Volume 17 Issue 19
Originally issued as C3



Global Journal of human-social science: C
Sociology & Culture
Volume 17 Issue 3 Version 1.0 Year 2017
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Does Happiness have a Gendered Face?

By Tanzina Choudhury
Shahjalal University of Science and Technology

Abstract- This article examines whether gendered identities have an impact on men's and women's perceptions regarding the concepts 'happiness' and 'unhappiness'. In other words: whether happiness or unhappiness carry different meaning for the people of different gender categories. In investigating this question, the paper draws on narratives of 63 male and female participants alongside ethnographic observations. The study was conducted in Sylhet, Bangladesh and evaluates these accounts in the context of existing social science literature. This study reveals that the participants' happiness is inextricably linked with their gendered identities. Women in most cases appear to define happiness in terms of their children's and family's wellbeing. However, this of course cannot be said about the male participants. Happiness for the male participants were more closely associated with their material pursuits and the ability to uphold their image as a 'real man'. This study argues that the processes of gendering, cultural values of Bangladeshi society and social expectations lead men and women to define their happiness in gender - specific ways.

Keywords: *men, women, happiness, unhappiness, gender, culture.*

GJHSS-C Classification: *FOR Code: 130308*



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



© 2017. Tanzina Choudhury. This is a research/review paper, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License http://creative commons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/), permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Does Happiness have a Gendered Face?

Tanzina Choudhury

Abstract- This article examines whether gendered identities have an impact on men's and women's perceptions regarding the concepts 'happiness' and 'unhappiness'. In other words: whether happiness or unhappiness carry different meaning for the people of different gender categories. In investigating this question, the paper draws on narratives of 63 male and female participants alongside ethnographic observations. The study was conducted in Sylhet, Bangladesh and evaluates these accounts in the context of existing social science literature. This study reveals that the participants' happiness is inextricably linked with their gendered identities. Women in most cases appear to define happiness in terms of their children's and family's wellbeing. However, this of course cannot be said about the male participants. Happiness for the male participants were more closely associated with their material pursuits and the ability to uphold their image as a 'real man'. This study argues that the processes of gendering, cultural values of Bangladeshi society and social expectations lead men and women to define their happiness in gender-specific ways.

Keywords: men, women, happiness, unhappiness, gender, culture.

I. Introduction and Context of the Study

What makes a person happy? This question hardly has a straightforward answer, partly because different disciplines explain it from dissimilar perspectives; and partly because it seems to have a relationship with a variety of issues of a person's life and in the society within which (s)he lives. In recent decades studies related to people's happiness received much importance from psychology, sociology, economics and other disciplines (Veenhoven 1991). The studies revealed dissimilar sources of happiness, and therefore most of the studies agreed to the fact that happiness in general are determined by multifarious factors and it is not easy to identify a particular element as the source of happiness. In this article I use the terms happiness, life satisfaction, wellbeing and subjective wellbeing interchangeably. Veenhoven (2008) perceives happiness as a subjective state of mind. According to Veenhoven (1991) if a person possesses more favourable attitude towards the overall quality of his or her life then the person may perceive him/herself happy; while a person may not feel happy even in a standard situation if (s)he does not like the life or requires more to claim himself or herself happy. Easterlin (2001) maintains although individuals are free to define happiness in their own terms, in most cases it has been observed that there are a few things which largely determine and shape people's happiness. Economists, even a couple of decades ago, tended to pay substantial emphasis on income as the main source of happiness. Correspondingly, unemployment has been identified as a major source of unhappiness in many studies (Oswald 1997). More recent studies conducted by economists, however, demonstrate that an increase in one's income does not automatically escalate a person's happiness. Rather, they go on to say that there are many other factors at play and these factors also need closer inspection to understand the inner dynamics (Easterlin1995 and 2001).It has also been documented by studies that gender difference may serve as an important aspect and accordingly men and women may find happiness in dissimilar sources (Argyle 1987).

In this study my aim is to facilitate, through gender analysis, a greater understanding of men's and women's perspectives regarding happiness and unhappiness in the context of Sylhet, Bangladesh. Although globally happiness studies have managed to draw immense attention among scholars, there has not been a great deal of work published in this field pertaining specifically to happiness in less developed countries. This is especially true for Bangladesh. There are many studies conducted in Bangladesh - widely discussing women's paid employment and its impact on their status (e.g., Kibria 1995, Kabeer 1997 and 2000, Haque and Kusakabe 2005, Zaman 2001, Zohir and Yunus 2000, Salway et al. 2003, Salway et al. 2005). Some of these studies (e.g., Haque and Kusakabe 2005, Kibria 1995, Kabeer 1997 and 2000) also mentioned how women's paid employment and corresponding men's unemployment influence women's wellbeing negatively, how domestic violence lessens women's satisfaction and how cultural values of the society put constraints on women to uphold their wellbeing. Nevertheless there was a dearth of information regarding gender based perceptions about happiness. To fill this vacuum, in this study I intend to address the questions: what are the sources of happiness for the men and women who are situated at the poorer strata of the society? Do men and women derive happiness from dissimilar sources? Do poorer women's engagement in paid employment and breadwinning role make an impact on their wellbeing? Do societal values and gendered socialisation lead women and men to derive happiness from particular

Author: Department of Sociology, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet 3114, Bangladesh.
e-mails: tchoudhurysoc@sust.edu, tanzinachoudhury@gmail.com

© 2017 Global Journals Inc. (US)

sources? To deal with these questions I use qualitative data gathered from the fieldwork conducted in Sylhet, Bangladesh. In order to explain the gender based inequality and resultant varied perceptions of men and women regarding happiness, I draw on different theoretical explanations made in existing literature.

