at how there are general differences in the experience of women with respect to time.

Through the narratives of women, the researcher has come to understand that even though time cannot be controlled, it can be gendered. That is whose time is more precious and is given more priority in the relationship. What is being done here is how women in their daily lives divide time in relation to the schedule of the man; her schedule is dependent to that of the partner. The daily chores and planning for the woman are influenced by the availability of the man.

From the below narrative it can be seen that at the beginning of the relationship, time is invested by the woman into the development of the relationship. The woman says that all the free time she has is devoted to the partner and the relationship. Along with time the other resources that the woman invests in the relationship is that of her emotions and mental space. Her time and other related aspects come to be associated with that of the man. The woman conforms to the gender norms of being emotional and investing all her resources in the relationship. The woman gives priority to her partner and the relationship and in the process is sidelining her other social networks. She does not go out with her friends and prefers to spend time with her partner, now the partner does not tell her not to spend time with her friends. It is the internalised hierarchy that the man has the right over her resources, in this case time is the resource. It is later on in the relationship that the man will still have his friends and time and the woman will have to renegotiate her own time.

*"Phir to pura time baat hota tha. Ek call ek do ghante ka hota tha. College me saara time main phone me hi hoti thi. Jo bhi free time hota tha, use bat hi karti thi phone me. Aise hi nikale do saal, XI and XII. [Then all the time we would talk. One call used to last two hours. In college I used to be on the phone all the time, used to talk to him only. Two years passed like this.]*

*Uske baad to usne mere PG ke paas me hi ghar liya. Phir to pura din udhar hi rehti thi. [Then I came to Delhi and he also came. After that he took a house near my PG. Then I started spending all my time at his place].*

*College ke time par [during college] my friends would ask me to go out with them, I would refuse, nahi mai nahi arahi [no I am not coming].*

*College khatam hote hi mai uske ghar chale jaati thi. PG me bhi pata tha ki ye ghar me nahi rehti. [the minute college finished I would go to his house. Even in the PG they knew that I did not spend much time in the PG]."(P2)*

The women's emotional labour is inherently exploitative in nature, altruism or compassion and self-interest or rationality are culturally constructed and may not be mutually exclusive. Altruism is associated with emotions like compassion, fear for the other's safety on the other hand there is self-interest associated with cold rationality. Hence it becomes important to understand the emotional labour of the women to unmask the duality of affect and reason. (Lutz)

The dominant time culture assumes the time to be individualistic and does not look at the interdependence which is part of human existence. Feminists look at this labour as generation of time for their close ones or in these cases their partners by coordination and planning. For feminists' time is not just an individual

resource rather it is a resource, before spending it, it first needs to be created and is bound to communal needs. (Bryson, 2007)

Women usually see themselves as carers or potential carers, for them time does not have individual ownership. This implies subordination of the self to the demands of significant others for the woman. Women in a way lose out of the 'own time' and concentrate on the 'us time'.

Once the women adjust their lives and time as per the requirement of the relationship, they are fine with it. The problem arises when the status quo changes, when the man does not give as much time as had been given. But then the gender roles expectations are also within the same frame, so a woman will voice her unhappiness but will also let it go, for the sake of the relationship and also blame herself for the trouble that she causes to the partner, the guilt of asking for time is on the woman. The woman has thus internalised the wider social structures of the society to be understanding of the emotions of the man, despite the fact that her own feelings may want her to behave in another way. Putting the emotions and the needs of the partner before her own show how gender plays out in structural ways in the intimate life of the woman.

*"I was getting very frustrated because he was always unavailable, but being fair to him he was doing MBA and that too a one year corporate MBA. Like he had no time and I was putting more pressure on him by asking for his time and the worse was that I knew I was frustrating him out and yet I was doing it and pushing him.*

*I would not say that he was completely not there but I would also say that that was the year I gave to myself." (P5)*

The woman is aware of the emotion work she is doing in the relationship and wants it to be reciprocated by the partner as an equal in the relationship. The man makes the excuse of work to avoid the emotion being demanded by the woman due to his gendered role of being indifferent to the expectation of emotion work from him. The woman knows that the onus of the care giving lies on her and she is trying to negotiate that within her relationship to not be only partner to do the same. (Nock, 2006)

P6 explains this,

*"So I would speak to him for four minutes subah and I would be on my way to work and raat ko he would not talk when he was on his way to work. So I was like if I could take out time for him, then so should he. He would be like, 'no' I need to get my food and all.*

*I clearly told him that I needed to have a proper conversation at least once in the day.*

*So it was a difficult during that time."(P6)*

### 4 INDEPENDENCE TROPE

Independence can be understood as women having control over their own lives, decisions and future planning. Independence also means to have the right to determine the emotion work and care that she wants to give to the relationship by her choice and because of the gendered understanding of women naturally being emotional ending up doing more emotion work. Through various narratives I will try to see how women express their freedom, within the broader structures of the society.

