

MASCULINITY SCRIPTS IN PAKISTANI DRAMA SERIALS: A FEMINIST CRITICAL DISCOURSE STUDY

Ammad Jahangir

PhD Scholar, IQRA University (Islamabad Campus)

Atif Khan

Department of Social Sciences, IQRA University (Islamabad Campus)

ABSTRACT

A feminist critical discourse analysis of masculinity in Pakistani drama serials is conducted in this study. Research Problem The questions arise of how media representations are inflected in the way they contribute to shape core values and norms of a society, especially gender roles and expectations. This study is conducted to explore the construction of masculinity in Pakistani television drama serials and the depiction of such masculinity, and how far these depictions reaffirm or contest patriarchal values. Applying the critical discourse analysis (CDA) – an interpretive methodology wherein language is used as the primary medium between text and society as a social practice (Fairclough, 1995) in dissecting popular drama serials -this study employs feminist theory to define aspects of gendered media/power relations. The findings indicate that although some of the dramas deconstruct traditionalised masculinity, the dominant discourses perpetuate patriarchal ideologies through reassertion of hegemonic masculinity. The study's findings inform the broader field of gender studies by illuminating how media can reinforce or challenge hegemonic gendered norms, with implications for the media industry and social policy in regard to gender representation across South Asia.

Keywords: Masculinity, Pakistani Drama Serials, Feminist Discourse, Hegemonic Masculinity, Gender Representation, Critical Discourse Analysis, Patriarchy.

INTRODUCTION

Media representations of masculinity have strong influence over how society views and expects male behavior, which is significant because media has been identified as a conduit for both the development and distribution of gender standards. Many such

as in Pakistan, have made TV drama serials hugely popular, and thus they are also a powerful conduit for the representation of cultural views on masculinity. These images are not only reflective of prevailing social norms but they also sustain and reproduce some behaviors and established expectations. In a highly patriarchal society like Pakistan's, the portrayal of masculinity in drama serials often endorses basic, unhealthy clichés that prize control, suppression and a clear separation between 'the man' and his defined walls.

The masculinity reflected by Pakistani media are typically attributed with authority, power and physical strength in many cases echoing the hegemonic masculinity outlined by sociologist R.W. Connell (1995). This version, the hegemonic masculinity is promoted and desired among men and other forms of masculinity take a backstage or get omitted. This conventional concept of masculinity has taken deep root in the psyche of society including Pakistan and is upheld by various media instruments, e.g. drama serials. Such representations mirror and perpetuate real-life patriarchal structures in which men are assumed to be the providers, protectors, and head of decision-making units within families and communities, while women should remain subordinate, passive subjects concerned with domestic affairs (Khan 2019).

This research is an attempt to investigate how masculinity is constructed and represented in Pakistani drama serials, and to analyze the extent to which these representations uphold or subvert hegemonic modes of masculinity. This paper explores the intricate relationship between gender and media from feminist theoretical perspective as well as critical discourse through a focus on media representation, because it is mediated images that have influence on our social practices. As feminist theory, media studies especially show that the pornography are not neutral (Suda: 2015; Sleek: 2010) and following from this one can say that media representations are strategy/laden and perpetuate power relations, patriarchy as a force for molding of gender roles plays center-stage (Butler, 1990). Hence, the research attempts to address a significant question: in what ways do the male characters of these serials represent

or challenge conventional gender behaviours and how do these depictions influence the construction of masculinity stereotypes?

The importance of this research is two-fold. The one in first place will be the detailed analysis of masculine identities as depicted within popular Pakistani television drama serials and how it expands societal gender norms. Second, it suggests that the media may be able to undermine these stereotypes, and provide alternative views of masculinity that could potentially lead to a more inclusive and enlightened understanding of gender differences. Given the growing consumption of TV content, particularly that of drama serials, it is important to acknowledge the effects these portrayals have on the audience in relation to their expectations of gender representations; they do not only mirror cultural norms and beliefs but (continue) to model and inform viewers' attitudes – especially the youth.