In Bangladeshi society, gendered socialisation of boys and girls starts from birth (Chowdhury 2000). From childhood a Bangladeshi girl is trained to accept her subordinate position in society through the process of gendered socialisation. She is taught the 'feminine' virtues, for instance, tolerance, patience, devotion, submissiveness and faithfulness to fit with the societal ideal of 'perfect woman' (Chowdhury 2000; Choudhury 2014). Marriage and the issues related to marriage occupy the central position of the life of a girl since her childhood. According to Sanyal (2009), cultural practices and rubrics that govern marriage and married women's demeanor efficiently keep them (women) from achieving greater control over their lives. Nevertheless marriage continues to be the most important event in life of an overwhelming majority of women. Socialisation, education and all other important aspects of a girl's life revolves around the thoughts of marriage (Khan 1993 cited in Akmam 2004). In recent decades some transformations have been observed in parents' thought pattern regarding daughters' education and socialisation (Chowdhury 2009). It has also been observed that the gender based socialisation has made such a profound impact on girls' and women's perceptions that minor shifts in parents' worldview has yet to bring significant changes. Goldberg (1993) observes that the difference between men and women does not lie in their physiology rather women's lack of motivation to achieve success holds them back. In line with Goldberg (1993) I argue that women's socialisation process precludes them from being motivated to seek better positions with greater spirit and perseverance. Even a great majority of educated women were seen not to take their professional career seriously. Rather, both women and society tend to consider women's paid employment only an option. In this way, women continue to devalue their potential to emerge as equal contributors to society and family. A good number of educated women seemed reticent - not wishing to challenge the existing gender hierarchy and relations. If they enter into the field of paid employment, most of them concentrate in female stereotype jobs and earn 'pin money'. Cultural norms and the process of gendering in a patriarchal society seem to shape women's worldview and eventually determine their destiny both at the familial and societal levels.

As mentioned earlier, in Bangladesh marriage as an institution has been given much importance and this is especially true for women (Chowdhury 2000). A newly married woman's relationship with her husband is hierarchical and her status in marital home is very fragile. She is expected to be compliant and shape herself according to the wishes of her husband and in-laws (Gardner 2006; Sikri1999; Jha et al. 1998). In Bangladeshi society a man is expected to be the household head, breadwinner, guardian of his dependants and the decision maker of the family. Wife, on the other hand, is clearly subordinate to her husband and required to fit with the ideal of 'perfect women'- widely valued in the context of Bangladesh (Ahmed 1991, Kabeer 1991, Dube 1997).

Bangladeshi society tends to emphasise heavily on women's responsibilities as wife and mother. And subordinating their own interests to the wellbeing of their husbands and families is perceived as natural (Kabeer 1994 and 1997). Women in Bangladesh are predominantly responsible for the tasks that take place within the home. I am not suggesting that all women in Bangladesh uniformly shoulder domestic responsibilities. I do recognise that women's socioeconomic position and location play an important role in constructing their experience within the home. In concurrence with my own studies (Choudhury 2013a and 2013b), I, nevertheless, argue that an overwhelming majority of Bangladeshi women continue to bear the full burden of domestic work regardless of their location, position and involvement in the labour market.

Bangladeshi society is patrilineal and patrilocal and as mentioned earlier, here men are culturally responsible for earning an income for their family. However, in recent decades financial hardship, men's inability to run the family with single incomes, unavailability of a reliable male breadwinner and women's improved employment opportunities concurrently have contributed to a shift in existing gender role-relations in Bangladeshi society. Participant women of this study entered into the world of paid labour predominantly due to poverty. A great majority of the female participants of this study do not have a reliable man to earn a living for their family. I am not suggesting that all women want to rely on men for their upkeep and those women who want to rely on men, they do so due to the fact that they do not want to work outside. Here I am arguing that under classic patriarchy in Bangladesh men and women alike are socialised in ways that obliged many of them to continue to adhere to the orthodox values of female seclusion. Consequently, infringing the artificial boundary of men's and women's domains exerts immense social and psychological stress on them. As stated earlier, poorer women who are pushed to the labour market, generally are not deemed suitable for better paid employments. In the labour market they earn less in comparison to their male counterparts, experience different forms of exploitation and discrimination, and in the home they do the 'double shift'.

