

GENDERED DISCOURSE IN PAKISTANI TALK SHOWS: A PUBLIC SPHERE PERSPECTIVE OF FEMALE MARGINALIZATION

Ms. Sobia Ilyas

Department of English Language and Literature
The University of Lahore, Pakistan

Dr. Shafaq Fayyaz

Department of English Language and Literature
The University of Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract

The paper examines female marginalization in selected clips of three Pakistani talk shows : Mazak Raat (2020), G Sarkar (2021) and The Late Late Show (2023) through the lens of Habermas's public sphere theory. Using conversation analysis (CA) and feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA), the research uncovers the discursive mechanisms that reinforce gender inequalities in talk show interactions. The comparison between talk shows and the public sphere highlights power imbalances, challenging their perception as open and democratic spaces of debate and deliberation. It is argued that Pakistani talk shows reflect the bourgeoisie public sphere by marginalizing women through the blurring of the public/private boundaries, exclusionary practices and media control. The findings reveal that female celebrities are subjected to stereotyping, under representation and media manipulation in Pakistani media discourse. The paper calls for greater gender inclusivity in talk shows, emphasizing the need to address the harmful impact of misrepresenting and diminishing female voices on broadcast media.

Keywords: Pakistani talk shows; female marginalization; bourgeoisie public sphere; feminist critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

The public sphere and the talk show have been frequently compared for their role in facilitating public discourse, yet their structural and conceptual disparities often undermine the ideal of inclusivity and equality. Historically, both Habermas's public sphere and the talk show originated on the principles of democracy and egalitarianism, offering multiple opportunities for the public to contribute to popular opinion. However, this became an unattainable reality since both transformed into class polarized, lucrative and media-controlled forums (Haarman, 2001, Seeliger & Sevignani, 2022; Stewart & Hartmann, 2020). The paper offers a comparison between the talk show and the public sphere theory to explore how women are disempowered in Pakistani infotainment talk shows through the marginalizing techniques inherent in Habermas' slanted public sphere: blurring of the public/private dichotomy, exclusionary practices and media control. More exclusively, the research addresses the following question:

- How do Pakistani talk shows reflect the characteristics of the bourgeoisie public sphere in their structural and ideological frameworks, thereby reinforcing female marginalization?

Accordingly, a historical background of the emergence and subsequent fall of the Habermesian public sphere is attempted followed by a review of literature. Next a three-tier analysis of selected

clips from three Pakistani talk shows is done using the public sphere theory, conversation analysis and feminist critical discourse analysis for a rich insight into the marginalizing techniques inherent to both the public sphere and the talk show.

1.1 The Rise and Fall of the Bourgeoisie Public Sphere

The Bourgeoisie Public Sphere is a modern yet complex social phenomena that has triggered debates about the possibility of a classless, inclusive and democratic space for public expression and deliberation. The notion of the public sphere emerged from ‘post-enlightenment democracy’ propagating beliefs such as ‘the centrality of a public capable of self-understanding and critique’ (Mahony, 2021, p.486). Likewise, Jurgen Habermas envisioned the public sphere as an egalitarian space which was a broader manifestation of the 17th and 18th century coffeehouses (in Germany, France and Britain) that “broke down class and status barriers, defied church and state monopolies on issues of concern, and established the ideal of inclusive public discussion in which all could participate” (Stewart & Hartman, 2020, p.172). However, the Habermasian public sphere gradually disintegrated into a re-feudalized public sphere which was class polarized, instrumentalized by state interests and “formally organized by media markets, mass culture, public opinion and technological forces” (Stewart & Hartmann, 2020, p.172). According to Fraser (1990), Habermas later confessed that ‘the full utopian potential of the Bourgeoisie Public Sphere was never realized in practice’ (p.59) since contradictory to popular opinion, the public sphere could not become an autonomous space for the private individuals to engage in rational discussions. The boundary between the public and private blurred deeply, corroding social consensus and genuine public debate. Habermas’s idyllic public sphere regressed into an anarchic space dominated by spectacle and consumerism. Benhabib (1997) calls the public sphere an ‘embattled public sphere’ which was a ‘pale recollection’ of what was once a public sphere of action, deliberation, and participation. Mah (2000) conceives the public sphere as the fusion of people into a ‘single, unified being, a mass subject’, no longer a ‘public sphere’ but a ‘public’ comprising conflicting social identities which renders the concept of a ‘unified political subject’ a ‘phantasy’ or ‘a double fiction’ (p. 168).