The research also fits into the larger picture of gender representation across the world in media. As elsewhere, the media discourses on masculinity in Pakistan are frequently constructed within a hierarchy of dominant (hegemonic) and subordinated forms of collective femininities. This problem is acute in post-colonial states including Pakistan as the imposition of western values has driven this confusion between indigenous practices and gender norms (Niazi, 2018). Dramas, as a source of entertainment, are also cultural narratives through which a society's values get manifested; the portrayal of men and women in fiction necessarily affects the way they interact in reality. The way men are depicted as emotionally separate (emotionally unavailable, in charge, dominating) in these serials strengthens the traditional stereotype that 'men need to be strong and assertive.'

Moreover, these dramas frequently depict females as victims of male characters and submissive to authority figures of men, consolidating traditional gender roles. For the most part, male leads are presented as having the last word in family and social responsibilities while lead female characters tend to be casted as carers, homemakers or emotive propellants. The representation of such power relations mirrors the

extreme patriarchy that is inherent in Pakistani society, where men are considered as breadwinners and protectors, leaving women's respect is associated with how well they serve the man's life (Sultana, 2020).

While such depictions are rampant to the point of being taken for granted, there is a new trend in some recent drama series that advanced and more emotionally-in touch and egalitarian versions of masculinity might be entertained. These characters are depicted as being more in touch with their feelings, and their relationships with women come across as more egalitarian. However, these dissenting masculinities continue to be sidelined in the overall landscape of mainstream Pakistani TV where hegemonic masculinity continues to rule (Yaqoob & Rashid, 2019). Understanding how these alternative presentations are taken up by public audiences and what impact such representations have on constructing masculine and feminine identities is crucial to making headway in the larger social problem of gender inequality, specifically, the normalization of patriarchal norms.

Therefore, the study is significant and relevant for a developing literature on gender and media in South Asia by offering an eye with which to understand the increasing affects of television drama serials on gender relations. Through an analysis of the intersection between media, masculinity and power, the study adds to broader feminist debates on media representational processes and popular culture's contribution in challenging or reproducing dominant ideologies.

Research Question: How is masculinity depicted in Pakistani TV drama serials, and how far do these depictions subvert or sustain hegemonic masculinities?

Research Objectives:

To explore the dominant masculinity scripts depicted in popular Pakistani drama serials.

In order to see how these masculinity scripts mirror and/or contest normative values of the patriarchy in Pakistani society.

To investigate the effects of these portrayals on public attitudes about sex roles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The depiction of masculinity in media has been a topic of academic study since mass media developed, but much of the research and writing on the subject remains hegemonic, particularly in post-colonial and non-Western contexts where media is playing an increasingly important role in constructing societal perceptions about roles for men. In developing nations such as Pakistan, media portrays and particularly television dramas play an important role in the establishment and promotion of gender expectations that are linked with masculinity. A default to masculinity has been portrayed and packaged in the media as an idealized form of power, dominance, and control.” Masculinity is not a neutral or natural construct; instead it is fundamentally social, political, and economic — and therefore subject to change. Perhaps the most prominent framing of this construction is R.W. Connell’s (1995) theory of “hegemonic masculinity”. Hegemonic masculinity is that form of masculinity which dominates in culture and which men are encouraged to follow by way of gaining superiority over women, other forms of men (i.e. non-hegemonic) being marginalised. In South Asia, including Pakistan, the hegemonic masculinity enforces gender norms. The media, namely TV dramas, play a significant role in circulating and legitimizing male dominance by projecting images of demanding, distant men. These characters also correspond closely with stereotypical representations of traditional masculinity—strong, assertive, wealth providers—and women are often represented as subservient figures (caregivers or passive recipients of male authority). So Pakistani drama serials doesn't just mirror the gendered power relations of society, it actively takes part in perpetuating and cherishing them too.

Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity has been particularly useful for structuring an understanding of how media constructs and deploys the ideal type of men. Despite its emerging influence, media content like TV dramas pave the way for norms. For example, research reveals that in Pakistani media depictions of masculinity are frequently related to power, authority, and dominance. This depiction

frequently includes male protagonists whom are straightforward, repressed and prepared to get physical. Masculinity is depicted in these spaces so as to support a traditional, binary gender dynamic that places men as being on top of the pecking order and women subservient or supportive (Khan 2019).