Paid employment outside the home also leaves a mixed impact upon the lives of poorer women in

© 2017 Global Journals Inc. (US)

Bangladesh (Choudhury 2013a). Given the socio-cultural discourses of *izzat* (honour) and shame, women face various obstacles while entering the labour market. Hartman (1976) argues that women's labour power does not belong to them and lack of control over their labour power is viewed by her as an important source of exploitation. In this study I also found that women are less likely to have control over their labour power. Studies (Kabeer 1997, Choudhury 2013a and 2014) revealed that women's participation in paid work in many ways contribute to their wellbeing. Conversely, my own study (Choudhury 2013b) also found that earning an income cannot be translated in more marital power. Moreover, women's earning capacity may expose them to domestic violence. It is evident from the above discussion that having a detail understanding about gender based happiness or unhappiness in the context of Bangladesh is a complex process. The article investigates this complex process in the light of the following theoretical arguments.

Studies conducted in different parts of the world reveal dissimilar findings about gender based happiness. For example: Wood, Rhodes and Whelan's (1989) meta-analysis of 93 studies, Mookherjee's (1997) study conducted in USA and the study done by Lu et al. (1997) among the Chinese community in Taiwan found that women were happier than men. Whereas, Stevenson and Wolfers' (2009) study conducted in American context reveals that despite many positive changes in women's status almost over the past four decades, women's subjective wellbeing is not improving. Rather their study reports a decline in women's wellbeing in comparison with that of men. My analysis also suggests that although there are many poorer women in Bangladesh who are the principal breadwinners of the family and able to make at least some important decisions for themselves, this scenario has not enhanced women's subjective wellbeing to a great extent. Similarly, Clisby and Holdsworh (2014) put forward the argument that the process of gendering of women can and do have an important impact on women's mental wellbeing and this in turn influences women's 'choices, opportunities and constrains'. Clisby and Holdsworh (2014:5) explain mental wellbeing as a state that 'includes a broad range of mental health issues, such as low self-esteem, lack of confidence, feelings of low self-worth, anxiety and depression'. Lu and Shih's (1997) research on Taiwanese people also supported this contention. In their study they demonstrated that women's happiness mostly emanates from harmonious relationship with their near and dear ones. Men, on the other hand, find happiness from material pursuits and career success. In line with Stevenson and Wolfers (2009), in this study I also argue that change in women's market position has not automatically promoted their wellbeing and there is a large gap still exists between the genders regarding this matter.

Clisby and Holdsworth (2014) though captured the scenario of the process of gendering of men and women in the British contexts, the situation of my participants fit with their explanation of the dissimilar process of gendering. Drawing on Clisby and Holdsworth (2014), I contest in societies where male domination is persuasive, gender based inequality is nothing but natural and cultural values are in favour of hierarchical relations between men and women, in such societies women's wellbeing will suffer to a great extent. Similar to Clisby and Holdsworth (2014), Ialso contend that women's lower mental wellbeing effectively put constraints on them to avail different opportunities open to them, hold them back to make choices more freely and reduce their appetite to strive for the best for themselves.

Mencarini and Sironi (2012) argue that unequal gender division of labour in the household has a profound impact on a woman's personal wellbeing. In line with them I also argue that Bangladeshi women's position appears to fit with this explanation as in Bangladesh the divisions of labour along gender lines is paramount both within and outside the home (also see Choudhury 2013a; 2013b and 2014). And this gender based division of labour places extra burden on women. Vyas and Wats (2009) maintain when women take paid employment outside the home, they may experience some positive changes in their households. However, women's access to an income and ability to make decisions about important issues of their life may have a negative impact on their conjugal relationship. As mentioned earlier, the hierarchical gender relations and patriarchal societal values in Bangladesh seem not to promote women's individualism even when they make visible contributions to the household. Rather on many occasions they encounter the wrath of their husbands who consider their income earning ability as a threat to their masculine identity. I contest in order to escape masculine domination and domestic violence many women downplay their economic role and this in turn reduces their wellbeing.

II. Methodology

This research is based on ethnographic observation, life history interviews with 43 female participants and in-depth interviews with 20 male participants. The data were collected in Sylhet, Bangladesh in 2010-2012 and a follow-up in 2017.My female participants were involved in construction work in Sylhet, Bangladesh and male participants were either involved in construction work directly or familiar with construction work via their wives. My female participants' marital status varies: they were married, widowed, separated, deserted by husbands and a few

© 2017 Global Journals Inc. (US)

of them were in a second marriage following divorce. Accounts of both male and female participants were included in the analyses to capture a broader picture of men's and women's perceptions regarding happiness. Incorporating participants of both genders allows us to compare and contrast men's and women's perspectives. In addition, inclusion of both husband and wife means in some cases husbands' accounts corroborate those of their wives and the vice-versa. The sample was purposively selected from three different congregation points of construction workers in Sylhet, Bangladesh. The sample was only limited to construction workers and husbands of female construction workers, majority of whom are also employed in other labour intensive work and the result cannot be generalised to other classes. My female participants range in age from 21 to 56 and male participants from 17 to 56. Among the female participants 41 of them had at least 1 child when they were interviewed.