The public sphere faced censure for being an ‘exclusionary historical account’ that promoted ‘masculinist ideology, class bias, and other inequalities’ (McLaughlin, 2020, p.2). Rendall (1999) describes it as structured in ‘excluding and changing ways’ allowing selective entries like ‘the skilled working man’ or ‘the educated single woman householder’ (p.483). Feminists such as Fraser emphasize that the core concepts of the public sphere such as political participation and public opinion formation are capacities linked with masculinity ‘in a male dominated, classical capitalism’ and are privileges denied to women and deemed at odds with femineity (Fraser, 1989 as cited in Nassif, 2014). Likewise, Lazar (2008) states that sexism persists covertly in the public sphere through ‘naturalized, deep-seated androcentric assumptions’(p.89). She adds that women are made a part of the private sphere which is characterized as ‘emotional, personal and particular’ while men are affiliated with the ‘rational, impartial and universal’ public sphere (p.102).

According to Habermas, the mass media and the culture industry were instrumental in transforming the public sphere ‘into a functionalist appendage of political reformism’ giving way to class antagonism and commodification (Susen, 2011). Thus, instead of facilitating ‘rational discourse and debate’ the media was more inclined towards ‘shaping, constructing, and limiting public discourse’ to the themes validated by the media corporations (Kellner, 2014, p.6). Susen (2023) acknowledges the mass media’s dysfunctional role in both forming and manipulating views, attitudes, behaviors and practices (p.853). Habermas later blamed party politics and mass media

manipulation for the ‘refeudalization’ of the public sphere ‘where the rational-critical public is transformed into a mass, manipulated by persuasive authority’ (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.19). Although enterprising the bourgeoisie public sphere lacked durability and practicability and gradually collapsed into an elitist and media driven domain of hierarchal discourse.

1.2 Talk shows and the Bourgeois Public Sphere

Past research while comparing the talk show with the public sphere also focuses upon their curated, gendered and non-democratic aspects. American talk shows like *The Ricki Lake Show*, *Phil Donahue* and *Geraldo Rivera* have been criticized for being commercial and voyeuristic and for preferring sensational content over rational discourse (Abt & Seesholtz, 1994 ; Shattuck, 2005). American talk shows are known for being confrontational, discursive, institutionalized and gender biased (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994 ; Ilie, 2006 ; Wood , 2001). Popular shows like Oprah Winfrey have been accused of promoting emotional, gendered and racist content (Squire, 1994). Yet others, like Ricki Lake and Sally Jessy have been called transgressive and carnivalesque for their promotion of lowbrow culture (Shattuck, 2005; Birmingham, 2010). While existing debates on the parallels between the bourgeoisie public sphere and talk shows do not explicitly focus on female marginalization, they highlight the non-inclusive, media controlled and elitist nature of talk shows. Thus, famous American talk show, *The Jerry Springer Show* has been criticized for scripted dialogues and spectacle driven discourse (Lunt & Stenner, 2005) while Albanian talk shows are tagged ‘pseudo public spaces’ for being media controlled, political, and lacking in public involvement (Luku, 2013). Similarly, Indian political talk shows have been called ‘faux public spheres’ and ‘brand augmenting platform(s)’ for prioritizing middle class interests , underrepresenting certain social classes and following ‘mainstream mores’ (Khorana , 2014 ; Pongiyannan & Pugsley , 2016; Srikrishna , 2022). Previous studies also highlight the role of the media in discouraging equitable discourse in talk shows. Saba and Anwar (2017) reflect on how male hosts in Pakistani talk shows act as media representatives in marginalizing women through different silencing techniques. Talk show hosts’ have been recognized for their authoritative positions as referees and judges (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994) , as ‘titans of talk and shapers of American popular culture’ (Timberg, 2002), as correspondents, comics and combatants (Vraga et al. , 2012) and as ‘brands’ and ‘leaders of the state of comedy’ (Perez, 2020). While talk shows have been criticized for various reasons , their role in marginalizing women and other minority groups has not been examined as a social issue requiring change or reform. The paper addresses these gaps by analyzing how talk shows, specifically Pakistani talk shows align with Habermas’s concept of the public sphere to marginalize women through stereotyping, exclusion and media control. Existing research on Pakistani talk shows discusses how women are marginalized, underrepresented, and trivialized in political talk shows through humor, repartee and satire (Qadir & Riaz , 2015; Yahya et al., 2022). Female objectification and misrepresentation in talk shows is another subject of discussion. Huda & Ali (2015) posit that women are objectified in Pakistani print, broadcast, and social media as well as in advertisements. They are portrayed either as sensual and alluring or as weak and gullible performing household chores like cleaning, sewing, cooking and nursing children (p.14). Women are also objectified in talk shows through engagement with