Over and above hegemonic masculinity, there are a small but significant number of feminist scholars who have suggested that gender identities— as masculine or feminine—are socially constructed and enacted. Judith Butler (1990), for example, argues that gender is not an innate or immutable identity, but a set of performances that are socially made and re-made in the process of repetition acts and doings. This is especially so when considering the media representation of masculinity given that such a representation perpetuates societal standards about how to be a "real" man. In Pakistani drama serials, these characters are prevalent in the form of he-man types who conform to strict notions of masculinity—they're strong and able bodied, emotionally repressed, and ready to protect or exercise dominion over others. Audiences internalize these performances to the same end, helping to manifest those norms as actual behaviors.

Adding to the discussion is "toxic masculinity," cultural standards that require men to embrace dangerous behaviors and attitudes, including emotional suppression, aggression and dominance. Toxic masculinity in Pakistani dramas is becoming an issue of concern. Research has suggested that Pakistani TV drama serials tend to depict its male protagonists as controlling, possessive and at times violent. Such depictions eulogize the exercise of force and malice, particularly in romance, while trivialising emotional and psychological implications for women (Khan, 2019). In this way, toxic masculinity is not merely a figurative conception of male strength, but actually a damaging ideal that prevents men from expressing themselves emotionally and endorses aggressive forms of dominance.

While hegemonic and toxic masculinity has predominated media research in Pakistan, some recent evidence is emerging on other masculinities. For example, the study by

Ali (2021) illuminates aesthetic and narrative changes in Pakistani TV drama to an emerging trend where male characters are represented as emotionally sensitive and fond of gender equality with some of them even questioning patriarchal masculinity configurations. These other masculine ideals, however much they remain marginal to entrenched representations of masculinity, do provide more subtle portrayals of masculinity and are representative of a more diverse and complex understanding of what it means to be 'masculine'. These representations are significant, as they dispute the narrow mores that have historically underpinned masculinity and present a more emotionally demonstrative and nurturing ideal of maleness.

The trend of depicting variegated masculinities on Pakistani drama serials mirrors a national shift in attitudes towards gender roles and relations. However, such depictions are few and far between; most have supporting character or minor character status. Mainstream Pakistani dramas, by and large, continue to paint traditional gendered presentations and male protagonists epitomize the ordination of hegemonic masculinity. This tug-of-war between orthodox and alternative masculinities in Pakistani drama illustrates the intricate process of gender representation within South Asian media.

Studies about representations of gender in Pakistani dramas exist, but studies that explicitly employ a feminist CDA approach to the portrayal are lacking.. Critically, CDA highlights the connections between language, power and sociocultural institutions and is a useful analytic tool for unpacking how masculinity is constructed in media texts. The Critical Discourse Analyst can illuminate these themes by deconstructing the dialogues, character development and narrative structures of popular Pakistani dramas, to reveal how concepts of gendered power are performatively constructed, upheld or broken against in this literature. This study tries to bridge this gap using CDA by examining the language, power relationships and gender identities in Pakistani drama serials to show that how masculinity is framed and what it means for societal prescriptions of gender.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is underpinned by feminist CDA and follows qualitative research design to investigate the projection of masculinity in Pakistani drama serials. CDA is a robust theoretical and methodological approach to investigating the role of language in media texts that looks closely at how language (co)-constructs power relations, gender stereotypes, and social injustices (Fairclough, 1995). Such an approach is particularly relevant when investigating media representations of masculinity because it allows space for us to consider the ways in which these visual renderings speak to social norms and alongside them serve as conduit for (re)producing patriarchal edifices. Using CDA, the paper intends to critically examine the scripts, dialogues and character building of these dramas and analyse how power influence is gendered.

The feminist [Page 27] theoretical perspective that supports and extends this strategy of reading questions how media forms sustain or undermine gender systems, especially in terms of the construction of dominant masculinities. Is a social construct. Here CDA serves not only as a means of examining the language but also of testing how these images work to perform and sustain dominant forms of masculinity in Pakistani media. The research concentrates specifically on tracking patterns of hegemonic masculinity according to R.W. Connell (1995) and consider what space is left in the narrative for other masculinities.

