

การศึกษาประสบการณ์ของการเป็นวัยกลางคนของผู้หญิงที่มีความเป็นมืออาชีพ
ในการทำงานผ่านทฤษฎีสตรีนิยมหลังโครงสร้าง
A Study of the Experiences toward 'Midlife Professional Woman'
Through Feminist Poststructuralism

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อเข้าใจประสบการณ์ของการเป็นวัยกลางคนของผู้หญิงที่มีความเป็นมืออาชีพในการทำงานผ่านทฤษฎีสตรีนิยมหลังโครงสร้างโดยศึกษาตัวตนผ่านประสบการณ์ของการเป็นวัยกลางคนของผู้หญิงที่มีความเป็นมืออาชีพในการทำงาน ทั้งนี้ใช้การสุ่มตัวอย่างด้วยวิธีแบบเจาะจงและลูกโซ่ และใช้เครื่องมือเก็บข้อมูลโดยการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก ผลการวิจัยถูกวิเคราะห์โดยวิธีการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหาและเขียนอภิปรายเชิงบรรยาย

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Abstract

This paper explores the experiences toward 'Midlife Professional Woman' by employing 'feminist post-structuralism' to be a theoretical framework in order to understand the subjectivity of 'Midlife Professional Woman'. Feminist Post-structuralism is taken for granted to be a critical lens to understand the 'meaning and experience' regarding to the individual subjectivity. The data is gathered by purposive and snowball sampling. The study is used in-depth interview to collect data. The data is analyzed in content analysis. The finding is contented and analyzed into narrative description.

Keywords : Feminist post-structuralism, Midlife woman, Experience

Introduction

Midlife is a normal life stage. If you live long enough you could not escape and avoid this particular state. Midlife is the transition period for women. They either enjoy or not in regards to their midlife. Midlife may take those women to positive or negative vibes. Midlife is a phenomenon which has been investigated and mentioned by many researchers. To clarify, Saucier (2004) discusses issues confronted by aging women, particularly those related to ageism and body image, emphasizing society's role in influencing women's perceptions of their bodies. Although body image issues cause anxiety throughout most women's lives, women entering middle age become more conscious of this concern. Problems related to a woman's realization that she no longer conforms to society's standards of youth and beauty includes low self-esteem, depression,

and anxiety. Also, women in the transition from midlife to elder status are more likely to undergo various and complex health problems, and to draw medical attention due to an increased risk of lowered quality of elderly life caused by inappropriate management (Kwak, Park, & Mi Kang, 2014). Then, midlife is tough sometimes for women as it is so called midlife crisis.

Midlife crisis happens sometimes in between midlife transition of professional woman. Thus, women who experience a mid-life crisis, they are often trivialized, or categorized as lost, depressed. Everything which they have taken for granted is falling apart. The relationships are dissolving, job holds no meaning, and pleasures make no sense. For example, a midlife generativity crisis, resulting in part from age-related social pressures to make a contribution to the next generation. This crisis results in a capacity and commitment to care-for ideas, cultural products, institutions, values, and people (Stewart, Ostrove, & Helson, 2001). In other words, for women the passage of time, and time itself, is significant, as their lives are marked by one monthly menstrual cycle, the span of pregnancy, the biological clock and then menopause, considered a temporal watershed leading to a mourning of the ability to create more time through the creation of new life (Colarusso, 1999). Resolution of this mourning can lead to transformation of the subjective sense of time. No longer bound in the same way by time, women can feel free to use time in new ways (Kendall-Tackett, A, & Ruglass, 2017). Furthermore, midlife is a significant process for women, is a period of physical, mental, and social role changes. Every woman faces her midlife differently.

Interestingly, when in the middle, it is natural to look back to see what has come before or to evaluate what has been accomplished and to look ahead to determine what comes next or remains to be done (Lachman, 2004). However, when midlife comes to woman, she has many alternatives thing to do and act as in other life periods. The experiences of midlife woman might have some common episode regarding both gains and losses. The story of midlife professional women is one of complexity and pivotal to study because she has to balance her multiple roles for transition in midlife and manage her professional career at the same time. To support, Chareoensanti et al. (2009) state that midlife is a complex period, with various challenging experiences, for women. Among these challenges are changes in physical and psychological health and roles within the family and work domains. Accordingly, I take the way middle woman does and acts for granted to study and investigate her valuable and productive experience with the critical lens of feminist post-structuralism to analyze the data and share the stories I gather.

Objectives

1. To examine the experiences of professional women living in the midlife.
2. To investigate the meaning of “midlife professional women” in terms of individual subjectivity.

