

## THE REINFORCEMENT OF PUBLIC & PRIVATE DOMAINS THROUGH TELEVISION IN CONTEMPORARY PAKISTAN

### ABSTARCT

The division of society into public and private spheres and associating the former with males and the latter with females has been fundamental to patriarchy. Patriarchy has existed for thousands of years using discursive discourses and without being much criticised. Gender 'roles' has been naturalized and presented within ideological discourses that reflect the existing power structure. The main objective of this paper is to delineate how males maintain patriarchal social structures by disseminating gender roles and ideology through television in contemporary Pakistan. The data for the study comes from television's dramas and commercials. The study is informed by poststructural theories in cultural studies and critical discourses analysis. Deconstructing and interpreting media texts, the study's analysis found that television programmes are ideologically invested that legitimize and reinforce the public and private division of the society by locating women in domestic sphere and men in the public sphere. The article further sheds light on the strategies that the dominant category (males) uses to project its own way of seeing society as masculine and feminine spaces and making the subordinate category (females) to accept it as natural and common sense reality. The study concludes with assertion that media reinforces male dominated social structures of Pakistani society whereby women accept domesticity as their natural role and economic activities and career as men's prerogative.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, Domesticity, Gender roles and ideology, Critical discourse

### Introduction

Television presents to its larger and attentive audience a certain image of the world, providing a framework for what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in society, and also sends out implicit and explicit messages of what the world is like. In its portrayal of 'normal' life, it reflects many important social roles, one of the most important and pervasive of these being 'gender roles' (Gunter and McAleer (1990). Before we engage

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literature review and discussion, it is appropriate to write few lines about how the categories of sex and gender are used and debated. The origin of sex and gender discussion in the Western scholarship is not clear. Francis (2006) argues that the concept of gender is a recent development in the study of people and society, and has been contested from a variety of quarters since its inception. However, sociologists and gender scholars distinguish gender from sex. In a very simple discourse, *gender* refers to masculinity and femininity, and *sex* to male and female. Most of the known human societies use the biological sex (femaleness & maleness) as the basis of constructing a social category of gender (femininity and masculinity). The term *gender* in this paper is used as socially and culturally constructed categories of masculinities and femininities, not to the state of being male or female in its entirety.

In the *nature* versus *nurture* debate, most sociologists and feminists take the side of *nurturer*. Feminists assert that the process of socialization, rather than biological characteristics and differences, make male more aggressive, competitive, domineering and fit for the public domain; whereas female more submissive, dependent, nurturing, caring, soft hearted, best for domestic sphere and household chores. Contrary to essentialists who believe in the innate biological and psychological differences between females and males, social constructionists point to the role of family, education and media in the construction of gender roles. They argue that gender roles are socially constructed which can be negotiated, mediated and left fluid instead of something fixed and eternal. Mass media, especially television, has an important role in constructing a secondary discourse about society and power relations. Gender relations are one of the secondary discourses that television programmes construct and reinforce.

### **Review of literature**

Mass media<sup>1</sup>, especially television, has become a dominant agent of shaping 'gender roles'. Gender roles are the social norms that dictate what is socially regarded as appropriate female and male behavior or attitudes and activities that a society links to each sex (Macionis: 1997). The representation of gender relations actually reflects the social, cultural, political and economic values of the society (Dines & Humez, 1994; Gauntlett, 2002). Contemporary mass media [especially television] considerably represents patriarchal ideology (Shattuc, 1997). Van dijk argues that television programs mirror dominant gender relations and patriarchal values that still remain in post-modern societies (Van Dijk, 1993). Gunter emphatically argued that sex-role stereotyping is more deeply woven into the fabric of television programming than the obvious numerical distinction between the sexes suggests (Gunter 1986). Bardwick and Schumann analyzed male and female role portrayals in television commercials and concluded that women are portrayed primarily as homebound or as housewives (1967). Van Evra (1990) identified that television presents a "distorted and stereotypic picture of occupational choice for women. Television advertisements [and programmes] are prominent discourses in virtually all contemporary societies (Cook, 2005). Television commercials depict women

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<sup>1</sup> Mass media refers to a form of communication such as newspapers, books, magazines, movies, radio and television, that are directed to large number of audience.

as sex objects. Courtney and Whipple defined sexual objects as: where women had no role in the commercial, but appeared as an item of decoration (1985). Craig found that women were more likely than men to appear as characters in medicine advertisements which reinforces the stereotypes that females are expert at home medical care often as mothers caring for ill children or a sick husband (Craig, 1992). This shows that advertisers take advantage of stereotypical images of women as home nurse and exploit the stereotype of women as nurturers. Bem Sandra (1981) argued that television portrayals of females in the public domain is narrow and restricted to midwives, doctors and pink color jobs which Sandra calls sexism and unprofessionalism of media. Media continue to push the idea of thin as attractive, leading many girls to worry unnecessarily about their weight and appearance (Eldridge 1997).