The research sample comprises of 10 popular Pakistani drama serials that were broadcasted from 2018-2023. A Lakhani Films production, these dramas have been chosen due to their high ratings and social impact and carry with them the aura of Pakistani media-centre viewership. The selection ranges from prime-time to daytime shows, as well as dramas that were critically praised alongside those that proved themselves at the box office. The male characters in these dramas demonstrate varying degrees of masculinity, ranging from conservative and hegemonic to more progressive portrayals of emotional accessibility and equal relationships.

Also, 40 interviews were carried out with the leading media creators (directors, writers and producers) working on these drama serials. These conversations reflect on the work that goes into creating gendered figures and narratives. The presence of media producers in the room enables further exploration what those intentions and struggles were in representing masculinity, as well as understanding the impact of normative assumptions on making culture.

The data for this work is gathered with a two-fold approach: first, an analysis of the contents of selected drama serials; and second, interviews with media producers. The content analysis was based on the script, dialogue and character development in scenes of selected serials. This paper explored the construction of the characters masculinity in term of language, interaction male-female and how men affirming or contesting power relation and gender roles narrative. There was a focus on the representation of male characters” relationships with women, their emotional expression and conflict resolution.

Besides the content-analysis, we carried out 40 semi-structured interviews with media makers. The interviews were designed to uncover the views of those directly engaged in producing the drama serials on gender representation in their work. The interviews were particularly illuminating when we wanted to know why things we'd seen happened, and the importance of cultural norms in understanding how men are represented in the dramas. The use of both interviews and qualitative content analysis afforded an in- depth investigation into the research questions.

The data were subjected to qualitative content analysis, and the analysis focussed on language devices, narrative structures and character representations in the target dramas. The themes such as dominance and control, emotional constraint, vulnerability were further extracted from the data. The linguistic analyses focused on the language of male characters, how characters communicated with other characters and how masculinity was constructed through dialogue. The plot and character arcs of

narrative structures were analyzed with regard to the representation and development of masculinity.

Ethical issues throughout the study were attended to closely. Of particular note, the anonymity of interviewers was preserved, in order to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of subscribers. All interview participants provided informed consent and were advised that their responses would be used for research purposes only. The information obtained from media creators was discussed with due regard to their points of view and intellectual inputs.

Triangulation was performed in order to increase the findings. Triangulation, is applying multiple data sources and method for cross-validation of results so as not to compromise the quality of the research outcomes (Denzin, 2012). Triangulation In the current analysis, triangulation occurred between the content analysis of drama serials and data from interviews with media creators. This process yielded a richer and illuminating understanding of representations of manhood in Pakistani drama series.

The integration of qualitative content analysis and interviews, as well as the application of feminist theoretical frameworks, this methodology to analyze how masculinity is constructed and represented in Pakistani media. By focusing on the specific content of the dramas and the emphases or lack thereof given to other issues by creators in this apparently contradictory area, it provides us with an alien angle from which to approach media, gender, and power playing across Pakistani mediaverse.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

A clear pattern was evident with regards to the representation of masculinity in the selected Pakistani drama serials through content analysis. Approximately 70% of the dramas examined were found to have male lead characters who embodied hegemonic masculinity (dominant, emotionally controlled)' who held power over their relationships. These men were frequently depicted as chiefs, holding dominion over

the family and community. They showed their manliness through being “tough”, aggressive and physically strong. Women in these dramas were mostly relegated as supporting or reliant, even they often needed the protection or guidance from men. This type of representation is in keeping with R.W. Connell’s (1995) notion of hegemonic masculinity, the manner in which men are socially constructed as the more powerful gender and it perpetuates gender differentials by forcing women to occupy an inferior position role, one relinquished or powerless.

As a result, 30% of the dramas depicted more progressive models of masculinity. In these series, male leads were portrayed as emotionally more vulnerable, cooperative and sensitive towards women. They seemed to be more emotionally liberated and comfortable showing emotion, affection, care and empathy, departing from traditional notions of masculinity. Although these depictions were somewhat less authoritarian, they were not very many. Yet they lit up a palpable recognition of the necessity for more multidimensional representations of masculinity on Pakistani screens.

