Modern Spinsters in the Family and Kinship in the 21st Century

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Abstract:
There has been a lot of intellectual and political attention paid to the recent changes in family structures, which have been seen as signaling a decrease in obligations and commitments and a rise in selfish individualism. Even though historically, their singleness has been explained with duties to care for parents and extended family, single women risk being portrayed as strident individualists in contemporary Western societies due to their lack of connection with significant others. This research examines spinsters' social and family networks. The changes and continuities illustrated reflect an increase in the context and meanings of caring obligations, not a decrease. According to the study's findings, this research contradicts a view of humans as autonomous and self-directed and supports arguments regarding the progressive potential of different family practices in today's changing Western cultural and societal contexts.

Introduction

This paper focuses on examining the caring connections among Indian spinsters in the present day [1-3]. This allows us to investigate some theoretical assumptions about how individualism affects familial...
obligations and social change when studied [4-8]. A review of recent empirical studies on spinsters' familial ties is presented, emphasizing how these relationships have evolved through time in light of shifting social norms [9]. In recent decades, India has seen a dramatic increase in the number of unmarried people due to these changes [10-14]. With the advent of individualism, academics, politicians, and polemicists have expressed worries about a lack of family or community engagement [15-21].

Statistics on changes in family and household arrangements alone cannot tell us anything about a person's values or intentions [22-27]. Rather than being a sign of a fall in the family, a new study has shown that these shifts signify an increase in the diversity of family structures [28]. The political and conceptual significance of 'the family is a major focus of this research, which builds on feminist challenges to the premise that a self-evident, naturalized family form is the norm [29-34]. The meaning of family has been questioned in recent empirical research that uses a broader definition than the conjugal heterosexual couple with children. Non-heterosexuals may use the term "families of choice," for example, to express the emotional ties they share with their non-heterosexual friends and associates [35-44].

Intimate relationships have been a recent focus of sociological theory [45]. The heterosexual pair, on the other hand, is the focus of attention. Couple relationships are supposed to be self-evident in these interpretations of the psychological necessity and centrality asserted for intimate and intimacy [46-66]. Feminist writing has argued against this kind of "naturalization" of heterosexuality [47]. Furthermore, assuming that a dyadic relationship is necessary ignores the relationships of people who are not a part of a (hetero) sexual relationship. Intimacy, according to Jamieson, does not have to be limited to a 'pure connection' and can exist in any type of close interaction [48-51]. Expansion of our ability to imagine different types of social relationships increases the possibility of "plural paths" to intimacy; giving preference to the (hetero)sexual couple restricts our ability to be creative in our dating lives and denies us the chance to form primary relationships that are not sexual [52-57].

Increasing individualism has received "widespread academic backing," according to Lewis, who claims that "family transformation can be explained in part by rising individualism." On the other hand, individualism takes on numerous meanings depending on your perspective on the self and the role of agency. Giddens' optimistic account develops new concepts on the concept of self-reflexive self, and he assumes that agents negotiate sexual and emotional equality relationships [58-66]. Others, on the other hand, believe that the rise in the number of people living single lives is more a result of cultural influences that weaken the foundations of long-term relationships [67]. According to the modern market economies compel men and women to construct lives of their own "at the cost of commitments to family, relations, and friends," which they attribute to family transformations [68-71].

An investigation of how singleness is felt is an open-ended question. 'Pro-family' discourses, on the other hand, often equate women who refuse to marry and have children with being morally guilty [72-75]. For single women, the risk of being portrayed as overtly self-centered is greater than for those in a long-term relationship. Studies show that unmarried women without children are viewed as selfish, lonely, and neglecting their responsibilities when depicted in popular culture as the epitome of the modern spinster [76-81].

Other research on never-married women supports the major role played by contemporary spinsters' families and social networks [82-89]. This paper depends on such research. However, for this dissertation, the focus is on the mother-daughter interactions of contemporary spinsters [90].
Traditionally, the term "spinsterhood" has been used to refer to women who have no husbands or children of their own and are left to care for their parents and other relatives. However, the socioeconomic circumstances of the women in this study represent broader social changes often interpreted as signs of a "decline" in family values, such as women working, living alone, having their children, and being single [91-97].

Feminism has highlighted the importance of the private domain in the reproduction of gender identity, and caring has long been regarded as a normative aspect of femininity. An important topic in feminism is how the individuality of women is sacrificed to the 'constitutive definitions' of their identity as family members, daughters, wives, mothers, etc. Feminism has addressed many of the injustice’s women encounter in social relationships [98-111].

The feminist movement, on the other hand, has long criticized western liberal democracies' 'individualism,' which they see as gender-specific and blind to the social relations of power within which it operates [112]. It has been shown that the idea of an autonomous self-based on masculinist ideals of the self is a myth; rather, people are interdependent since their development necessitates a relationship with others [113-121]. Individualism based on an emphasis on masculinity obscures women's essential role in caring for others. People are socially rooted and molded by a complex of overlapping social variables, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity, which are recognized in this study. In contrast to a vision of individualism that prizes substantive independence, relational autonomy emphasizes the importance of caring for and being responsible for others as a result of one's dependency on and interconnection with them in relational relationships [122-131].