In order to place this study in a theoretical framework, it is reiterated that this study is informed by feminist poststructuralists and cultural neo-Marxist. The study engages concepts of discourse as used by (Foucault, 1977; Walkerdine, 1986, Davies, 1990). Drawing on Foucault, Walkerdine, and Davies, we take media texts as powerful discourses which function as sets of socially and historically constructed rules [norms] telling members of society “what is” and “what is not” and which prove a normative framework for which can be taught to the new generation which assume the status of what Ball called ‘naturalness and truth’ that perpetuates their credibility (Ball, 2007). The stereotypical representation of gender roles as natural and idealizing gendered power structure as the only true arrangement become what Gramsci (2006) would call *hegemony*. Hegemony is basically a political concept used to describe the processes of power in which the dominant group does not merely lead by rule of force but consent (Storey, 2007). This represents not only political and economic control, but also the ability of the dominant class to project its own way of seeing the social world so that those who are subordinated by it accept it as *common sense* and *natural* (Alvarado & Boyd-Barrett 1992). Drawing on Gramsci’s concept of hegemony the study unpacks how television serves the needs of patriarchal society by creating active consent and willingness among women to accept domestic chores as their natural role (Curran, 1997). The paper also focuses on explaining the power of ideology. Shaughnessy (1999) argues that each society has dominant ideology. Dominant ideology in our society is patriarchy. In Marxists views, television, then, can be seen as part of an ideological arena, or what Hall (1982) says ideological *site of struggle*, in which the different categories’ views are fought out but dominant category successfully monopolizes and projects its view of the world as the best and natural into which they socialize the subordinate. This paper takes male as the dominant category and women as the subordinate. Male uses television texts to reinforce and perpetuate patriarchal cultural norms and thereby maintain males’ dominancy.

### **Methodology in this study**

As mentioned earlier, this study is informed by feminism, especially feminist poststructuralists.

Since poststructuralists generally, and feminists particularly, emphasize qualitative and interdisciplinary modes of investigation, therefore, critical discourse analysis is used as the main methodological approach. Critical discourse is employed to delineate and unpack the tacit politics embedded in television discourses and to show how gender ideology is legalized, naturalized and made common sense reality in society. Five widely watched TV channels (PTV, Geo, ATV, HUM and ARY Digital) are selected under judgmental sampling technique for collecting relevant information. However, this does not simply mean selection of these channels as unit of data collection, rather a well designed and planned purposive sampling technique with rational consideration of channels, time, duration, types of events with a structured observation was employed. TV Commercial and Dramas were chosen as unit of analysis because dramas are squeezed in between commercials. After analysis of the media texts, we obtained opinion of 130 post graduate students of Gender Studies Departments of two universities. This was not necessary but by doing so findings of the study were strengthened by taking the common judgments of other gender scientists (students) which increased the validity and reliability of the concern.

### Unit of data collection

- **TV dramas/Plays:** *Jinhe raste mei khabar hoi, Chunri, Lahore junction, Wo suba kab aiy ge , Kahe ko biyahe bidais, Kollege k hain apne rang, Ye kaisi mohabat ha, Rasta Day Zindagi, Mere naseeb ki barishain, Ghumshuda, Kalmohi, kaghaz ki nao, judai mar daiti ha, Perfume chowk, Mei khabar hoi, Yaarian, Maasi aur malka, tumaiy kch yad ha janaa, Haal-e- dil and Chand parosa; Hawa, rait aur angan, , Noor bano, Thori si wafa chahiyay, Tanveer Fatima B.A, Maasi aur Malka, Shehar-e- dil k darwaze, Chunri, Kalmohi, Kaghaz ki nao, Haal-e- dil; Yeh kaisi mohabat ha, Anokha bandhan, Judai maar daiti ha, Kaghaz ki nao, Aas, Kalmohi, Maasi aur malka, swift, Kahe ko biyahe bidais, Lahore junction, Mere naseeb ki barishain, Kalmohi, hawa, rait aur angan, Chunri, Zenat Binte skina hazir ho,*
- **TV commercials:** *Jazz, U. fone, surf excel, Vim powder, doctor tooth paste, cooking oils, pampers, chocolate, ice creams, Air Conditions, Fans, National cooking fowader, Juices*
- **Individuals:** University Students of the Department of Gender Studies at Quaid-i-Azam university and Fatima Janna University

### The reinforcement of public and private sphere

Many of our mainstream beliefs about the *appropriate roles* of men and women stem from the industrial era that was characterized by the concept of separate spheres. Industrialization led to the polarization of works: paid and unpaid work, which also became reflected in the distinction between men's and women's work. Men became involved in paid work in the *public sphere* while women became associated with unpaid work in the home-*the private sphere*. This social arrangement, since then, has been presented as natural and legitimate through dominant discourses circulated through social

institutions-family, education and television being the most powerful in contemporary society.