Further information about why these dramas depict masculinity in this way was offered by interviews with media producers. The directors, writers and producers also stressed on the portrayal of masculinity which is heavily impacted by the societal norms and conservative values that loom over Pakistani society. Many content creators admitted that not just Pakistani viewers but even the men in rural or traditional homes tend to be more receptive of mainstream masculinity. Men in this regard are pressured to be tough, in charge and independent... which means that male characters often come out as powerful, domineering and emotionally detached.

Despite the prevalence of such stereotypical norms and values, some media authors revealed their wish to break with these expectations. A few interviewees mentioned that they're actively trying to develop more complex men who don't necessarily adhere to traditional gender stereotypes. For example, males who are portrayed as emotionally vulnerable or have equal power in relationships with women were cited as depicting more balanced concepts of manhood. But the filmmakers also saw how

dangerous it could be to deviate from a decades-old masculine game plan. Portrayals like this are met with resistance from audiences, who have thought of them as too “progressive” or not fitting the cultural bill. It illustrates a push-and-pull in the production of Pakistani drama — the urge to be more adventurous and offer up different gender representations versus catering for mainstream, conservative audiences.

The results indicate that although the hegemonic masculinity represented in Pakistani dramas to some extent perpetuates traditional gender ideology, there is evidence of some progressive change too. Representation of hegemonic masculinity is still widespread, where male lead characters are often displayed as superior figures who dominate their relationships and embody the conventional perceptions of male muscularity and emotional detachment. These images help reinforce societal patriarchal attitudes about gender, in which women are submissive, secondary characters.

But the rise in other forms of masculinity on 30 per cent of the dramas suggested a potential turning point on media portrayal. These representations embody more of a level playing field, with male characters being depicted as emotionally sensitive and supportive partners. This expanding presence of alternative masculinities in media mapping similarly echoes international conversations regarding unpacking toxic masculinity and presenting more healthy and varied forms of manhood (Khan 2019). However, with so few of such portrayals out there perhaps the broader media culture still promotes hegemonic concepts around masculinity, albeit this might be something that can change. The creators' reluctance to challenge such traditional norms and alienate their audience complicates the transition of mass media representations of masculinity.

So, though there is space for evolution, the overall direction of Pakistani TV drama serials overwhelmingly leans in favour of patriarchal norms. The changing face of the manly man The image of the contemporary man shows that while we may be making

progress, it is slow and sporadic with old fashioned ideals still hogging the spotlight in most mainstream media outlets.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that Pakistani drama serials still glorify the image of traditional and toxic form of masculinity. Most (drama) protagonist were male with hegemonic masculinities such as domination, emotional detachment and control of relationship. These depictions uphold the ever-lingering social construct that men are strong, sturdy figures who can't be tamed and women are demure or subservient. This is the kind of representation that not only glorifies toxic masculine values but also normalizes them. These behaviors often include aggression, control and unhealthy fear of vulnerability; also able to perpetuate gender-based inequalities in contemporary reality (Khan, 2019).

The study does however point out that this is also a relatively new trend in the portrayal of alternative masculinities on screen which often seem to show male characters as being more emotionally open, co-operative and less patriarchal within their relationships. While these more liberal images mark a radical departure from convention, they are not the dominant models and only occur in relatively few instances. It does reveal that while there are some gains being made against patriarchal norms, the general media scene in Pakistan remains overwhelmingly inclined towards propagation of traditional gender roles. Due to this, these alternatives masculinities are not fully assimilated into the mainstream and continue to be marginalized.

In the light of these findings, it is evident that although the Pakistani media landscape is slowly witnessing diversification in representations of masculinity, liberal versions of masculinity remain reductive. The myth of the controlling and emotionally distant man is still by far the biggest story we're told, and it props up patriarchal standards that crush out other definitions of what being a man could look like. While some

positive changes are evident, the journey towards a representative gender identity is blocked by innate cultural resistance to 'unconventional' depictions of manliness.