Gouldner (Gouldner, 1960) speaks of the "need to reciprocate" the benefits received contributing to continued interaction. Traditionally in a dating relationship the woman becomes obligated to the partner when he takes responsibility of cash-outlay. This can take the form of granting the partner other and sexual favours in order to show her affection towards him (Sheila K Korman & Gerald R Leslie, 1982). An interactional tension maybe located when the woman does want to reciprocate in this manner or rather cannot decide the method of reciprocity.

Women are seen to be invested in the quality of their intimate relationships because they have borne the emotional burden in relationships and family life. Their share in the emotional aspect of the intimate relationship is based on the gendered

socialisation where they have been trained to be sensitive towards emotional dynamics in relationships. P6 tells us how she responds when her partner tells her that he wants to move outside the country. There are multiple themes underlying what the woman is saying. Firstly there is an assumption that if he is moving she also needs to move with him, the patriarchal idea residing in the same household and marriage as an eventuality. Secondly her internalisation of the gendered ideology of accepting and following the decision of the man in the relationship, when she says that she will have to make moving arrangements. The other part, being in contradiction where she thinks of her career and job and leaving behind her own social networks because of the decision of the man. The career adjustments and social adjustments are expected of the woman and the embeddedness of the same make the woman think on the same lines.

*"So he said that he wants to move to Canada, so I told him that he can't just dump things and I also need to make arrangements to move. He couldn't tell me to leave my family and job and move."(P6)*

For the woman the financial independence is an imperative for her to give her a sense of equality in the relationship. She does try to assert her financial independence in her daily interaction with her partner, by paying half the bill when they go out on dates or future planning based on a sharing model, this also needs to be understood within a particular social economic context. From the narrative it can be seen that the ability to pay equally is in a way making the woman an equal in the relationship without being obligated to reciprocate. The man has internalised the traditional ideas of marriage, house and the related status and prestige. There is an ideological conflict between the two partners where the man wants to prove his social status and the kind of house he lives will be the symbol for that.

*"So on our dates, we pay half and half, but I earn like half of what he earns. So I am like Subway chale jaenge date ke liye because wo bahut paise banata hai aur mera khatam to hojata hai, zero [that we could go to subway for the date because he earns a lot and my salary finishes due to spending on dates]."*

*I then told him that it would be better to rent a barsaati. He said that we should have a two BHK and I was like why ..."(P6)*

The woman says that she has been brought up in a way where she was she learnt that life is a struggle and education is most important thing and has been encouraged to further her career. She has lived her adult life in a different city than her parents and has usually done things according to her will, she feels that freedom is most imperative for her as that is the way she has been living and would not compromise the same even in her intimate relationship. She feels that she gets the confidence and the feeling of independence from her ability to earn and that gives her a sense of power in the relationship. The woman says that she is not ready to give up on her freedom as she has come to learn it through her life journey. She defines the source of her power in the relationship in terms of financial independence.

*"Yaar tumne agar dekhli hai to usko decrease nahi karoge na tum. Yes, I have that power. I feel that it is related with money. Matlab tum agar kama rahe ho to khud hi chala rahe ho, koi hai nahi na. Matlab wais ebhi the kind of life we have adopted wo dependence hai hi nahi [If you have seen it then you will not want to decrease it. I feel that I have power and I feel that it is related to money. If you are earning then you are living on your own, you don't really need anyone. Anyways the kind of life we have adopted we are not dependent on each other in that way]."* (P8)

## 5 NEGOTIATION

### 5.1 Strategies

According to Certeau strategies try to possess a specific space to exercise power and domination. To extend one's own place where the power of the other implicitly exists. Tactics are hidden, dispersed and improvised to respond to situational demands. They are temporal and rely on collective memory and ways of traditional resistance and passed from one generation to another. They try to give advantage to the powerless as they cannot directly challenge the existing power structure.

In this part of the paper I will discuss the ways in which women negotiate and assert themselves in intimate relationships. Will give an idea as to what are the strategies that women use to negotiate patriarchy, everyday in their intimate relationships. We can use the framework of Kandiyoti of patriarchal bargain to understand the subjectivity of women and how gender ideology works in various contexts. (Kandiyoti, 1988)

Kandiyoti (Kandiyoti, 1988) argues that patriarchal bargains are specific and vary as per caste, class and ethnicity. Patriarchal bargains influence and shape the gendered subjectivity of women and decide the gender ideologies in a particular context. They are influencers to potential or particular forms of women's resistance either active or passive when they face oppression. Patriarchal bargains are not unchangeable, they evolve with the changing times and new areas of struggles are opened and renegotiations of gender relations take place.

"Women's 'clinging' behaviour is required by the objective social situation". According to Firestone, men react with hysteria to a prospect of mutual commitment and the women's response to this is manipulation through subtle methods to get the man to be committed as much as possible. (Firestone, 1970)

One of the ways women negotiate is through the medium of communication. The women may directly confront and express what they want from the relationship and the partner and in some cases silence is used as a tool to express displeasure with the partner.