beauty, fashion, and cooking. Talib and Idrees (2012) address this issue in their study ‘Pakistani Media and Disempowerment of Women’ mentioning two popular Pakistani talk shows which ‘promote a patriarchal content’: *The Nadia Khan Show* and *Meena Bazaar*. It is opined that both these shows project a disempowering image of Pakistani women through “content and narratives that reveal a preoccupation with marriage” (p.29). Cheema (2017) opines that breakfast shows target passive women ‘who have nothing beyond their kitchen and homes’(p.187). As deduced from the above discussion, most research on Pakistani talk shows draw attention towards the relegated status of women as homemakers, sufferers and unintellectual individuals limited to the world of beauty, fashion, and cooking.

2 Methodology

The methodology comprised a step wise analysis of the data. Selected YouTube clips from three Pakistani late shows from the years 2020, 2021,2023 were chosen as a sample and were coded into themes /categories using provisional and axial coding techniques. These themes were then examined through Conversation Analysis, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis and the Public Sphere Theory to draw parallels between the modern talk show and the transformed public sphere specifically with relation to the portrayal of women . The selected talk shows are as follows:

- *Mazak Raat* (2020)
- *G Sarkar* (2021)
- *The Late Late Show* (2023)

Each talk show clip represents one of the three aspects of the Habermesian public sphere chosen for analysis: blurring of the public/private dichotomy, exclusionary practices and media control. Since the paper focuses on talk show dialogues, CA proved useful in giving a nuanced and systematic analysis of talk show exchanges. Broadcast talk and CA share “a distinctive perspective on the analyzability of talk: that is, the focus on the sequential organization of talk-in-interaction, in which analysis concentrates on turn-taking and associated structural phenomena” (Hutchby, 2004, p. 437). Similarly, feminist critical discourse analysis provided a social, cultural, and political perspective of female marginalization in talk shows. FCDA is a theory grounded in social activism and is concerned with “raising critical consciousness about the discursive dimensions of social problems involving discrimination, disadvantage, and dominance with the aim of contributing to broader emancipatory projects” (Lazar, 2018, p.372). According to Lazar (2014) the ‘theoretical interdisciplinarity’ of FCDA renders it capable of “undertaking analysis of discursive enactments of structural domination” and that of discursive strategies of “negotiation, resistance, solidarity, and social empowerment of disenfranchised women” (p.183). A feminist analysis of the talk shows facilitated in unravelling the ‘taken- for- granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations’ (Lazar, 2007) in male dominated discourses.

3 Analysis and Discussion

The analysis is divided into three steps. In the first step, the data was coded in accordance with the fundamental principles of the public sphere theory and the predetermined themes: non inclusivity, blurring of the public/private divide and media and institutional control.

Table 1 shows a tabular representation of the coding process.

Table 1. Talk shows as a Bourgeoisie Public Sphere

Name of talk show	Speakers	Themes	Quotation/Time Stamp
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Mazak Raat	Vasay Chaudhry Faryal Khan Agha Majid	Non inclusivity	<p>“Alright, so Faryal, do you have an interest in cooking?” (11:34)</p> <p>“No, I don’t have an interest in it” (11:35)</p> <p>“Yes, it’s understandable”(11:35)</p> <p>“No, people like her can’t cook... she just takes a single noodle and (mimics putting a long noodle in his mouth)” (11:39)</p>
G Sarkar	Nauman Ijaz to Juggun Kazim	Blurring of the public/private divide	<p>“Yes, you have a lot of kids that you are looking after as well and then I have heard that these days you are taking a lot of care of your in laws too” (04:26)</p>
The Late Late Show	Hassan Choudary Iman Aly	Media/Institutional control	<p>“Is no one writing roles for you? I would assume that special roles are written just for you” (14:02)</p> <p>“You write them for me”</p>

The coded data was then examined through CA followed by FCDA for a more rigorous and nuanced analysis.

3.1 Conversation Analysis and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

This section comprises a two-tier analysis of three interview clips from the aforementioned Pakistani talk shows.