Theoretical underpinning

Feminist post-structuralism focuses on the ways language constitutes subjectivities and truth within particular discourse Poststructural feminism moves beyond the psychological and structural models of feminist theory (Tisdell, 1998). In feminist post-structuralism, multiple truths happen and could be viewed from a variety of positions. Furthermore, experiences are relevant to one’s perspectives of reality rather than to one given absolute truth. Poststructuralism does not

seek to search for meaning, but rather how discourse functions and is historically produced (St. Pierre & Adams, 2000). As a framework, feminist poststructuralism functions with the purpose of searching for meanings, which constantly shift, and deconstructing essentialist ideas perpetually. Moreover, feminist poststructuralism philosopher such as Weedon (1997) challenges the concepts of fixed meaning, unified subjectivity. Weedon intends to deconstruct the idea of essentialist, unified and rational subjectivity within liberal humanistic tradition. Feminist post-structuralism points out that we constitute in the current discourse. We share what we see and learn from telling our stories about the experiences or past event which occurred to us in particular discourse. From here on, at the level of the individual, this feminist post-structuralism theory is able to offer an explanation of where our experience comes from, why it is contradictory or incoherent and why and how it can change. Also, it offers a way of understanding the importance of subjective motivation and illusion of full subjectivity necessary for individuals to act in to the world (ibid, p.40). Feminist post-structuralism is an approach to analyze the ways in which the individual negotiate his or her identity, relationships and positions in the world according to the ways in which they are located by competing yet interwoven. Letts (1987) points out that feminist post-structuralism acknowledges the sense of one's subjectivity as shifting, multiple, and sometimes contradictory. In consequences, the subjectivity is sense of self in regards to the way of individual understand on a particular opinion or experience which can vary and depends on the individual's feeling and perspective. To support, subjectivity refers to an individual's conscious and unconscious thoughts, sense of self and understanding of one's relation to the world (Weedon, 1997). Thus, an individual's subjectivity can be acknowledged through the experience of the usage in everyday life, and in part in response to the contradictions within and between discourses. Subjectivity is fundamental part of human experience. A subjective experience is an output of individual's mind. Our subjectivities are experienced as if they were entirely our own because we take on the discursive practices and story lines as if they were our own and make sense of them in terms of our own particular experiences. (Davies & C, 1982). In addition, the subjective experience could not be objectively measured by others. The experiences somewhat have got some similar part but not exactly the same perceptions. (Chintaradeja, 2015). To consolidate, feminist post structuralism's concern in relation to the ways of subjectivity is constructed in the discourses of the society .This study will investigate the meaning of "midlife professional women" in terms of individual subjectivity.

Literature reviews

1. Reviews of Midlife Studies

Women experience midlife differently. They might experience boredom, worthless feeling, and loneliness, lack of confident, depression or anxiety. Midlife can mark as a period of huge transition. To illustrate, Parry and Shaw (1999) used an alternative feminist framework to explore the experiences of menopause and midlife, and to examine the impact of leisure on these experiences. The findings indicated that menopause and midlife were inextricably linked for these women, through the emotional challenges that they were experiencing and through the realization of aging. Leisure was shown to have a number of beneficial outcomes.

Next, drawing on women's accounts of the menopause, Ballard et al. (2001) describe

the experience of the menopause transition as a status passage. The social changes experienced by women during this time are then considered as parallel status passages, often competing for attention with the menopause transition. These free comments made by women emphasize the importance of changing social relationships with partners, children and parents, and changes at work. We show that, whilst women conceive the menopause to be a medical event, they themselves place importance on the social context in which the menopause is experienced (Ballard, Kuh, & Wadsworth, 2001).

Moreover, Lahman (2004) summarizes research findings on the central themes and salient issues of midlife such as balancing work and family responsibilities in the midst of the physical and psychological changes associated with aging. The field of midlife development is emerging in the context of large demographic shifts in the population. A section on the phenomenology of midlife development presents images and expectations including the seemingly disparate views of midlife as a time of peak functioning and a period of crisis.

Next part, I will illustrate the literature reviews of Feminist Post structuralism.

2. Reviews of Feminist Post structuralism

Feminist Post structuralism is recognized as a critical theoretical framework which can be employed to critically question everyday practices by focusing on the meaning of experiences. For instances ,Dickson (1990) investigates an understanding of women's experiences with menopause by exploring the interrelation between the knowledge in the scientific/medical discourses, both past and present, and the knowledge in the everyday discourses of a select sample of midlife women regarding the closure of menstrual life. The significance of this study is that it provides a social, historical, and cultural horizon from which to begin to understand the experiences of menopause. By developing an alternative knowledge of menopause, this research challenges the prevailing discourses of menopause, resists the way these discourses have solidified into what is accepted as truth, and makes visible the links among values, assumptions, research, and knowledge.

Furthermore, Lutter (2011) explores the perceptions of female registered nurses who have intentions to leave the profession with particular attention to the influence of gender. The theoretical framework of feminist poststructuralism informed this study, which emphasizes the role of discourse and power relations in the construction of identity. An aim of this study was to uncover the visible and invisible influences of gender as a social structure in respect to workplace experiences and career decisions in nursing.