Men and women alike the participants of this study were from the poorer strata of the society and female participants were engaged with manual labour that are designated as 'unskilled'. A great majority of the female participants were unschooled. However, all my participants were one way or another constrained by their socioeconomic and educational capital to find a better position for themselves in the society. The life history interviews with female participants lasted from 7-8 hours over several sessions and in-depth interviews with male participants lasted from 11/2 to 2 hours in single sessions. The interviews were audio recorded with their informed consent and transcribed later.

Happiness and unhappiness: the male perspective

As mentioned before, my male participants were either construction workers or well informed about construction work through their wives. The construction sector in Bangladesh is overwhelmingly male dominated and hierarchical on the basis of gender (Choudhury 2013a).Accordingly, being familiar with construction work as workers and being acquainted as husbands of female construction workers carry different meaning for the male participants. Again, male participants' position in the construction labour market also has an important impact in shaping their experience and perceptions. Although in this study I found that there were a few common sources of happiness for all male participants, it has also been observed that there were some other sources which were closely related to the personal circumstances of the participants. For example, participants who were working as *rajmistris*[1] they earned as much as 700 tk. (approximately £7) a day. Among the construction sector workers they are considered to be the most successful. Their relative higher income gives them an edge to spend little more money in comparison to other male workers who were working as *jogalis*[2] in the construction sector. J*ogalis* generally earn 450 tk. (approximately £4.5) to 500 tk a day. *Rajmistris* wear better clothes in comparison to *beta jogalis*[3]. They (*Rajmistris)* often spend money on ready food, buy tea and tobacco for themselves from the shops near to the construction sites. Sometimes they even treat their 'favourite' co-workers with, tea, juice, biscuits and snacks. In this way *rajmistris* demonstrate their affluence and derive some satisfaction that they are certainly better off than their female and also some of the male co-workers.

All my participant *rajmistris* were able to discharge the culturally prescribed masculine responsibility of providing for their dependants and keeping their wives from entering into the labour market; while in most cases construction sector helpers were not able to do so. Emerging as a successful breadwinner was also a matter of pride and happiness for the *rajmistris. These rajmistris'* ability to discharge provisioning role also serves to entrench their power base within the home. Monzurul, Bazlu, Mahbub and all other *rajmistris* were happily mentioned that their wives required to follow their instructions as they are getting their wives food and other necessary household items at home. All of them were able to make significant changes in their material condition in terms of buying a piece of land, renovating their old houses or constructing a new house in their place of origin and making small investments in local business. Their children of school going age were attending school and these men possessed high aspirations for their children. None of them wanted their children to work in the construction sector. These men appeared to receive greater recognition from their family and friends. Similar to Lu and Shih (1997), in this study I also found that access to resources and success in career contributed to my participant *rajmistris* happiness.

Male construction sector helpers, who required their wives' income to run the household and thereby indorsed their wives' paid employment outside the home, consider it a laceration on their identity as 'men' (Choudhury 2013a). Since the childhood they heard numerous gender biased discourses, for example, women should stay at home and men should deal with the activities that take place outside the home, women of *izzatdar* (respectable) families do not work outside the home and so on. Through the process of gendering these men internalised men's and women's dissimilar roles and responsibilities in the society. Their inability to adhere to these esteemed cultural practices of the society thought to discredit them as men both in family and wider society and also exposes them to potential

[1] Head construction workers/masons

[2] Construction sector helpers

[3] Male construction sector helpers

© 2017 Global Journals Inc. (US)

challenges from their wives. And this concomitantly contributes to men's unhappiness.

From the above discussion we see my male participants appeared to derive happiness from different sources, yet, they all were seen to be very happy to be 'men' in Bangladeshi context. I am not suggesting that all men are uniformly more powerful than women in Bangladesh; what I am trying to say that the local gender discourses award men greater control both in the private and public spheres. The existing belief of male pre-eminence in the society, assigns them such a higher status that regardless of their personal circumstances, men (and also women) tend to believe that they (men) are superior as a gender. It has been observed that using this societal discourse of male supremacy, male construction sector helpers get higher wages than female construction sector helpers (Choudhury 2013a). It has also been observed that the discriminatory practice of receiving differential wages on the basis of gender has far reaching implications on the lives of both men and women. Whist wage discrimination in the labour market constitutes the basis of satisfaction for many of my male participants, it effectively weakens many female construction workers' confidence and motivation as workers and dwindle their self-esteem as equally competent contributors to their households in particular and society in general. The worldview of men of being superior to women though may increase their satisfaction, my analysis suggests that it efficiently limits the wellbeing of the women of their immediate surroundings – for instance - wives, other female family members and female co-workers.