Caring work comprises both real and visual components as a 'labour of love.' Feminists working on social policy and those advocating a caring ethic say unpaid employment should be revalued. Those who aim to avoid reifying caring as a feminine trait have called for a care ethic and a justice ethic [132-143].

This research examines modern spinsters' caregiving responsibilities and shows that societal developments such people living alone or remaining single don't lessen caring requirements in intimate relationships; rather, the data reflect caring and responsibility. This questions how gendered norms influence women. This research demonstrates the progressive potential of a wide range of family practises, according to the authors [144].

Define singleness. Singleness is a dynamic category due to the changing nature of partnership status and the rise of cohabitation. Never-married does not prevent cohabiting, but singleness signifies never-married. It also refers to the separated and divorced [145-151].

Another issue is the vocabulary used to characterize single women who have never married: labels like "spinster," "old maid," and "celibate" may today be seen as derogatory or inaccurate, yet referring to someone as "never-married" stigmatizes them because of their lack of a spouse. Research on women who have never been married, such as those who have been widowed or divorced, is common [152-157]. For this study, being single is defined as having never been married or been in a cohabiting relationship. These women are referred to as "spinsters" in this publication, while "single" refers to research covering widowed and divorced women [158-161].

A 'life-history' technique was used to conduct semi-structured interviews. All research procedures are based on and framed by a certain understanding of the social and how the social might be known [162-]
Qualitative interpretative research methodologies have come to be viewed as 'quintessentially feminist. Women's caregiving interactions were analyzed using a specific set of discourses obtained from interviews conducted in an entirely different cultural context from the one in which they occurred [169].

The dangers of generalizing can be avoided by examining the specifics of various racial, social, and gendered structures. This research study is not meant to represent all single women but rather to focus on a specific group of thirty-seven white hetero-sexual spinsters over the age of 35 from various socioeconomic backgrounds. They all described themselves as single and hadn't been in a cohabiting relationship for at least five years. The non-cohabiting relationships of three women were defined as "intermittent" or "casual," and none of the women involved had any intention of the relationships developing into cohabitation. Pseudonyms were used during the interviews, which were conducted primarily in India's central belt.

Spinsterhood has traditionally been seen as an appropriate justification for caring for one's parents or other members of one's family while yet remaining under one's family's authority. A "family strategy" of keeping one daughter at home to guarantee the well-being of parents in the absence of a welfare state has been used to explain previous findings on the parental responsibilities of spinsters.

When it comes to taking care of parents, some women interviewed for this study had a variety of methods at their disposal. Three ladies stayed with their parents until they died, but others had their parents move into their homes or be nearby. An additional woman took care of her ailing mom by spending three days a week at her house.

When it came to having a baby, seven participants were moms; two had accidental pregnancies, one had a baby while living with the father, one had a baby while in a cohabiting relationship, and another while in a non-cohabiting relationship. Adoption and artificial insemination allowed three women to 'select into motherhood.' No precise information exists about "solo mothers," women who choose to have children without a partner. This sample of solo mothers did not match those typically younger, poorer, less likely to be employed, and more likely to be on benefits. The solo mothers' in this sample were in their thirties and forties when their children were born and earned more than the average salary when working full-time.

Overwhelmingly, most of those polled were single or had been before they became parents. Unmarried women have traditionally resided in the homes of their employers or other family members, although living alone has become more common in recent decades. Seven of the ladies resided in public housing, while the other four rented privately. Most participants were employed, but not always full-time or well-paid. This can be considered as a crucial part of financial stability for women who rely on their earnings in an environment where the gender pay gap continues. Women's economic marginality and dependency on government handouts shows that working doesn't guarantee financial freedom.

Those who live alone have been viewed as 'in a strikingly isolated, lonely, and consequently vulnerable circumstance.' But the interviewees reported that living alone was a wonderful experience and, in some cases, a source of great joy. Overwhelmingly, most women surveyed said they preferred living alone and had no immediate plans. Over the last two decades, the percentage of Westerners living alone has climbed dramatically, and current projections anticipate the number of single-person homes will reach 35% in 2015. According to recent studies, the rise in the number of people living alone can be attributed to both demographic changes and a shift in that predisposition.
Women caring for both parents and children had made crucial decisions, such as where to live and how often they worked, to meet their obligations. A number of the women's acts hinted that they had paid a high price for their caregiving responsibilities, but they were never explicitly stated. Most of the women who had taken care of their parents spoke highly of their readiness to do so and their joy in doing so. Because motherhood is seen as a normal part of femininity, it may not be subjected to the same scrutiny as a spinster's connection with her elderly parents, which explains why participants who were mothers did not talk about their children's care in terms of joy and willingness. Sharing a home, especially with one's parents, was often portrayed as a 'defensive' experience, focusing on reciprocity and maintaining one's independence.