Talk show: G Sarkar

Guest: Jugun Kazim

Year: 2021

Duration: 3 minutes and 22 seconds

3.2 Structure of the interview

G Sarkar is a tabloid late show. It has one principal host, Nauman Ijaz and a panel of cohosts both male and female. The male cohosts are comedians while the female cohosts consist of an astrologer and a supporting panel member. Usually, one guest appears on the show but sometimes celebrity couples are also invited. The show is run by the main host who usually focuses on the personal and professional life of the guests. Being an actor himself, many of the guests are his colleagues and therefore he uses a very friendly style of conversation. All the fun and entertainment are provided by the male cohosts who use the traditional banter and repartee style for comedy. The astrologer is an additional attraction since she not only contributes to the conversation but also reads out the horoscopes of the celebrities for more interesting information. This interview clip

features a female guest who is a model, actress, talk show host and an entrepreneur. The discussion is based on different topics related to Kazim's professional and personal life.

3.3 Conversation Analysis

The analysis focuses on how female marginalization occurs through the blurring of the public/private boundary in the Pakistani talk show emphasizing that although female celebrities are invited to the talk shows they are rarely if ever engaged in intellectual discussions. They are rather positioned in the domestic sphere and stereotyped as mothers, wives and daughters. In doing so, they are excluded from the rational critical sphere and relegated to the private sphere of the home. The interview begins with the host informing the audience about Jugun Kazim's busy schedule and her new brand, the details of which are neither mentioned nor requested from Kazim. The host then alludes to her motherly responsibilities, a topic which is passionately taken up by Kazim who talks excitedly about having lots of kids to look after. Ijaz then mentions how she is looking after her parents-in-law these days with Kazim flaunting that she has been doing so for the past eight years. It can be seen how the host steers Kazim towards the private sphere of the home and family and how her achievements are evaluated from the perspective of her being a doting mother and a home maker. Further on, the host asks her a series of questions regarding her true place and identity in life. Kazim proudly answers that although she used to characterize herself as an artist before her son's birth, she now sees herself as just a 'mother'.

Nauman Ijaz (04:08): So, first of all, we would like to welcome you to 'G Sarkar' and thank you very much for taking time off your busy schedule because I came to know that you are very busy these days. You have established your own brand and are working on it, day in day out and then God has willed it... *gestures with hands* numerous...

(Juggan Kazim interjects playfully)

Juggan Kazim (04:25): There are a lot of kids as well. (Everyone laughs)

Nauman Ijaz (04:26): Yes, you have a lot of kids that you are looking after as well and then I have heard that these days you are taking a lot of care of your in laws too.

Juggan Kazim (04:34): (Laughs) Not only these days, but I have also been taking care of them for the past 8 years. But, yes, Thank God I'm busy.

Nauman Ijaz (04:49): So, who is Juggan Kazim? Amidst acting, morning shows, restaurant business and so many things in your life, who is she? Where is she?

Juggan Kazim (05:03): Whenever I think about this question now, the first thing that comes to my mind is 'Mother'. Actually, the fact is that, at the end of the day, whenever someone used to ask me - this is before Hamza (my son) was born - who is Juggan Kazim, I used to say, 'an actor'. Now, however, when I'm asked the same question, the thing that instinctively comes to me mind is 'a mother' because I'm actually a mom.

There are more instances of Kazim being placed in the private sphere, especially in the long discussion about her compatibility with her husband, Faisal. The hosts freely comment on her marital relationship. Ijaz asks her how Mr. Faisal deals with her hyperactive behavior. Kazim enjoys and contributes to the banter about her personal life she also makes funny allusions to Ijaz's own marital relationship.

Nauman Ijaz (06:48): How does Mr. Faisal deal with such hyperactivity?

Nauman Ijaz (07:30): Yes, this is what we are trying to ask. When two people with such contrasting personalities live together then who gives in first?

Juggan Kazim (07:39) Do you not know the answer to this question? You tell me, in your house (between you and your wife), who gives in first?

Nauman Ijaz (07:43): My wife.

Juggan Kazim (07:44): So then, who gives in at my house?

Nauman Ijaz (07:46): Your husband.

Juggan Kazim (07:47): End of story.

Interestingly, when the host questions her about her career, it is not done to create any significant impact. Her fifteen-year long journey is not eulogized nor is she projected as an inspiration for other actresses. On the contrary, Ijaz takes a dig at her for being a short statured model. He jokes about her being asked to model for a children's shoe brand.

Nauman Ijaz (08:57): So, Juggan, how many years now that you have been working?

Juggan Kazim (09:00): (Cheekily) I just started last week.

Samiah Khan (09:02): Oh, you mother's darling!

Nauman Ijaz (09:05): No, the morning shows...

Juggan Kazim (09:06): It's been 15 years.

Nauman Ijaz (09:07): 15 years. So, 15 years ago you started acting or hosting?

Juggan Kazim (09:11): So, in Pakistan, fifteen and a half/sixteen years ago I started with modeling. I had not seen any other five feet and four inches tall model (like me) at that time.

