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SELF-SILENCING WITH ITS ROOTS IN AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS: A STUDY ON WOMEN

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Abstract:

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the relationship between self-silencing and automatic negative thoughts among working mothers and non-working mothers. The independent variable of the study was automatic thoughts, and the dependent variable was Self-Silencing. The interactive effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable of the study was also investigated. The mixed sample of 175 women who were both working and non-working mothers and were aged between 35-45 years was used for this study.

The data was collected through the Silencing the Self Scale and The Automatic thoughts questionnaire. The statistical analysis included correlation and regression. Results indicated that Automatic negative thoughts had a significant positive correlation with self-silencing ($r=0.380$; $p<0.01$), and automatic thoughts also predicted self-silencing, accounting for 14.0% variance in it. The results become meaningful in the context of changing scenario of modern society, particularly in India.

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1.0 Introduction:

In today's era where we are entering in a world where women empowerment has become the main objective not only in Western culture but also in India, there are still hidden psychological disturbances with which most women are dealing and need our attention. Women, whether working or non-working, often sacrifice their needs for the needs of others, repress their negative emotions or anger to avoid conflicts in an intimate relationship. Suppressing the inner feelings to please the outer world and meet the standards of a culturally defined "good woman" give rise to phenomenon like self-silencing and automatic thoughts which are usually negative which develop depression, anxiety and stress in women these days which make them vulnerable to mental, psychological, biological and emotional disturbances.

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Self-Silencing is basically a chronic state of mind where there is a habit of frequently staying silent and quiet and ignoring our needs and feelings because we think that the needs and feelings of others, whom we love and share a bond, are more important than our own (Jack 1992). The basic features of self-silencing include repressing the anger and feelings that may cause disagreement and conflict in an intimate relationship or in close interpersonal relations in the family, externalized self-perception, ignoring one's own needs, and finding oneself responsible actions of others (Canyas et al., 2013; Tan et al., 2008; Whiffen et al., 2007; Jack 1992).

Reviews suggest that women who were self-silenced had an increased risk of plaque in their carotid arteries which in turn lead to different cardiovascular diseases due to increased stress, anxiety, and depression which was concluded in a study by Karen Jakubowski (2019). She said that "Given increased public health interest in women's experiences in intimate relationships, our results suggest that women's socio-economical expression may be relevant to their cardiovascular health" (Hirsch, 2019). The accommodations of self-silencing led to negative affect or negative automatic thoughts accompanied with hostility in women after they were rejected by their partners to whom these accommodations were made (Canyas et al., 2013). In another study, it was concluded that scores on suppression of anger, externalized self-perception, care as self-sacrifice, self-silencing, and divided self was higher in women with high depression than those with low depression whereas anger-expression was higher in women with low depression than the ones with high depression (Tan et al., 2008). Self-silencing is a process that seems personal to each woman, but this process is also cultural, if observed, in-depth. Dana Jack is a professor of psychology at Western Washington University has done a pioneered research on the theory of self-silencing and also developed the Silencing The Self Silencing Scale which has been used in this study and it measures self-expression in intimate or close relationships. She defined Self-Silencing as "Repressing one's feelings when they might threaten relationship or one's security, and appearing outwardly agreeable "while inner feelings grow angry and resentful is what is meant by self-silencing. "Self-silencing had four major components which were externalized self-perception, care as self-sacrifice, silencing the self and the divided self" (Jack 1992).

Men and women hid their anger and went along with the opinions and wishes of their partner to avoid conflicts as the relationship between marital conflicts, and depressive symptoms were mediated by externalized self-perception, which was one of the facets of self-silencing (Whiffen et al., 2007). Though there are cross-cultural differences, the positive correlation between psychological disorders like stress, anxiety, depression, and self-silencing remains the same for both males and females practicing it (Gratch et al. 2006).

1.1 Automatic Thoughts:

Automatic thoughts are usually subconscious and negative, which occur due to the responses that we make in our day-to-day lives. These thoughts are usually non-meaningful or irrational, which occur without any obvious reasons, self-defeating, and may also give birth to Social Anxiety Disorder. The historical roots of Automatic negative thoughts come from the hypothesis of Beck (1976), which states that the thinking patterns or thought patterns of depressed people usually tend to be negative. He gave a cognitive triad or a negative triad which is a part of the cognitive theory of depression, and this concept is used in cognitive behavior therapy in the treatment of automatic negative thoughts. The three elements of this triad include automatic thoughts about the self, the world or environment, and the future

Some of the important characteristics of Automatic thoughts are: -

- Usually random and negative.
- These thoughts are usually unconscious or sub-conscious; they occur at instantaneous points and affect the moods, actions, and functions of an individual.

