



RESEARCH PAPER

**Satisfaction and Freedom: A Psychological Feminist Study of Mohsin
Hamid's "Exit West"**

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ABSTRACT

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The present study aims at examining the issue of satisfaction and freedom through the Psychological feminist study of Mohsin Hamid's (2017) *Exit West* under the theoretical framework of Karen Horney's (1950) "Neurosis and Human Growth; The Struggle Towards Self-Realization". The purpose of this research study is to identify the elements of satisfaction and freedom that effect the psychology of women. Horney's (2013) neurotic theory established the path for the analyzation of such type of elements. The study examines the impact factor of satisfaction and freedom on the life of one of the main characters of the novel named as Nadia. It focused on the issues like Nadia's separation from her boyfriend Saeed, how she develops an understanding of herself by freedom phenomenon and what are the important points of this study that highlighted the psyche of Nadia. The research inspects how these issues paved their ways in the psyche of a girl since her childhood. The study is based on qualitative paradigm of research which supports the reasons, and findings that are examined with the help of psychological feminist theory.

Introduction

Psychological feministic theory focused on social structures as how it affected the role of gender in the individual's life. The main aspect of this theory is to develop an understanding of an individual on political and social platforms. According to a current research basically psychological feminist study is about the emotional state of a female, the state through which she is culturally controlled by the societal rules. In

her *Relational Cultural Theory*, Miller's (1976) said that during growth fostering, human necessities and disconnections are the main reasons of psychological problems.

Since the birth, some stereotypes are fixed for the women. And they are indoctrinated in their minds and if they are failed to follow them, they face sanctioned. There is a need to develop and understanding regarding to these stereotypes that how they are hitting their mental health.

In her work Horney (1950) said that anxiety of women could be due to number of situations, like lack of respect and guidance during childhood, too much or lack of admiration, hostile atmosphere, and disagreement with parents, lack of warmth and isolation, and list is so long.

In short, this study is based on viewing an individual according to her sociocultural context. And the problems women are facing due to their social structure in which they live. The goal of this theory is to re-value their perspectives and also self-define their roles.

Hamid's (2017) *Exit West*, examines the same problems like changing in the behavior of a female character, under the context of psychological feminism. The study analyzed that how work shows the struggle of a woman to understand herself by facing her harsh surroundings. For the explanations that how these reasons occurred, Horney (1950) presented neurotic theory. Her theory cope with an anxiety caused by interpersonal relations. The study shows that women can claim for the satisfactory conditions and for their freedom selection.

The research investigated the conditions in which Nadia, main character in the novel, tries to stable herself by choosing freedom and by recognizing her personal self, under the theoretical framework of Karen Horney's (1950) "*Neurosis and Human Growth; The Struggle Towards Self-Realization*". The study objectified by investigating the psyche of a woman impacting her whole life since from her childhood. And also investigates that how her important decisions of life depending on such type of impacting factors.

Literature Review

A series of the investigations can be seen on the subject of the sensitive issues of the women and this popular narrative may be diverse in its expressions under the frame work of Horney's (1950) "*Neurosis and Human Growth; The Struggle Towards Self-Realization*". According to a Journal:

Previously Pakistani fiction always shows some oppressed women due to male dominance but now their focus changed. Today they are showing a confident and independent female character in their works. They are showing liberal feminism with modernism. And impact of this theory in the Islamic society. Westernization also has a very dominant influence on the mind and life of people. Even media is also presenting it in a very glittery form that no one can escape from it. Its impact on Nadia,

in the novel, in such a way that it lost her all relations gradually. (Kayani, T., Mubarik, M., & Butt, H. M. (2020).