Audience laughs

Nauman Ijaz (09:19): No. So, what did you model for then? Bubble Gummers? (children's brand)

Soon after, the topic is reverted to Kazim's personal life again. The host asks the astrologer to comment on Kazim's horoscope whereby it is revealed that she is a Capricorn but unlike other Capricornians, she is neither self-obsessed nor self-centered. She is praised for being a multitasker, a good home keeper and for being very supportive of her family. Ijaz adds to the tribute saying that Kazim constructed her house 'brick by brick' like a man. Thus, Kazim is trivialized through covert sexism and the use of diminutives like 'my child' and 'little girl'.

Nauman Ejaz (17:03): Samiya, tell us, what is her star sign?

Samiya Khan (17:05): She was born with the sun at 17 degrees in Capricorn. I have seen a lot of Capricorns multitasking (Talking about Juggan). She knows how to bake, keep her home beautiful, and you will never see her home disorganized.

Nauman Ejaz (17:21): Just like a man builds a house with his own hands, my child (talking about Juggan) has built her home like that.

Nauman Ejaz (17:33): Brick by brick... Faisal as well, he is adorable, but he is a lawyer, so he has his own workload to manage. He couldn't find the time to get involved. But this child here built that house with passion and love. May Allah always keep happiness in that home.

Samiya Khan (17:53): Nauman Sir, I have seen that often Capricornians are self-obsessed and self-centered, but she is not. She maintains balance in her relationships. I am amazed. She has raised her family members like a mother along with her own kids. I want to give credit to this little girl.

The analysis supports the view that Pakistani talk shows resemble the bourgeoisie public sphere for their power imbalances, non-inclusivity and the blurring of the public/private dichotomy.

3.4 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

As previously mentioned, one of the major causes of the decline of the Habermesian public sphere was the blurring of the public/private divide whereby the public sphere became increasingly privatized, an apathetic mass society with the quality of debate deteriorating into trivialized talk and a fondness for the spectacular (Wright, 2008). This excerpt exemplifies that the talk show, like the bourgeoisie public sphere, does not foster rational and intellectual debates. It rather promotes sensational content through the blurring of the public/private divide. The interview begins with the host asking Kazim ‘Who is Jugun Kazim?’ and she replying, ‘ a mother’. It is notable that the guest prefers to be placed in the domestic rather than the professional realm. She is further encouraged by the host and the panel of cohosts to discuss her private life and is portrayed as an exemplary mother, wife and daughter-in-law. Likewise, the astrologer and cohost , Samiah Khan keeps feeding her personal opinions (about Kazim’s married life) into the discussion. She also explores Kazim’s stars to reveal that she is a perfect home maker and one who has raised her parental family along with her own children. There are sporadic references to her work usually in a mock casual tone when the host mentions that she had started her modeling career as a children’s shoe brand model owing to her short height and when he criticizes the culture of morning shows (Kazim being a morning show host) which feature female hosts decked in wedding clothes and jewelry. Throughout the show, Kazim’s personal life is prioritized over her professional life. She is thus firmly stationed in the private sphere of the home and domestic life. This is further reinforced when she is infantilized: when Ijaz praises her for building her home ‘like a man’ and calls her ‘my child’, when Samiah Khan calls her a ‘mother’s darling’ and a ‘little girl’. This interview clip is an example of marginalization through the female guest’s relegation to the private sphere of motherhood and domesticity.

3.5 Talk show: Mazak Raat

Guest: Agha Majid and Faryal Khan

Year: 2020

Duration: 2 minutes and 22 seconds

3.6 Structure of the interview

The talk show ‘Mazakraat’ has a specific format and structure. Firstly, it does not have a single host and is similar to the panel talk show in having multiple hosts. However, there is one principal host, Vasay Chaudhary, who sits at the head of the stage and is usually the one responsible for introducing and interviewing the guests. Besides him, there are four more male cohosts: three of them are comedians and they are seated together as a team. Regarding the guests, these are two in number: one male and the other female. The content of the talk show is mostly funny with the panel comedians using cross talk and repartee to satirize political and social issues , targeting their guests and fellow cohosts in the process.. This interview clip is a medley of cross talk, comic jabs and repartee which the comedians aim at each other and the female guest, Faryal Khan who is a source of entertainment with no significant and intellectual representation in the show.