In can be seen from the narratives of the women that their demands whether spoken or unspoken are responded with incomprehension by their partner, often this leads to disagreements. The man tries to maintain control by avoiding arguments, ignore and carry on with whatever he is doing. At times for winning arguments men rely on verbal logic and coolness and concentrate on issues that were being argued in that situation. (Marsden, 1993)

*"So instead of saying things out loud, I shut my mouth. I would stop calling him. I have started to not tell him things and keep putting a distance between us."(P7)*

*"I told him that I was not going to talk to him beyond that point until he figured out what he wanted out of this equation because I was pretty clear on what I wanted. And it was important that we discussed what each one of us wanted. I remember this talk as I had walked out of the library while doing an assignment.*

*He had been giving me one word answers since the morning. I got extremely angry that I actually gave him a call saying that I did not want one word replies anymore and I wanted him to have a straight talk with me. (P5)*

Women through the course of the relationship learn to control their anger and irritation and do all that is possible to avoid conflict in the relationship. The adjustments are made mostly by the women so that the relationship can carry on smoothly, the idea of leisure time is in most cases applicable to the man in the relationship, to keep herself busy the woman gets involved in housework. Hochschild talks about the leisure gap between men and women in the home in line with the wage gap in the workplace.

Women in a longer relationship adjust to the man's emotional distance in multiple ways. One way of responding is that women compare their relationship with the worst possible scenario; and considered the man to do as much as he could and try their best to not be 'too demanding'. (Marsden, 1993)

It can be seen that the woman gets irritated with her partner when she, the woman has internalised the role of managing the emotions in the relationship. Even if the woman tries to involve the man in emotional work or intimacy, his response is that of ignorance. The woman may feel angry but continues to do the extra work on emotion to avoid conflict and diverts her attention from and does not expect anything from her partner.

"Ghar pe he is always on his phone! Twitter!

Agar mai use kuch puch rahi hun na to sar utha ke dekhega bhi nahi. He is very involved in his politics.

Kuch nahi. Chali jati hun, kuch nahi kar sakti. Apna TV movie dekhna shuru kar deti hun.

Mujhe samajh nahi ata ki itna kya obsession hai Twitter and all se. I get mad when the time we can spend with each other is spent on this.

I avoid shouting as he will also get angry and we will end up fighting. Mai apna kaam karti hun, bahut kaam hota hai ghar me."(P2)

## 5.2 Adjustments

The future goals of individuals are important for the experiences in the relationship. (S Shulman & J Connolly, 2013). The commitment in an intimate relationship is affected by cognitive interdependence. Restructuring of the self in the relationship determines the commitment the woman has in the relationship. Women start to perceive themselves less as individuals and more as a part of a 'pluralistic self and partner collective'. Cognitive interdependence can be understood as the collective mental representation of the self. (C.R Agnew, 1998)

It can be seen that the performing of emotion work is based on a gendered construction, this performance is reflective of the construction of the self in a gendered way. Daniels (Daniels, 1987) has argued that the work that a person does provides a sense of status they have in a society and helps in identity building. She also adds that the recognition of a work provides a certain level of dignity to an individual. The failure to recognise the emotion work of women in a way invalidates the women's contributions in the social, community and intimate life, reproducing gender inequality.

From the narrative we can understand how the woman says that she is a social person and likes and wants the attention that she gets. But in next part of the narrative says that understands that her partner is a person who is busy and has a lot of work and says that it is fine with her if he does is not able to give her time and attention. Here it is evident that the woman is ready to subvert her desires to that of her partners, so that the relationship can be smooth and that she is acting as per the traditional norms of femininity of being overly understanding at the cost of own happiness.

It can be seen that time and effort put in care work are often discounted by women themselves because it is an expectation to show spontaneous love but also the imposed expectation is that of effortlessly doing the care work. This can be understood in continuation of the above narrative where the woman is acting as per the internalised gender norms, where she is being extremely caring and empathetic towards her partner despite the fact that the partner has not shown the same compassion towards her feelings. And yet her concern arises as soon as she realises that her partner is going through a troubled time.

"And then he told me that he cried a few times during the summer which is very unlike him. Because he is that kind of a guy who did not even cry when his grandmother passed away or whenever, like he has never cried. He told me that he has never cried and getting to know that he cried during the summer and he had cried a day before he had texted me, it hurt me basically knowing that. I wanted to know kihuakyahaiisso [what happened to him]." (P4)

Sexual reciprocity has been lauded in intimate relationships but feminist writings have shown that the entitlement of the male and obligation of the female is centered on gender lines. It has been seen through studies that women prioritise the pleasure of the partner rather than their own. From the below narrative it

can be seen how the woman accepts pain as part of the sexual intercourse because that is what is expected of her, for the pleasure of her partner. (Breanne Fahs and Eric Swank, 2016)

"Quite a lot of times it is painful. It is like doing it for the very first time. And often not pleasant because there needs to be some momentum also. While it is really great and romantic and passionate when you meet each other after months and are ready to fall onto each other's bodies and you cannot get enough." (P5)

## 6 CONCLUSION

Over the interviews I did with the women, they had in one way or the other tried to change certain norms. It can be seen that the reason for this effort is that the women live in a contradiction of living by the traditional ideologies and circumstances created by modernity. Notunless they themselves make an attempt to change the status quo in relation to the work done in the relationship, they will have to continue doing the extra work.

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