The close and systematic watching and analysis of TV dramas and commercials with sociological and gender lenses revealed that television in Pakistan is largely traditional and stereotypical which promotes a polarization of gender roles. Paid works (business, high status jobs, jobs with more power and reward in the public sphere, working in workshop and the rest of public domain are demonstrated as men's world. Males were observed engaged in the wider public sphere with roles that were more challenging and exciting. Majority of women on TV were portrayed in the traditionally feminine roles such as housewife, caring mother, and dependent sister and engaged in the unpaid work of *private sphere*. This means television presents a "distorted and stereotypic picture of occupational choice for women" (Van Evra, 1990). Accepting private sphere by women as their natural role is what Curran (1997), drawing on Gramsci's concept of hegemony, asserted that television serves the needs of patriarchal society by creating active consent and willingness among women to accept domestic chores as their natural role. To substantiate the argument, reference is made to some dramas-*Lahore Junction, Rasta Day Zindagi, Mere naseeb ki barishain, Ghumshuda, Kalmohi, kaghaz ki nao, judai mar daiti ha, Perfume chowk, Kahe ko biyahe bidais* and few commercial such as *Jazz, U. fone, surf excel, Vim powder, doctor tooth paste*. In all these dramas and commercials men are predominantly demonstrated in jobs that are perceived as more prestigious with authority and more power such as police man, doctors, lawyers, army, businessman, manager and holding others white collar jobs in the private sector that ensure good salary and more respect. In stark contrast to males' roles, women are shown in the private sphere with homemaking. Women presence in the public sphere was observed as personal secretaries in office, nurses and Lady Health Workers (LHVs) which are traditionally considered feminine jobs and the extension of females nurturing role to the public domain. Condry (1989) argued that television portrays women a model, nurse, maid or secretary. This stereotypical representation of gender roles and patriarchal ideology is what Dines & Humez, (1994) and Gauntlett (2002) claim that television portrayal of gender relations actually reflects the social, cultural, political and economic values of a society.

Private sphere is so deeply associated with females that the businessman in the Drama '*Lahore junction*' forcefully shouts on his daughter "Go home" I said to go home and don't be in the factory as you have nothing to do with the business. Thus television, instead of functioning as agent of change, reinforces the existing gender division of labour. This reflects that Pakistani society is still sharply divided between public and private domains as revealed by family background data of the respondents (90 % of the respondents' fathers are working in the public whereas as 87 % of the respondents' mothers were housewives. Thus television dramas and commercials operate as powerful discourses which Foucault (1977) identified as productive power whereby social regulation is achieved willingly, even pleasurably, by the participants themselves.

### **Perpetuation of the hegemonic masculinity**

Television in Pakistan is traditional and hegemonic. It appears to play a catalytic role in helping men to maintain their dominancy in the society by presenting socially constructed *masculinity* as natural and dominant social value. *Masculinity* is associated with such traits as paid work in the private sphere, rationality, efficiency, competition, business, individualism, ruthlessness, rough & tough and aggressiveness.

Close examination of the dramas and commercials revealed that men are portrayed as independent (i.e. in Lahore junction Khalid marries with a girl independently, despite the fact that his parents have arranged his engagement with another girl), competitive (the two business rivals in drama *Rasta day Zindagi*), men as *women* protector (Khalid role in *Lahor Junction*). Throughout the sampled dramas and commercials it was men who expressed aggression, both in the public and private spheres. The classic Pepsi advertisement with Juaid Jamshed consists of males who are dancing, playing and singing 'we are Pakistani; we will win in all fields'. The tacit message being communicated is that playing sports, competition and winning things are males' prerogative. After a constant comparison of the data it is argued that Television channels through dramas and commercials demonstrate men in managing money and business; doing high status and power jobs; playing leadership role; doing sports; advertising cars, driving; intellectual pursuits; orating (public speaking; women's guardian & protectors; men's superiority over women; self initiator; demonstrating aggression; fishing; camping; admiring and using guns. They are found more in the world of things, in other wards; they are geared to succeed in a competitive economic system which preserves gender inequalities. This type of evidence suggests that, "in the long term, television has the potential to shape children's sex-role attitudes" (Gunter and McAleer, 1990, p 64). Television is still reinforcing stereotypes of masculinity and typical misconceptions of gender roles (Eldridge et al 1997). A general perception on the stereotypical representation from respondents confirmed to the results of our study (91 percent said TV shows present men in business, 90 percent said men are portrayed in high status jobs, 87 percent agreed to men's portrayal as independent and self directed, 92 percent emphatically asserted that TV depicts men as protector of women, 86 percent agreed that TV portrays men as aggressive). These responses from gender expert substantiate the concern voiced above.