III. Happiness and Unhappiness for Women

As stated earlier, at present a great majority of women in Bangladeshi society cannot afford to conform to the archetype of 'ideal women' by staying at home as they require to earn an income for their family. Inability/unwillingness on the part of the husbands to provide for wives and children has accelerated the need for married women to take paid employment in the public sphere. Although these women's entry into paid employment in most cases was the upshot of men's actions (e.g., lack of effort to earn a living for the family, physical illness), both men and women suffer alike from the psychological pressure when they cannot comply with the cherished age-old gender roles(Choudhury 2013a).Female construction workers work in both public and private places, and also routinely mingle with non-kin men for work purpose which are inconsistent with the feminine norms in the context of Bangladesh. My participants, Jahela, Rokeya, Rehena, Muleda and many others do not tell their extended family members and acquaintances that they work in the construction sector. Even they deliberately avoid the situations where the possibilities arise to be identified as construction workers by the networks which are not related to their work. This finding concurs with my own study (Choudhury 2013a).Morzina, one of my participants, considered herself unlucky as her husband neither made a significant financial contribution to the household nor did he possess the desire to do so. Her comment portrayed women workers' dissatisfactions:

> *I am from a religious family. My family members offer people religious education and I am working on the street. I cannot face my near and dear ones. I am ill-fated and this is why my husband is worthless. Had I been lucky, he would have taken care of me (Morzina, 32, married).*

It emerged from the narratives of my participants that women's socialisation process and the life-long training to become a 'perfect woman' in the context of Bangladesh serve as a basis for further vulnerability. It seemed that women also feel unhappy to perceive that they are contravening the social norms.

Studies (Kibria 1995; Kabeer 1997; Choudhury 2013a and 2013b; Vyas and Wats 2009) demonstrated that paid employment resulted in women's improved position in home and wider society, in this study I also found the same. In the present study I came across particular examples where women's paid employment facilitate them to actively negotiate at home and wider social contexts. However, women's ability to take advantage of their changed economic circumstances is contingent. In Bangladeshi society, the roles of married women (especially those live with husbands) as the primary breadwinner and decision maker of the household are less likely to be admired. On many occasions women deliberately restrain themselves from asserting authority at home (Kabeer 1997; Choudhury 2013b). Moreover, they tend to keep gender relations unchanged to circumvent conflicts at home. In order to keep the gender relations intact women require to compromise their own wellbeing. They work long hours on construction sites and do most of the domestic chores which reduce their leisure time substantially (see Choudhury 2013a and 2013b). Most of my participants reported that they do not find time to chat with friends or relatives, spend some time indolently, take care of their personal needs or even think about themselves. Men, conversely, did not report to experience such busy schedules at home. At home nearly all of my male participants had free time. While women were always in rush and required to discharge their responsibilities. Similar to Mencarini and Sironi (2012) I also argue that the long working hours of women both at home and workplace decline their physical and mental wellbeing.

Despite having able bodied husbands, Noorjahan, Mahmuda, Minara, Rokeya and many others performed the role of principal breadwinners of their family. Their husbands were not willing to shoulder either financial or domestic responsibilities with them.

© 2017 Global Journals Inc. (US)

Furthermore, instead of being thankful to wives for earning incomes for the family most of them were critical about their wives' paid employment and reputation as women. It emerged from the narratives of my participants that husbands' irresponsible and inconsiderate behavior/statements not only hurts women but also contributes to lessen their confidence and self-respect. My own studies (Choudhury 2013a and Choudhury 2013b) claimed that husbands' attitude matters the most to the women because they are socialised to believe that husband is the 'master' of a woman's life. Children also play an important role in constructing women's experiences. Children, those who were grown up, on many occasions reflected negatively on their mothers' work in the construction sector. Aklima, one of my elderly participants, for example, narrated that her sons were incessantly nagging that her work in the construction sector was ruining their image. However, they were reluctant to provide for her. Aklima seemed to feel very unhappy to think that her children do not care about the fact that their aged mother works hard in the construction sector to meet her needs but they care for their *izzat* in front of others. I, conversely, found that women received much appreciation from their children who were relatively young. After taking paid employment in the construction, all of the female participants were better able to support their children and themselves. They were not able to gain much material success like many of their male co-workers, yet, they were able to buy small things for their children– for example, toys, a new pair of shoes, a dress and occasionally a meal of their children's choice. Some of them were able to buy a television and other cheap consumer goods to meet the long-lasting demand of their children. Women's ability to meet the demands of their children appeared to be a great source of their satisfaction.

Similar to Lu (2000), in this study I found that the thought about children's wellbeing was at the centre of my participant women's lives. Naju, the youngest of my female participants, did not remarry despite immense pressure from her natal family and social surroundings. She knew that her second marriage would make her children more vulnerable. She did not want them to suffer, instead she struggled with two small children without receiving support from her near and dear ones. Similarly, Rina, Julfa, Firoza and many others did not remarry considering their children's wellbeing. Hasna, Mahmuda and others continued to be in an abusive relationship for the sake of their children. They thought walking out on their husbands and starting a new family would reflect negatively on their children's wellbeing. However, such concerns were not expressed by male participants. According to the law, it is mandatory on the part of husbands to get unconstrained consent of their existing wife before taking another wife. Hasna and Swapna's husbands got married without even informing them, Afia's husband got married to her hiding his first wife and children. All these stories of my participants clearly demonstrate how men's and women's perspectives differ in upholding or sacrificing their own interests and corresponding wellbeing.