Another writer, Zaman (2017) argued that the cultural background in which she is located, Nadia presenting a utopian female character. She left home and in a society argumentative to women's independence. Nadia exemplifies Hamid's recognition of the inner lives that women lead within the holy space of private apartments. She is rebellious in the face of the acquiescence her society demands of her, creating a space for herself. She is better equipped to cross lines, and continues to do so as she moves through doors and refugee camps. Compared to Saeed, she has an easier time on her own, making new connections. Hamid writes that "Nadia had long been, and would afterwards continue to be, more comfortable with all varieties of movement in her life than was Saeed, in whom the impulse of nostalgia was stronger, perhaps because his childhood has been more idyllic, or perhaps because this was simply his temperament." (Hamid, 2017) Nadia's knowledge of life as another gives her a deeper capacity for survival and empathy. Comfort is not a state she has known, so she can handle discomfort much more productively than Saeed. Her past gives her the ability to move beyond it, forming new communities and ways of being.

Altman (2004) said that from the last few eras, females are showing struggles that they are not submissive and docile. But on the other hand they are energetic, strong, self-reliant and self-motivated in every walk of life. And for this purpose, it's not a big deal for them to go abroad.

According to Butler (1990, 1996), In today's world, women are entering in the fields that are linking with men, such as police-officer, lawyer, banker, bureaucrat and many more. This attempt has changed the function and position of women throughout the world. They are firming their self-defined roles and have not restricted themselves to the fixed binary-relations to a certain degree that they are accepted based on performative identity. Butler (1990, 1996), is a postmodern writer. He is very much inspired by the Derrida's theory of deconstruction and denies the conventional roles assigned to male and female. She said that identity is not a fixed or constant phenomenon. believes that identity is not fixed and constant but is unnaturally formed by diverse cross-cultural interaction and social influences.

A number of Pakistani fictions are written with the topics of cultural and societal shifts. And these fictions are mostly pointing out, the shifts, in the life of females that belong to elite class. They are both educated and under the influence of western civilization due to their abroad educational level. (Safdar, 2018). He said that they are not accepting the taboos of Muslim-families. They want to spent a life without limited boundaries.

Hamid (2017) is an eminent Pakistani novelist. He has won many international awards for his emotive writing. His works depicts the portray of identity crises, war system, changing behaviors, loneliness, militants, terrorism, relationships of male and female which offers new visions of changeability in their traditional roles.

In Spender's (1980) words females will no more be poorer and musses. As the character in the novel *Exit West*, Nadia breaks the cultural norms and takes the dominancy in resist leading a married life free from boundaries as a wife and mother, even her own name, Nadia, is standing without any sir-name throughout the novel. This indicates her freedom and cultural-shift as no father's name or husband's name is attached to it.

In her famous work, Lakoff (2004) writes that sir-name is the most important part in the life of a women. Without it they have no identity and with it, a female can rely on a male as a father, brother or a husband. If she does not have these relations she can't sustain any position in the cruel world. But in the case of Nadia's role, she decides to construct her new and independent identity without any support from her father or husband.

Hamid (2017) describes an independent female character in his work who is struggling for the independent life. Since from her childhood, she is a stubborn nature. She has no good attachment with her family. She is taking the decisions in which she feels satisfaction without the interference of any other being. She wants to be dominate. Her such type of condition is due to the mental set up in which she raised and after her connection with Saeed, the conditions she is facing. Pakistani literature is backed with such type of so many examples.

The psychological feminist study has the ability to raise the voice and awareness related to such type of issues confronted by the females. And in the work, *Exit West*, Hamid (2017) represents these dogmas through the character of, Nadia.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is depending upon the model of Horney's (1950) "Neurosis and Human Growth; The Struggle Towards Self-Realization", discussed with perspective of psychological feminist theory. The theory is relevant to the idea of certain behavioral issues of a person due to psychological disturbance. It is centered on social structure and gender. Feminist psychology is oriented on the values and principles of feminism. It shows the way people identify their gender have been affected by societal structures relating to gender. The main objective behind this study is to understand the individual within the larger social and political aspects of society. Feminist psychology places a strong emphasis on women's rights. She discusses the neurotic process as a special form of the human development, the antithesis of healthy growth. She unfolds the different stages of this situation, describing neurotic claims, the tyranny or inner dictates and the neurotic's solutions for relieving the tensions of conflict in such emotional attitudes as domination, self-effacement, dependency, or resignation. Throughout, she outlines with penetrating insight the forces that work for and against the person's realization of his or her potentialities. (1950)

Horney (1950) is the prominent vocal sound in this field of study. In her work, "Neurosis and Human Growth; The Struggle Towards Self-Realization", she assumed that neurosis resulted from basic concern caused by interpersonal relationships.