The results of the study have significant implications for media people /producers, policy makers and educators in Pakistan. More diverse and progressive representations of masculinity in television dramas may help to disrupt deleterious gender norms and push towards a more just society. Media is a strong influence on what the public perceives socially, and in representing more diverse images of masculinity, earns atau producers can help create positive social/he fictional characters who also work as responsible or caring fathers/husbands. In going against the grain of invulnerability, domineering masculinity to showing more feeling and collaborating could contribute to a shift towards greater healthy attitudes of gendered relationships and roles.

Policymakers might also want to consider the possibility of adopting rules or recommendations in favor of gender-sensitive media production. For instance, television stations could publicize scripts and plots that depict more equitable gender relations, presenting both men and women in complex roles. Such regulations might enable alternate content that oppose conventional gender stereotypes to be available with commercial viability.

In addition, media literacy programs that address gender-specific content can help viewers to be more skeptical of the media, and to then break down damaging images associated with masculinity. Such programs would challenge students to develop a more critical gaze when viewing media representations and obligations, by revealing the unrefined ways gender norms are sustained. If the audience were media literate, it would ask questions of themselves as well as demand more progressive representations of gender; more realistic rather than stereotyped portrayals of masculinity and femininity. This action would prevent normalizing toxic masculinity, and instead expose the media to more inclusive ways of representing life on screen (hooks, 2000).

Notwithstanding these limitations, information generated will give us valuable insights into the representation of masculinity in Pakistani drama serials. The study was limited to a small sample of 10 drama serials from the period between 2018 and 2023, and these might not adequately reflect scenarios in relation to media content produced within Pakistan. The dramas we selected were based on their popularity, but we are likely to get different perspectives and additional sub-genres and forms (e.g., movies, reality shows or online dramas) in which gender roles are reflected.

A broader sample based on other media such as movies and reality television shows will be helpful to more fully explore media effects on body image. In this same line, the presence of material from various years or studying long-term trends in media representation could further aid to a broader knowledge about how masculinity is being shaped by Pakistani media. Furthermore, the analysis of audience reception and reception conditions during these representations would complement the results.

This study also mostly involved textual analysis of the drama serials and the media creator interviews. Those approaches although insightful did not include an additional element such as audience surveys and/ or focus group work to generate a more nuanced sense of how the viewers make sense of these media portrayals. Such an approach would enable a more thorough investigation of media representations and public perceptions of masculinity.

CONCLUSION

Additionally, this paper offers insights on masculinity depiction of men's characters presented in Pakistan drama serials, and it becomes apparent that traditional image of patriarchal masculinity still prevails as a dominant script shown in many stories. The results suggest that such characters are still the archetypes of narrative in most dramas, meaning that they have a younger women fall for them while fulfilling a hegemonic male model (dominant; emotionally controlled and controlling relationship). These portrayals serve to maintain normative beliefs that men are masters of control and should remain powerful, in charge and emotionally distant as a result--characteristics

regularly associated with gender inequality. The focus on these stereotypical representations reflects upon the long-standing influence of patriarchy in determining media constructions and societal interpretations of masculinity (Connell, 1995).

There are however some increasing depictions of different kinds of masculinities, notably men and boys being portrayed as emotionally open, supportive and egalitarian but they are by no means the norm. Such forward-thinking representations are pushed to the margins or presented as notable exceptions, not standard representations, in a way that reflects a larger resistance to challenging long-standing gender norms. Bottom line These new masculinities are, however, a welcome change toward diversifying the representation of manhood in Pakistan media and providing a more inclusive approach to gender.

The results also highlight the importance of increased diversity in other representations of gender in media. Encouraging more diverse, and progressive, representations of masculinity in drama serials might be one way to help fight back against some of the harmful gender norms that all too often perpetuate gender inequality. Media is one of the most influential tools in constructing social attitudes that can either continue or disrupt harmful stereotypes about girls and boys. Pres Marriages that reflect more egalitarian views of masculinity might create a more equitable society by setting the stage for healthier and more mutually supportive interactions between men and women (Butler, 1990; hooks, 2000).

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