- Routinized thoughts and occur automatically without involving many cognitive efforts.
- It can occur in any form-in words, image, memory, physical sensations etc.
- Believable, and their validity is non-questionable.
- These thoughts are quite specific to us.
- These thoughts are usually persistent over time, and they interfere with our capability of forming a positive thought or lifestyle.

Reviews suggest that negative automatic thoughts gave rise to depression, anxiety, and stress (Yasemin and Zeynep, 2017; Fiske et al., 2009; Kwon & Oei, 1992; Wenzlaff et al., 1988). It is also reported that if our thoughts involve the word “should”, then we really need to focus and think about such thoughts as they may be our negative automatic thoughts which were embedded in our unconscious mind, and we may face depression, anxiety, stress if we are not able to accomplish the task or meet the standards that we set by the use of the word “should” in our thoughts or statements (Pirbaglou et al. 2013; Flett et al. 2011). We often tend to overgeneralize the things due to which we lose control over our actions and behaviors (Wenzlaff et al., 1988).

Several studies identified negative effects like stress, anxiety, depression along with disturbances in physical health due to both these variables, and they were all linked indirectly, but no research study showed the direct relationship between these two variables in women, making it is an intriguing area to work upon.

2.0 Objectives of the study:

- To investigate the relationship between self-silencing and automatic thoughts.
- To study the interactive effect of automatic thoughts in relation to Self-silencing.

3.0 Methods:

3.1 Hypothesis:

Based on the objectives of the study, the researchers have framed the following alternate hypothesis.

H1: There will be a significant relationship between self-silencing and automatic thoughts among working and non-working mothers.

H2: The independent variable of the study, which is automatic thoughts, will contribute variance in predicting the dependent variable, which is self-silencing among working and non-working mothers.

3.2 Sample of the Study:

The size of the sample was 175 (N=175). It was a mixed sample of working and non-working mothers aged between 35-45 years. They should understand English. They should have at least one child.

3.3. Procedure:

The sample is collected on the basis of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The participants were administered the psychological tools which were relevant for the purpose of the study after their consent, through both online (Google forms) and offline (pencil-paper test) sources. The statistical analysis was conducted on the collected data and the further trends were evaluated.

3.4 Tools of the Study:

3.4.1 Silencing the Self Scale (STSS) by Jack (1992):

The scale has 31 items. It is a 5-point scale with alternatives ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, and the respondent has to mark the alternative as per her agreement. Items

1,8,11,15, and 21 are reversed to control acquiescence in response sets. The scale has four dimensions - externalized self-perception, care as self-sacrifice, silencing the self, and the divided self, and the total scores give the scores for self-silencing. The possible scores range from 31 to 155. The reliability of the scale was excellent, and construct validity was established.

3.4.2 The Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ) by Philip C. Kendall and Steven D. Hollon in year 1980 Hollon and Kendal (1980):

The scale has 30 items, and it measures the frequency of negative automatic thoughts. It is a 5-point scale with alternatives ranging from not at all to all the time. The dimensions of the scale are personal maladjustment and desire for change (PMDC), negative self-concepts and negative expectations (NSNE), low self-esteem (LSE) and Helplessness. The total scores give the overall scores for automatic negative thoughts and the possible range of scores is 30 to 150. The reliability of the scale was 0.98.

3.5 Statistical techniques for data analysis:

The statistical techniques used for data analysis were:

- Product Moment Correlation
- Regression Analysis using Enter Method

3.6 Analysis of Results:

This section includes the tables and figures of the statistical techniques analysis results, which were correlation and regression using the SPSS tool. Table 1 reveals the interpretation of correlational analysis between automatic thoughts and self-silencing. Table 2 and Table 3 reveal separate multivariate analyses used to find out whether the independent variable of the study viz. ATQ predicts Self- Silencing (SS). Fig. 1 shows the research design, which is the causal research design. Table 1 shows the correlation between the independent variable viz, Automatic thoughts (ATQ) with the dependent variable Self-silencing (SS). From this table, it is apparent that Automatic thoughts (ATQ) have a significant positive relationship with self-silencing (SS).