3.7 Conversation Analysis

This clip will be analyzed for two categories non-inclusivity and media control. The interview begins with the host asking Majid how he feels sitting next to Faryal Khan instead of his usual colleague (Mr. Honey). He replies with mock disdain that he feels ‘just ok’ . This draws laughter from the audience encouraging the host to ask if he feels ‘good’ or ‘just ok’. Majid says

that he feels good and , for the first time , addresses Faryal Khan , asking her name. Next, the host asks Khan how she is feeling and if she has seen Majid's work. Contrary to Majid's response regarding her, Khan replies that she knows him well and is pleased to be sitting next to him. It is worth noting that Majid belittles Khan's admiration for him, calling her an 'innocent child'.

Vasay Chaudhry (06:19):How do you feel about Faryal Khan sitting here instead of Mr. Honey?

Agha Majid (06:22): (pretending not to be happy) It's just ok.
[Laughter]

Vasay Chaudhry (06:26):Alright, so are you feeling good, or just, okay?

Agha Majid (06:28):No, I'm feeling good. God has willed it (addresses Faryal Khan) what is your name?

Faryal Khan (06:31): Faryal.

Vasay Chaudhry (06:32): Faryal, how are you feeling? Have you seen Agha Majid's work?

Faryal Khan (06:35): Yes, I often watch his work. I feel very good that he is sitting with me.

Agha Majid (06:38): Thank you. Kids are so innocent. Thank you, child, thank you. [Faryal Khan laughs]

Khan remains the focus of the conversation with the host questioning her about her degree in International Business. Instead of being appreciated for her good education, she is mocked and becomes the target of jokes. The next many minutes are spent demeaning Khan's profession (as a model) and her university education. The host repeatedly questioning why modelling is often a last resort. Moreover, she is accosted for not pursuing a career in International Relations. Majid says that her degree is lying at home with a mask on (because of Covid) .

Vasay Chaudhry (06:50): Faryal, tell me, you have studied International Business from Coventry, right?

Faryal Khan (06:54): Yeah, exactly

Vasay Chaudhry (06:56): So, where did the idea of modeling come from?

Faryal Khan (06:58): Basically, I was not interested in it initially. But when I returned to Pakistan, I had nothing to do. So, I did a shoot.

Vasay Chaudhry (07:01): (interjects) So, you started modeling?

Faryal Khan (07:01): (continues) I did another shoot. Then, gradually, I became a model.

Vasay Chaudhry (07:04): How does it happen that when you have nothing to do, you go into modeling?

Agha Majid (07:20): These days that degree has a mask on and is staying inside.
[Laughter]

Moving on, Khan is asked whether she is fond of cooking. She replies instantly that she is not at all interested in cooking. This comes after Majid is praised for his cooking skills by his fellow comedians. In the following excerpt, Majid makes fun of Khan's slightness saying that she does not like cooking because she survives on a single noodle.

Vasay Chaudhry (11:34): Alright, so Faryal, do you have an interest in cooking?

Faryal Khan (11:35): No, I don't have an interest in it.

Vasay Chaudhry (11:35): Yes, it's understandable
[Faryal Khan laughs]

Agha Majid (11:39): No, people like her can't cook... she just takes a single noodle and (mimics putting a long noodle in his mouth)

[Laughter]

At one point, to establish Majid as 'sensibly romantic', he is prompted to sing for Faryal Khan. Accordingly, he sings and performs a romantic song for her (17:00- 17:32). Although Khan is noticeably disturbed by Majid's physical proximity, she calls him 'cute' when asked about her experience of being romanced by him. This is another example of female denigration through non inclusivity, whereby Khan is primarily used as a source of amusement.