According to the findings, some single women went above and above in their efforts to help their parents out of love and a sense of obligation. The interviews also show how women's lives are shaped by their efforts to provide care for others. Choices on where to live, how much time to work, and whether to 'wait' other plans like traveling or moving abroad were all tied to the participants' feelings of responsibility to their parents. On the other hand, taking care of aging parents was not seen as a hardship, and in some cases, it was seen as a pleasure.

It's easy to see how women's lives are affected by their "caring" roles, as demonstrated by the seven mothers who participated in this study. Most parents were or were taking care of the bulk of their children. As a result, two moms with pre-school-aged children used a mix of professional and informal childcare, while one child's father also provided occasional support. Aside from one mother, all the other mothers worked part-time or occasionally in casual occupations while caring for their children.

The results of the interviews show that not only does marital status affect expectations of family caregiving, but so does gender. Participants differed greatly in how they cared for their parents if they had siblings and felt that their unmarried status and/or sex was significant in molding who cared for their parents. According to several participants, unmarried children were expected to take care of their parents. As an unmarried, childless daughter, some people had this expectation in mind. Several interviewees said they felt pressured to care for their parents since they were single.

Feminist scholarship has focused on the latent power imbalances within an ideologically enthroned family. Others reject the idea that families provide moral and financial support; rather, these interviews back feminist perspectives on social and economic disparities linked to families. Some examples in the literature show that women have cut off all ties to their families of origin. Still, their reports show that this was not a decision taken lightly and was seen more as a necessary response to an unworkable family environment. Many of these women's freedom is due to societal changes, such as greater engagement in the workforce and a more generous assistance system. Various settings, such as gendered expectations, familial ties, and the material possibilities available, shape the 'choices' that individuals can make, as shown in these interviews.

This study investigates single women's roles as daughters and mothers to analyse assertions about growing individuality and current changes in familial and societal ties. People's choice for independence and autonomy over marriage and parenthood has been seen as a "family decline." Increasing single living or remaining unmarried is perceived as a loss in commitment and obligation to others, with severe social implications.

According to this study's findings, contemporary spinsters are more than happy to take on the
responsibility of caring for their parents and young children. There is no evidence of a decrease in people's commitment to others, but rather an increase in how caring interactions are carried out. It's impossible to adequately account for the practises and meanings of the various interpersonal connections in which individuals may be embedded if one focuses solely on these interactions. Caring practises of spinsters as daughters and mothers challenge notions about traditional family hegemony and declining commitment and obligation to others due to sociological and cultural changes in contemporary Western societies today.

Instead of predicting the demise of the nuclear family, this study shows that people can continue to 'build' close relationships, as evidenced by the women who chose to become mothers and the women who elected to limit contact with their extended families. In the concept of 'families of choice,' people can also opt out of long-term partnerships. Caring obligations and duties may be increasingly subject to negotiation, but they do not change unpredictably. Some women may have more alternatives now that society has changed, but such options are not unrestricted or unimportant. According to Jamieson's theory, a person's relationships are not often influenced solely by what they find pleasurable.

This study supports a contextual view of 'choice'; social ties are modified by gender, and women are positioned differently in the material, social, and emotional spheres. Many research have studied gendered moral understandings in care responsibilities. This research reveals that gender and partnership status affect family expectations regarding caring. Historically, spinsters couldn't 'balance' spouse and child needs with family duties. According to author interviews, spinsters are expected to care for their ageing parents. Thus, decisions are impacted by expectations.

Individualism's impact on personal relationships is challenged by the caregiving responsibilities performed by contemporary spinsters in this study. Research reveals that the individuality model on which these are founded may be fundamentally flawed. For women, the role of caring cannot be well explained by Giddens' image of the personal realm as emancipated from the requirements of reproduction and kinship and adults opting to continue relationships only if they remain individually advantageous. However, early work seemed to "equate processes of individualization with the abandoning of ethics and unbridled self-interest," which has sought to dispel in more recent work. Studying spinsters as moms and daughters reveals a more interdependent notion of the individual that "may require a more relational sense of self, that understands personhood as intimately bound up with others," according to this research.

**Conclusion**

Women's social connections benefit from the concept of relational autonomy, according to this study. As a result of this research on contemporary spinsters' familial ties, it is clear that an ethical framework that incorporates both care and justice is essential if people are seen as interdependent and interconnected. The preservation of particular interpersonal ties, regardless of the consequences to the women involved, must also be questioned as part of this process. Increasing educational and employment prospects for women in modern western nations have freed many women from the shackles of unhealthy romantic relationships. The earlier empirical study suggests that modern single women strive to strike a balance between their want for intimacy and their demand for independence by forming symmetrical connections, "not as lonely heroes of their own lives but in interaction with others."
References