The study covers the issue of psychological feminist study of Hamid's (2017) *Exit West* under the theoretical framework of Karen Horney's (1950) "Neurosis and Human Growth; The Struggle Towards Self-Realization". It advocates new style of thinking about the psychology of a female on deeper level. Horney (1950) introduced approximately ten neurotic needs that put impact upon female psyche and divided them into three basic categories:

1. **Needs that move you towards others:** These needs grounds persons to pursue affirmation and acceptance from others. They behaved as needy or clingy for the approval and love.
2. **Needs that move you away from others:** These needs create hostility and antisocial behavior. It happened mostly due to take sides in parental disagreements, isolation from other children these individuals are often labelled as cold and detached.
3. **Needs that move you against others:** These needs result due to opposition and to control other people. These individuals are often described as difficult and unkind.

Her theory about neuroticism is not considered as a mental health diagnosis. For the investigation of this aspect of personality neurotic behaviors often paint as peculiar and cute, neurosis may play a role in mood and anxiety problems.

By Recognizing your own neurotic tendencies can help you better understand your own behavior your own self. By addressing these issues, people can often improve their overall mental health and wellness. Researchers have found that mindfulness, or being aware of your own thoughts, might be a useful approach for combating neurotic, negative thoughts that contribute to worry, anxiety,¹ and relationship problems.

According to Horney (1950) Well-adjusted persons employ all three of the above strategies shifting focus depending on internal and external factors. So it is the overuse of one or more of these interpersonal styles. Horney's (1950) theorization has a worthy place for the validity of this research.

Material and Methods

The research study follows a qualitative paradigm. It analyses the data based on the themes of freedom and satisfaction, through the psychological feminist study of *Exit West*. The research helps the researchers to examine in the relevance of manner. The study analyzed by using online journals, books and articles. For this purpose, a number of concerned works and other sources have been engaged. As a sample, those lines are selected from the novel that best describes the idea of independency and satisfaction, for the investigation of research. The process of data collecting techniques focused on four steps, carefully and comprehensive reading, note taking, interpreting and categorizing.

The researcher read the Hamid's (2017) novel, *Exit West*, carefully and comprehensively. For the reliability, she read and reread the novel for better understanding. After the collection of data, it is interpreted by using psychological feminist theory.

The study aims to raise the awareness about the psychological issue of women just like satisfaction and freedom. It provides the opportunity to study female issues in diverse form.

Analysis

The study focused on highlighting feminist psychology depicted in the selected novel. It shows that how the phase had an impact on the life of woman present in the novel, *Exit West*. The basic focus of the investigation is on the character of Nadia. Feminist psychology, is a form of psychology centered on societal structures, and gender. It critiques the fact that historically psychological research has been done from a male perspective with the view that males are the norm. Feminist psychology is oriented on the values and principles of feminism. It incorporates gender and the ways women are affected by issues resulting from it.

That narrative initiated with the central character, Nadia, Nadia is one of a free-spirited and rebellious woman who praises immigration as a journey to a new life. She grows up with a family that doesn't understand her and criticizes her snooping nature. So as an unmarried woman, after leaving home, she faces a life that operates within a constant threat of violence and censure. Nadia develops a tough and cold nature in order to keep herself safe, symbolized by her black robe. She doesn't lose as much as Saeed when she leaves her home country for Mykonos.

Due to her lack of sense of belonging in her country, she approaches every place on her journey as somewhere with an opportunity to find people to connect with. Once the Mykonos girl shows her kindness, Nadia pursues a friendship. She opts to attend the elder's council, the lifeblood of the London house, so that she can understand the people she's living with. In Marin, Nadia has the space to discover herself, as symbolized by her realizing her bisexuality. Nadia has never shied away from sex, but the freedom to meet new people from different cultures allows her to expand her understanding of herself.