Lu and Shih's (1997) study maintains that women's happiness is contingent on their relationships. Aldous and Ganey (1999) also found interpersonal relationships and marital satisfaction as important sources of women's happiness. I concur with their assertions. My participants' accounts reiterated that being in an abusive relationship lessens women's physical and mental wellbeing; whilst being in a relatively egalitarian relationship substantially improves women's wellbeing. Shaheda, Meena, Aleya, Benu, Amena, Piyara, Fuli who seemingly had better control over their conjugal relations – appeared to be more satisfied than others. It is not to say that these women did not have dissatisfaction regarding their life. They did have issues with their husbands, nevertheless, their relationships with their husbands were not as hierarchical as many other participants of this study. They were able to maneuver many, if not all, situations in their favour in the home when the need arose. I contend that this also gives women some sort of satisfaction. In the same vain, I argue that women - for instance – Mahmuda, Ranu, Aklima, Rokeya and others - who were not in good terms with their husbands appeared to be more dissatisfied with their lives. Domestic violence is inextricably linked with the lives of these women which has a direct and detrimental bearing upon their wellbeing. In this study I found that people's experiences about domestic violence varies to a large extent depending on their gendered identity. A great majority of my female participants reported to face domestic violence routinely, while none of my male participants made such claims. Even the question of encountering domestic violence did not seem pertinent to my male participants. Female participants, however, were seen to trivialise the issue of domestic violence by putting the blame on their economic condition. Sometimes they even justified domestic violence on the part of their husbands by saying 'if you keep two pots close by, they will collide' or 'it happens as men cannot keep their head cool due to different problems they face in everyday life'. Clisby and Holdsworth (2014) commented that the women of their study perceived domestic violence as a 'mundane' affair. The same assertion can be made about the female participants of this study. Rina, Hasna and many other women who were neither living with husbands nor receiving financial support from husbands, continued to encounter domestic violence committed by their husbands. For Afia, Mahmuda, Ranu, Rokeya, Coomi and many others conjugal conflict was a part and parcel of their daily life. All of these women were members of nuclear family and the violence was perpetrated exclusively by their intimate

© 2017 Global Journals Inc. (US)

partners. However, none of these women ever thought about making official complaint against their husbands. This is not the case that these women do not feel bad; they do feel bad but did not protest overtly. In line with Sarker and Yesmin (2013) I contend that the culture of acceptance of domestic violence in Bangladeshi society is pervasive. I would also argue that the socialisation of women and cultural practices of the society simultaneously inhibit women from raising voice and persuade them not to take this seriously even though it has a deleterious effect on their physical and mental wellbeing.

However, in stark contrast to these stories I also heard stories of women who uphold their self-respect by not being compliant with their abusive husbands. My participant, Razia, walked out on her abusive husband without giving it a second thought. Assia also left her abusive husband in their village home. Asma told that she would not keep quiet in case of violent behavior on the part of her husband. Another participant, Benu, had a conjugal conflict with her husband. Her husband's siblings used to set him against Benu. The conflict situation at Benu's household got worsened gradually and one day her husband left the house. After his departure, Benu found out that she was pregnant for the third time. She had two children to look after and her husband even did not know about the third baby. Benu neither tried to find her husband nor she looked back, rather she concentrated on her paid work and children. She was working irregularly at the beginning but after giving birth to the baby, she started working with full force. Her husband's patrimony was the main source of conjugal conflict. Her in-laws often blamed Benu saying that she was after her husband's patrimony. Thus, Benu was determined to achieve material success in terms of accumulating money and/or land. She wanted to show her husband and in-laws that she could do things on her own. After almost two years, Benu's husband came back to her. During this period he met an accident, had difficult times and was apologetic for his behavior, hence, Benu accepted him. Even upon his return, Benu continued to make important decisions about the household and her own life. This obviously enhanced her subjective wellbeing.

I argued in previous sections that the process of gendering shapes women's worldview and makes them feel bad if they cannot conform to the societal norms of 'stay at home wife'. However, it is not to say that all women feel the same way. There were women who did not want to rely on men. Rather they wanted to work outside the home and live their life not only to fulfill maternal and wifely responsibilities but to ful fill their own dreams and uphold self-esteem. Goldberg (1993) argues that women are behind men in terms of achievement because they lack the motivation. I contend that this is always not the case that women do not have the motivation to achieve material success in life. Benu and Fuli, two of my participants, are the glaring examples of this fact. However, it is no use denying that society does not possess high aspirations for women and this is particularly so for the poorer women. Benu's husband was able to provide for Benu and children. Likewise, Fuli's second husband was willing to support her financially. Nonetheless, they did not leave the labour market. Benu told me that her husband could only give her food and shelter, but in her opinion this was not enough. She wanted to save money for her future. Equally, Fuli was also pertinacious to save up money for future. Both Benu and Fuli had reliable men, at least their husbands verbally assured them that they would take care of their needs, but these two women did not want to relinquish their economic independence and corresponding life chances. They had access to cash income and they retained control over their incomes. Fuli had a particular plan for her future where she wanted to see herself as an independent and successful woman. Similarly, Benu wanted to be successful and accomplish more than her husband to prove her ability to her husband and in-laws. Benu and Fuli wanted to gain respect both in family and wider society and they were working hard for that. This also reflects that some women are trying and successfully infringing the indiscernible ceiling imposed on them.