Additionally, Price et al. (2015) examine the experiences of overweight and obese individuals and nurses, physicians and dieticians who cared for them in the assessment and management of obesity. A feminist post-structural methodology and semi structured face to face interviews were used to examine personal, social and institutional aspects of obesity management in rural and urban settings across a province in eastern Canada. This study states that marginalization, oppression, bias and stigma continued to affect obesity management. Individuals living with obesity require greater levels and duration of support, given the multiple barriers they face at the individual, social and institutional levels. It finds out that health care professionals need to understand the social construction and relational context of obesity in order to minimize stigma and enhance the provision of supportive and non-judgmental care. My study will shed the light

on “the way of understanding the experiences of midlife professional women with individual’s story.

The definition of terms

Midlife woman: a Thai professional woman with aged 41-59 who is Thai nationality who is available and willing to participate in the study Experiences: the ways which Thai professional woman make senses of understanding her midlife.

The Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of professional women living in the midlife and investigate the meaning of “midlife professional women” in terms of individual subjectivity. This study is drawn on ethnographic study in relation to midlife professional women. Data is gathered by semi-structured and in-depth interview and analyzed in content analysis. Over a 6 month period, four midlife professional women are interviewed with the purposive and snow-ball sampling technique. With the participants’ consent, all 4 interviews are recorded, transcribed, and translated into English by researcher. The following cases are some of the content analysis.

Findings

Meaning of “Midlife women”

The meaning of ‘midlife women’ is varied according to individual’s perception and experiences. The feminist poststructuralism enables us to reveal a variety ways of meanings of ‘midlife women’s life which is multiple constructed within the discursive field in particular of individual.

“In my point of view, ‘midlife woman’ means a woman who is older than 40 years of age. Midlife woman has got a lot of experiences and specialization in her professional career at least 15 years or more”.

Gift, 41 years

“I define my midlife period as it is the moment to recall my life memories, such as: work, study, happiness and time sharing with my family”.

Mo, 45 years

“Midlife woman is woman with the life period for hard working, gaining some experiences and making progress in the professional career”.

Or, 43 years

“I think ‘midlife woman’ is a woman who is older than 45 years with strong background of professional career and social status”.

Da, 45 years

Professional women’s experiences of being ‘midlife women’

I don’t feel older actually, I feel like I gain a lot of experiences. With the time constraint, I can analyze thing and really make a better decision than when I was young. Also, I am flexible much more in life. When I make some mistakes I still feel OK. When facing midlife moment, my health is not in good shape, physical body is quite changed. I occasionally get migraine and office syndrome. However, I am well-managed my emotion. I happily focus on the relationship with my daughter and husband. I love both ‘the time when I was young’ and ‘current midlife moment’.

Gift, 41 years

My physical appearances are apparently changed, such as; getting more wrinkles, gaining weight. The health is not as good as young people. Also, my emotion is not quite stable. I feel OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) sometimes. I often feel bored with my job. However, I take this time period for granted to revise my life in the past and think about very near future though. Even I like the time when I was young more than midlife period, but 'being in the midlife' is the happy time for spending the beautiful moment with my family.

Mo, 45 years

I definitely don't feel old, I like my midlife time. It is the time period which rushes me to do many things in life. I keep myself healthy. For examples; I eat healthy food with no carbs and sugar, play badminton, do some face make-up and be optimistic. That's why; I am emotionally stable without getting bored. Currently, I remain single.

Or, 43 years

When comparing with young age, I completely feel older. I like the time when I was young more than midlife time. Although, I feel young at my heart but my physical body is really getting downhill. I often worry about my health. Accordingly, I take care of my health more and more each day. Luckily, I can control and manage my emotion quite well. Without kids, the relationship with my husband still goes well.

Da, 45 years

Discussions and Conclusions

According to the interviews, they define 'midlife women' differently. The study finds out that two midlife women are satisfied with their midlives. All of them accept their changes of the physical bodies and try to keep themselves healthy. In terms of emotional changes, three midlife women get the emotion stability but one of them still confront with her emotion instability. Moreover, everyone has no problem with her marital status and relationship.

The findings show the ways which the professional midlife women constitute their subjective experiences differently, as Weedon (1997) states that 'the experience of individuals' is far from homogeneous, what event means to an individual depends on the way of interpreting the world. As such, this study weaves together the experiences from four midlife professional women'. Clearly from the findings, the meaning of midlife is not exactly the same. I claim from this point that everyone knows the beginning of the lifetime. Likewise, nobody can not figure out when is the end of the time. Consequently, there is exactly no rules to judge the individual midlife time period in terms of subjective experience. The midlife moment is pinpointed into the middle path of life differently according to the experiences. For instances; it is pinpointed by ages, the changes of physical bodies, health and emotional management.

In sum, it should accept subjective experience since the ways in which individual make sense of their lives. A variety of experiences illustrates the acceptance of change in regards to midlife moment. They all have tried to adjust themselves in relation to their ages to overcome this particular moment indefinitely.

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