She left Saeed because outside the context of their country, his slightly conservative nature reminds her too much of what she enthusiastically left behind. She feels attracted to Saeed during their first date when he talks about wanting to visit Chile, which Nadia interprets to mean he has an adventurous spirit. She then feels secure in their relationship when he accompanies her to her cousin's grave and prays while allowing her a moment of secular mourning, revealing that he respects her lack of religious beliefs. Because he respects her desires, need for independence, and her atheism, Saeed originally appears extremely progressive to Nadia. However, after they leave their country, Saeed's need for familiarity in the form of religion starts to stifle her, albeit unintentionally. When Saeed tells her she can't stand in the hallway

with a towel on their first day at the London house, she immediately interprets his words as him trying to control her or critique her lack of modesty. She begins to think of Saeed's religiousness as a "rebuke," not because Saeed has tried to force religion upon her but because of the way it reminds her of the rebukes of her youth.

According to Horney (1950) ten steps of neurosis theory, one step is that the neurotic need for a partner who will take over one's life, is applying on the character of Nadia. Since from her childhood she faced a very restricted sort of environment. She is not very much touched about her family. So when she met Saeed, she felt some kind of security, sense of satisfaction and liberal thoughts in his behavior. Because he respects her desires and her independent nature.

This opening passage, with its mixture of intimacy and detachment, in many ways sets the tone for the novel. It is a novel that talks about big, global disruptions, while also examining one intimate domestic relationship – that of Saeed and Nadia – up close". (p.1)

According to the second step, the neurotic needs to exploit others, this idea is very much applying on the character of Nadia, she is with Saeed to satisfy her own needs. He has all the qualities that a woman notices in a man. And the other thing is that, Saeed, wants to marry her, but she refused to do so, due to some reasons. These reasons are actually related to her mental state, that she wants freedom. She knows that by marrying a man she would be bound to fulfill her desires or lose her freedom. "He was an independent-minded, grown man, unmarried, with a decent post and a good education" (p.8).

According to the third step of neurotic theory, the neurotic need for personal achievements, by using this Horney (1950) said that some people try to push themselves to achieve greater things as a result of basic insecurity. These types of people have some fear of failure and feel a constant need to accomplish more than other people and to top even their own earlier successes.

The same thing is happening in the novel, since from her childhood Nadia wants to achieve personal freedom. Due to her own insecurities, throughout the novel she is choosing all sorts of conditions as an opportunity of new life. "She wants to be dominated in every matter. She had a job at an insurance company, and she was determined to survive, and so she did" (p.18). She also took the decision to move away from home without marriage. And it's a very controversial statement among the family members.

There was no physical violence in Nadia's home, and much giving to charity, but when after finishing university Nadia announced, to her family's utter horror, and to her own surprise for she had not planned to say it, that she was moving out on her own, an unmarried woman, the break involved hard words on all sides, from her father, from her mother, even more so from her sister, and perhaps most of all from Nadia herself, such that Nadia and her family both considered her thereafter to be without a family, something all of them, all four, for the rest of their lives, regretted, but which none of them would ever act to repair, partly out of

stubbornness, partly out of bafflement at how to go about doing so, and partly because the impending descent of their city into the abyss would come before they realized that they had lost the chance. (p.18)

So the fourth step of Horney (1950) neurotic theory, the neurotic need for self-sufficiency and independence is also present in the character of Nadia. These individuals exhibit a "loner" mentality, distancing themselves from others in order to avoid being tied down or dependent upon other people. She left Saeed due to his slightly conservative nature which she left behind. She just feeling security in his because he respects her desires and her independence. Saeed originally appears extremely progressive to Nadia.

So, the whole study showed the psychological instability of a female charter. According to neurosis theory, these types of tendencies can help a person to better understand his or her own tendencies. So same is the case for Nadia, the freedom to meet new people from different cultures allows her to expand her understanding of herself.

Conclusion

The analysis shows that the story was stunningly assembled. The painting description of Nadia's life portrayed the impact factors of psychological feminist study. Throughout the novel, she is just struggling for achieving the freedom and sense of satisfaction. Wherever she gone, she took her journey as a form of opportunity of knowing herself. Hamid (2017) *Exit West*, shows the struggle of a girl, developing understanding by her own self.

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