Asma's mother inherited property from her parents but after their death, she lost control over the property. Asma was fighting the legal battle on her own to get back her mother's property. She had brothers but they did not have the courage to endure the lengthy, expensive and complicated legal procedures in order to get this property back. She, however, took this bold step and was going door to door to seek justice for her mother. Asma seemed to be satisfied to hear good comments made about her efforts by her neighbours and acquaintances. When people said that she was performing the role of a 'man' by confronting the influential people of society who grabbed her mother's property, she seemed to feel proud of herself. This suggests that even a brave and competent woman like Asma tends to consider that being male is equated to being superior and this precludes women from taking pride on their identity as 'woman'. I, nevertheless, argue that Asma's desire to be seen as 'superior' motivated her to strive for better things, earned her respect from others, enhanced her confidence to a great extent and contributed to her overall wellbeing.

IV. Conclusion

This paper clearly demonstrates that gender plays an important catalytic role in determining a person's source of happiness. Men in this study predominantly, if not exclusively, derived happiness from their material achievements. In the same vein,

© 2017 Global Journals Inc. (US)

men's unhappiness was also associated with their failure to emerge as successful men by earning an adequate income for their family. Poorer women's happiness, on the other hand, was dependent on a wide range of issues. In general, family continues to be the primary site of importance for women. Children's wellbeing was one of the main concerns for the overwhelming majority of my female participants. Women were seen to relinquish their personal happiness for the sake of their children's wellbeing. This study reveals that women's paid employment outside the home enhances their bargaining capacity at home to some extent but it also exposes them to many other vulnerabilities. In most cases women are the primary breadwinner and responsible for all household tasks, which curtail their free time significantly and ultimately lessen their mental and physical wellbeing. Women's satisfaction about paid employment largely depends on their family members. They seemed to feel satisfied when their sacrifices and contributions are positively valued, conversely, lack of recognition and/or criticisms seemed to make them unhappy. Women value harmonious relationships and this is particularly so with their near and dear ones. Consequently, strained and/or violent relationships with their husbands contribute to their lower self-esteem and satisfaction, and increased mental agony.

Drawing on different theoretical frameworks in this study I argue that men's and women's gendered socialisation differently shapes their worldviews and lead them to derive happiness from dissimilar sources. In this study we saw that family, children and husbands continue to get much importance in women's lives. All female participants made considerable sacrifices and adjustments for their husbands and children in different forms and at different junctures of their lives. Women throughout their lives were taught to find happiness in their family's wellbeing and a great majority of women were seen to adhere to such societal values. Men and women in Bangladeshi society learn from the beginning of their lives that it is *normal* for women to make sacrifices, to do extra work to meet their family's need and accept the pain inflicted on them without much noise. This however, was not the case for my male participants. I contend that this difference of attitude shown by men and women is rooted in the process of gendering and serves to shrink women's wellbeing.

However, it is not the case that all women uniformly sacrifice their own wellbeing in favour of children and husbands. In this study I came across women who combined their children's wellbeing and their personal satisfaction through using their agency. They did not renounce different opportunities (e.g., earning an income, retaining greater control over their lives, living on their own, getting married after divorce/desertion) came their way and endeavored to uphold their own wellbeing. Though these women are very few in number, their effort can be viewed as an indication that more and more women in future will follow in their footsteps in upholding their wellbeing and this in turn will push the persuasive gender boundary to achieve greater gender parity in various aspects of life.

Note: This paper partially draws on my PhD thesis.