3.8 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

A FCDA will be done to highlight the themes of non-inclusivity and media control. In this clip, non-inclusivity refers to the trivialization of the female guest and her exclusion from the talk show agenda. Likewise, media control is exercised through the show's format (which is male centric) and the reduced airtime given to the female guest as compared to her male counterpart. This talk show includes a male host, a panel of male comedians and two guests: a male and a female. The male guest is usually a prominent politician or a senior film actor. The female guest is mostly a lesser known or struggling actor or model. This format supports female marginalization since it is male dominated, and women are invited merely for strategic purposes. They are made the objects of satirical humor, cross talk and repartee and are sexualized and objectified for thrill and entertainment. They are not included in the primary discourse and are usually asked to speak on insignificant and trivial issues which get embarrassing at times. The present clip displays all the above-mentioned features. The male guest, Agha Majid is a famous comedian and a senior colleague to the other comedians. He is therefore seen commanding their respect and attention due to his dominating personality and his sharp skills at repartee and cross talk. The female guest is noticeably ignored and is only indirectly referred to by the host, Vasay Chaudhary, almost six and a half minutes after her appearance on the stage. This happens when Chaudhary asks Majid about how he feels to be seated next to Khan and he replies with a smirk that 'it feels ok'. Here exclusion refers to the role assigned to Khan in the discourse which is that of an entertainer. This is further affirmed when Majid is asked to sing a romantic song for Khan and he circles her, goes down on his knee and sings with his gaze fixed upon her. This little spectacle is carried out at the expense of Khan who is visibly disturbed by Majid's proximity and unexpected actions (17:07- 17:32). With the spectacle over and the audience excitement calming down, Khan once again recedes to the background as a passive spectator. Non-inclusivity is also shown through a disregard for decorum with the male comedians carrying on with their bawdy and vulgar jokes without any regard for the female guest. She is even made to comment on their crude jokes by the host. Khan copes pleasantly with the men's derogatory attitude using positive words like 'cute' and 'I loved it' to retain her membership in the dominant discourse. Non inclusivity also occurs through trivialization. This is done through the use of diminutives and vernacular for addressing Khan and for projecting her as small, vulnerable and even foolish. For example, when Majid pretends not to know her name and calls her 'an innocent child' and when he uses 'ainu' which is slang for s/he in Punjabi. Moreover, she is treated as foolish and unintelligent. This happens on two occasions: once when the male comedians are engaged in dense repartee (in Punjabi) and Choudhary asks Khan if she understands what they are saying (10:08) and second when Majid was being roasted by his male companions and he says mockingly that its very unfortunate that even she can understand what's going on (14:09). The female guest is intermittently disparaged for various reasons such as for becoming a model when she had a foreign degree in International Business. The host repeatedly expresses his surprise at her decision to relinquish her business career for modeling. It is implied that those who don't have good options go for modeling. It is also suggested

that she may have faked her degree . Later, she is mocked for not being fond of cooking and is body shamed for resembling a ‘ single noodle’.. In short, the whole episode projects Faryal Khan as an object of frolic , amusement and cheap thrill. Non inclusivity and trivialization occur through the manipulation and underrepresentation of the female guest and her projection as a glamorous nonentity in a male dominated discourse.

3.9 Talk show: The Talk Talk Show

Guest: Iman Aly

Year: 2023

Duration: 5 minutes and 22 seconds

3.10 Structure of the interview

The ‘Talk Talk Show’ is a tabloid weekend show with one male host and no cohosts. The host, Hassan Choudary interviews one or more guests in a single episode. The host, although very friendly, has complete control over the topics of discussion. The questions are pre-decided and are read out from cue cards, but the host frequently improvises more questions. This show does not make use of repartee, crude humor or cross talk and all the entertainment and sensational content is provided by the host through his clever maneuvering. This show is rather progressive as compared to other Pakistani talk shows in that the host unreservedly flirts with his female guests and is very liberal in his choice of topics and questions. In the following excerpt, the female guest is subjected to satire and sexualization through the manipulative tactics of the host.

3.11 Conversation Analysis

This excerpt will be examined for media/institutional control. The interview begins with Choudary introducing the famous model and actress Iman Aly in the following manner:

Hassan Choudary (1:00-1:16): Ladies and Gentlemen! Give it up for the ravishing, the stunning, the most beautiful and equally talented, the heartbeat of not thousands but millions, the one and only Iman Aly.

She is then escorted to the center stage by the host who then gives her more tribute and compliments. He also pretends to be dumbfounded by her beauty and at a loss for words. From the very outset, Aly is presented as a sex symbol and the whole interview is crafted around her charm and beauty. The host’s behavior warrants this outlook, as he remains flirtatious throughout the interview. He ogles at Aly and even gets up to sit very close to her. He repeatedly compliments her on her looks and even asks her the secret of looking so beautiful.

Hassan Choudary (01:51):

(Looking at her and pretending to be speechless)

Iman Aly (01:52): Okay, so do we have to sit silently?

Hassan Choudary (01:55): (Looking at her admiringly) What should I do? Are we supposed to talk?

Hassan Choudary (02:15): I was thinking that whenever we see you on screen, you look very beautiful.

Iman Aly (02:21): (Sits up straight) Oh yeah.

Hassan Choudary (02:23): And when you came on the show and I saw you from afar, you looked just as beautiful. Now that I am sitting next to you, you are looking even more beautiful.

Iman Aly (02:34): I know.

Hassan Choudary (02:35): What is the reason behind it?

Iman Aly (02:36): I don't know. It is something done by God. He has done it

Although Aly is initially complimented on her beauty, the host soon shifts the conversation to her speech slurring, subtly invoking accusations of drug use or intoxication. This abrupt shift undermines the earlier praise, revealing a pattern of strategic maneuvering.