Table 1: Bivariate Correlational Analyses showing Correlation between Independent Variable-Automatic thoughts (ATQ) with dependent variable Self-Silencing (SS)

Variable	Self Silencing
Automatic Thoughts	.380**

Source: Computed by Authors

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2: Model Summary Self Silencing (DV)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.380 ^a	.145	.140	15.1010	.145	29.250	1	173	.000

Source: Computed by Authors

a. Predictors: (Constant), ATQ

Table 3: Coefficients^a

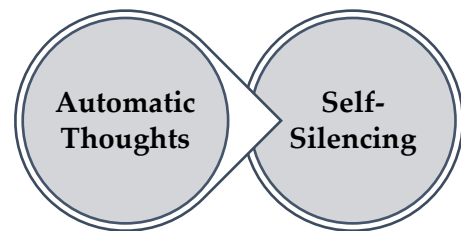
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	74.386	3.411		21.806	.000
	ATQ	.284	.053	.380	5.408	.000

Source: Computed by Authors



Table 2 and Table 3 show the result of separate multivariate analysis used to determine whether the independent variable of the study viz. ATQ predicts Self- Silencing (SS). Table 2 shows that the study's independent variable predicts 14.0% variance in Self-Silencing (SS), which is significant at 0.01 level (F= 29.250). Table 3 reveals that individually ATQ predicts Self-Silencing.

Fig. 1: Causal Research Design: Fig. 1 is indicative of a model which suggests that self-silencing can be predicted through automatic thoughts among women.



Source: Authors' perception

4.0 Discussion:

Sacrificing and keeping the needs of others before one's own needs and suffering from automatic thoughts which are negative are some of the disturbances which can be seen in women these days. They rarely reflect upon their lives for their subjective wellbeing, happiness, their own needs, interests and improvement rather devote their lives for their family. The reasons behind it includes the influence of the culture, suppression of anger, feelings and emotions in order to avoid conflicts in interpersonal relationships and meet the definitions of a culturally defined "good woman" which leads them to depression, anxiety and stress and they become more vulnerable to psychological and physiological disturbances. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between self-silencing and automatic negative thoughts among working mothers and non-working mothers. The independent variable of the study was automatic thoughts, and the dependent variable was Self-Silencing. The interactive effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable of the study was also investigated. The mixed sample of 175 women who were both working and non-working mothers was used for this study.

The first hypothesis mentioned that there would be a significant relationship between self-silencing and automatic thoughts among working and non-working mothers, and the hypothesis was accepted. Results as per Table1 indicated that Automatic thoughts have a significant positive relationship with self-silencing ($r=0.380;p<0.01$). *The second hypothesis* mentioned that the variable of the study, which is automatic thoughts, will contribute variance in predicting self-silencing among working and non-working mothers. The analysis of results in Table 2 and Table 3 clearly indicated that the independent variables of the study, viz Automatic thoughts predict Self-Silencing (SS). It is evident from these two tables that the independent variable of the study, which is Automatic thoughts contribute 14.0% variance in predicting Self-Silencing (SS), which is found to be significant at 0.01 level (F= 29.250).

Thus, experiential support clearly indicates that women who practice self-silencing suffer from automatic negative thoughts and depression. The results are consistent with the past studies as well. In a study, Yasemin et al. (2016) reported that satisfaction of life acted as a mediator in the relationship between negative automatic thoughts and depression, which is the major factor in self-silencing, and this led to the conclusion that thoughts that were negative made the participants access the quality of life negatively which led to an increased level of depression. Another study by Rainer et al. (2013) reported that the accommodations of self-silencing led to negative affect or negative automatic thoughts accompanied with hostility in women after they were rejected by their partners to whom these accommodations were made, which in turn led to stress, depression, and anxiety in women.

5.0 Implications:

The current study provides some important implications to our knowledge and in the enhancement of understanding the psychological disturbances that women face in day to day lives.

- The concept of self-silencing is understood, and women should learn to prioritize their own needs and wishes, and repression of their inner feelings should be avoided, which can improve their psychological as well as physiological health. The family environment should be women-oriented.
- The automatic negative thoughts should be controlled, which are the major causes of self-silencing. The thought patterns should be shifted to positive from negative.
- Women suffering from domestic violence or abusive marriages could take charge of their lives and take actions for their subjective, physical and psychological wellbeing without bothering about the traditional norms of society and social stigma.
- Society should become women-oriented rather than men-oriented and the faulty beliefs which are incorporated into a woman from childhood should be removed and replaced.

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