References Références Referencias

1. Ahmed, A., 1991, *Women and Fertility in Bangladesh*, Sage, New Delhi.
2. Akmam, W., 2004, *Women's Participation in Higher Education and White Collar Professions in Bangladesh: Some Issues on Gender Discrimination*, Higher Education Link Program (funded by DFID and managed by British Council), Department of Sociology, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, Bangladesh.
3. Aldous, J., Ganey, R.F., 1999, Family Life and the Pursuit of Happiness – The Influence of Gender and Race, *Journal of Family Issues*, 20:155-180.
4. Argyle, M., 1987, *The psychology* of *happiness,* London, Routledge.
5. Choudhury, T., 2013a, Experiences of women as workers: A study of construction workers in Bangladesh, *Construction Management and Economics,* 31:883-898.
6. Choudhury, T., 2013b, Women within the Family: A Study of Female Construction Workers in Bangladesh, *International Journal of Social Science Tomorrow,* 2:1-10.
7. Choudhury, T., 2014, Women's Paid Employment and Intra-Household Divisions of Labour: A Study of Female Construction Workers in Bangladesh, *SUST Journal of Social Sciences*, 22:84-92.
8. Chowdhury, F.D., 2009, Theorizing Patriarchy: The Bangladesh Context, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 37:599-622.
9. Chowdhury, K.A., 2000, *Role and Status of Women: A Comparative Study Between Migrants and Non-migrants Households*, PhD thesis, University of Philippines.
10. Clisby, S.,Holdsworth, J., 2014, *Gendering Women: Identity and Mental Wellbeing Through the Life Course*, Polity Press, Bristol.
11. Easterlin, R.A., 1995, Will Rising the Incomes ofAll Will Increase the Happiness of All? *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 27:35-47.
12. Easterlin, R.A., 2001, Income and Happiness: Towards a Unified Theory, *The Economic Journal,* 111: 465-484.
13. Gardner, K., 2006, The transnational work of kinship and caring: Bengali-British marriages in historical perspective, *Global Network*, 6:373-387.
14. Goldberg, 1993, cited in Hakim, C., 1996, *Key Issues in Women's Work: Female Heterogeneity and*

© 2017 Global Journals Inc. (US)

the Polarisation of Women's Employment, Vol. 4, Athlone, London.
15. Haque, M.M., Kusakabe, K., 2005, Retrenched Men Workers in Bangladesh: A Crisis of Masculinities?, *Gender, Technology and Development,* 9:185-208.
16. Hartman, H., 1976, Capitalism, patriarchy and job segregation by sex, *Signs,* 1:137-169.
17. Jha, U.S., Mehta, A., Menon, L., 1998, *Status of Indian Women, Crisis and Conflict in Gender Issues*, Vol. 2, Female Exploitation and Women's Emancipation, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi.
18. Kabeer, N., 1991, Cultural dopes or rational fools?: women and labour supply in the Bangladesh garment industry, *European Journal of Development Research*, 3(4):133-160.
19. Kabeer, N., 1994, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought,* Verso, London.
20. Kabeer, N., 1997, Women, Wages and Intra-household Power Relations in Urban Bangladesh, *Development and Change*, 28:261-302.
21. Khan, S., 1993, *The Fifty Percent: Women in Development and Policy in Bangladesh,* The University Press limited, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
22. Kibria, N., 1995, Culture, Social Class and Income Control in the Lives of Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh, *Gender and Society*, 9:289-309.
23. Lu, L., 2000, Gender and Conjugal Differences in Happiness, *The Journal of Social Psychology,* 140: 132-141.
24. Lu, L., Shih, J.B., 1997, Sources of Happiness: A Qualitative Approach, *The Journal of Social Psychology,* 137:181-187.
25. Mencarini, L., Sironi, M., 2012, Happiness, Housework and Gender Inequality in Europe, *EUROPEAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW*,28: 203-219.
26. Mookherjee, H.N., 1997, Marital Status, Gender and Perception of Well-being, *The Journal of Social Psychology,* 137:95-105.
27. Oswald, A.J.,1997, Happiness and Economic Performance, *Economic Journal,* 107:1815-1831.
28. Salway, S., Jesmin, S., Rahman, S., 2005, Women's employment in urban Bangladesh: A challenge to gender identity?, *Development and Change,* 36:317-349.
29. Salway, S., Rahman, S.,Jesmin, S., 2003, A profile of women's work participation among the urban poor of Dhaka, *World Development*, 31: 881-901.
30. Sanyal, P., 2009, From Credit to Collective Action: The Role of Microfinance in Promoting Women's Social Capital and Normative Influence, *American Sociological Review*, 74: 529–550.
31. Sarker, N.M.,Yesmin, S., 2013, Domestic Violence in Bangladesh Analyzing from the Contemporary Peace & Conflict Perspectives, *Peace and Security Review,* 5:74-90.
32. Stevenson, B.,Wolfers, J., 2009, The Paradox of Declining Female Happiness, *IZA Discussion Paper no.4200*. Bonn, Germany.
33. Veenhoven, R., 1991, Is Happiness Relative?, *Social Indicators Research*, 24:1-34.
34. Veenhoven, R., 2008, How universal is happiness?, *MPRA Paper No. 16853, Online at http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/16853/*
35. Vyas, S., Watts, C., 2009, How Does Economic Empowerment Affect Women's Risk of Intimate Partner Violence in Low and Middle Income Countries*? A Systematic Review of Published Evidence Journal of International Development,* 21:577–602.
36. Wood,W., Rhodes, N., Whelan, M., 1989, Sex Differences in Positive Well-being: A Consideration of Emotional Style and Marital Status, *Psychological Bulletin*, 106: 249-264.
37. Zaman, H., 2001, Paid work and socio-political consciousness of garment workers in Bangladesh, *Journal of Contemporary Asia,* 31:145-160.
38. Zohir, S.C., Yunus, M., 2000, *Household Response: A Survey on Households of Female EPZ Workers in Bangladesh*, Final Report.

© 2017 Global Journals Inc. (US)