Hassan Choudary (07:22): You're right about social media. People often say that you are drunk or doing drugs. How do you see that?

Iman Aly (07:28): I speak with a slur.

Hassan Choudary (07:30): Because of MS.

Iman Aly (07:31): Yeah, but besides that, I've always spoken a bit slowly and with a slur. And MS has...

Hassan Choudary (07:37): It has exacerbated it.

Iman Aly (07:38): Yeah, it has increased.

In the following excerpt, Choudary acts surprised that no one was writing special roles for her. He repeats the question twice for the sake of emphasis. It comes to a point where Aly says openly that she is not doing any work because there are no good offers for her. She also mentions not having any money to make her own films.

Iman Aly (14:00): If someone was listening to me, wouldn't I be working?

Hassan Choudary (14:02): No one is writing roles for you? I would assume that special roles are written just for you.

Iman Aly (14:05): You write them for me.

Hassan Choudary (14:07): They're not being written? Really?

Iman Aly (14:09): No.

Hassan Choudary (14:09): So, is no one writing roles for you especially?

Iman Aly (14:12): I would have done them if they were being written. There's nothing at all. I have written my own scripts, but...

Hassan Choudary (14:19): You have?

Iman Aly (14:20): I don't have the money to make the films.

Still later, Choudary asks her about her friends in the film industry. The emphasis is on 'a lot of friends' as though it was a prerequisite for surviving in the industry. When Aly says that she doesn't, Choudary sounds surprised and disappointed. There is a deliberate stress on not having time to 'maintain friendships'

Hassan Choudary (25:16): But Iman, why are you not so friendly? Why don't you have friends?

Iman Aly (25:20): It's not about being friendly. I don't have the extra time to waste.

Hassan Choudary (25:25): You don't have time to maintain friendships?

Iman Aly (25:27): No, I don't make a lot of friends. I find them all a pack of lies flaunting their designer bags. I hate shopping, so I don't even get ready. I feel it's a waste of time. I'd rather sit at home and just watch Netflix. I feel that's time better spent.

This interview is an example of how the male hosts manipulate and relegate female guests through satire, sexualization and topic control.

3.12 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

An FCDA will further reveal how the aforementioned goals are achieved. In this case, the host begins the interview through intense sexualization of the guest to the point where she is made to appear as an object of pleasure for the male gaze. For the first half of the interview, the host is bent upon sexualizing her through his flirtatious attitude. He also takes advantage of her medical condition: MS (which naturally affected her speech and verbal responses) by putting her in situations which made her appear unwitty, careless and immature. She is initially presented as a charismatic celebrity but as the interview progresses, she is shown to be unsuccessful, friendless and jobless. Moreover, the host repeatedly tries to portray her as eccentric and insignificant. His questions are predetermined and focused on highlighting Aly's weaker areas for example her limited work, inactive status and lack of enthusiasm for her profession. She is also satirized for being a nonsocial and an unpopular actress who neither has friends, nor gets good work and who is not at all ambitious. Interestingly, the host delays speaking of her medical condition till much later and does not laud her for fighting a difficult illness. He speaks about MS only to emphasize her disabilities and how she speaks like a person who is drunk or who takes drugs. This interview reveals how women are marginalized through satirical remarks, sexualization and media control.

4. Conclusion

This study examines the intersection of talk shows and the bourgeois public sphere to uncover the sociohistorical roots of female marginalization in broadcast media. By applying Habermas's public sphere theory to selected talk shows, the research highlights the prevalence of gender-biased content in media platforms that are often regarded as open and egalitarian. Through Conversation Analysis and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, the study provides an in-depth exploration of how female marginalization manifests in Pakistani talk shows and its broader implications for women's media representation. The findings indicate that, despite positioning themselves as spaces for public discourse, talk shows frequently perpetuate gender disparities and reinforce dominant power structures by disseminating hegemonic views and gender biases. Additionally, the research reveals that talk shows, particularly late-night programs, remain male-dominated, with influential and charismatic hosts who wield significant control over the discourse. This authority enables them to exploit female guests through both overt and subtle mechanisms. The study advocates for greater gender sensitivity and equity in broadcast media, emphasizing the need to reform late-night talk show formats, increase female representation, and eliminate gender-biased content. Its multidimensional approach contributes to discourse analysis, communication studies, and gender research, offering critical insights into how Pakistani talk shows both reflect and shape societal norms. Ultimately, this research advances a feminist critique of media and underscores the role of the public sphere in addressing gender inequalities.

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