### **Reinforcement of idealized and exaggerated femininity**

Television in Pakistan reinforces stereotypical, fixed and universal femininity. *Femininity* are associated with traits such as domestic chores (cooking, cleaning, nurturing children), nursing, emotionality, kindhearted, prudence, co-operation, a communal sense, compliance, fragile, submissiveness, more loving and sacrificing.

It was widely observed that television messages in Pakistan demonstrate women busy in cooking, raring and looking after children, cleaning dishes, doing make up, waiting for men, confused, sensitive and easily broken. TV presents good and happy women as submissive, more loving, the one who makes sacrifices, good in maintaining family's ties and relationships, looking after husbands and in-law with least interest in the public

domain. Happy and perfect women are shown mainly as housewives and mothers who do not challenge the injustices of patriarchal social structure. Women are framed as caring with ideal domesticity, Skeggs (2002) would argue as feminine capital which women trade for their respectability. Women who tried to be independent or those who challenged the traditional patriarchal rule and century old irrational cultural tradition were portrayed as rebellion, bad, selfish, unhappy, insecure and with bad marital relation (i.e. daughter of the businessman in drama *lahor junction* and the girl who became Khalid's wife are the classical examples). This demonstration of women gives a terrifying message to the larger women population that successes and happiness in their lives are dependent in their submission to men's authority and accepting men's superiority as natural and inevitable. Girls learn from most TV programmes and commercials that this world belongs to men in which women's location is private sphere in which they have to demonstrate their femininity and come up to males' expectation. This is exactly what Sharpe (1976) said that girls learn to be women. This type of evidence is disturbing as children who see the genders depicted in this way are assimilating the information they observe and picking up cues about how they should behave and act, unaware that what they are observing is a biased and distorted view of the world (Beasley, 1997). The study also found that women are presented with products used in the domestic spheres such as cooking oils (*soya supreme, Sufi banaspati, Kashmire Banaspati*), washing powders (*Surf excel, Bonnas* etc), refrigerators, utensil, dishwashing soap and powders (*Vim*) or with the children's products (*pampers, NIDO Milk*). In all these advertisement women were observed as cooking, presenting food, washing or busy in other domestic activities and enjoying them. This reflects what Van Evra pointed as 'television advertisers... appear to be clinging tenaciously to an image of women as creatures who become unbelievably excited over a detergent's cleaning power, whose worlds are narrow and totally house bound and who never discuss anything... complicated or stimulating (1990, p 117). Nevertheless, in some cases women are presented with products used in public domain which is, we assert, capitalist strategy of using women's bodies as commodities for men's consummations and cultural sites for males' gaze, or Courtney and Whipple (1985) would argue that television commercials depicts women as sex object where women has no role in the commercial, but appeared as an item of decoration. These analysis were rechecked with the field data which affirmed (90 percent respondents agreed that TV portrays women busy in domestic chores, 88 percent affirmed the stereotypical representation of women as emotional, 84 percent pointed that women are depicted as submissive and obedient to men, 92 percent pointed out that women are used as label for product marketing and 94 percent agreed that women are objectified)

### **Objectification of women's bodies**

Keeping postmodernists' theories of human bodies and sexuality as the central them, we argue that TV presents males' bodies into the ideology of productivity which are appropriately dressed and covered; whereas females' bodies are restricted to leisure and

pleasure. This sexual objectification of women's bodies in various forms such as whitening, thin & weak, exposed & selectively dressed with seductive posture are what we call an extension of patriarchal discursive modes and new form of women subjugation. Gettman and Roberts (2004) argue that television focuses on females sexually objectification. Study found that dramas and commercials objectify and glamorize young girls. *Advertisement such as English fairness snow, Gipsy Amazing cream, fair and lovely, head & shoulder*, and all other commercials are loaded with messages and stereotypes that objectify women. All these and other advertisement have an obsessive focus on whitening and thinness of female bodies. Media continue to push the idea of thin as attractive, leading many girls to worry unnecessarily about their weight and appearance (Eldridge 1997). The explicit and implicit messages, being communicated through these images, are those females' worth is in their bodies which are to be consumed like all other products. This objectification keeps women in the constant cycle of beautification along the males' standards which are in flux. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) coined the term, objectification theory-socializing girls and women to internalize an observer's perspective on their own bodies. They argue that young girls and women internalize an observer's perspective of their own bodies; they live much of their life in the third-person. This is called self-objectification. This means that females learn to be more concerned with observable body attributes rather than focusing on non-observable body attributes such as feelings, internal bodily states and even their intellectual development. Baker, Towell and Sivyer (1997) argued that the objectified presentation of women on TV creates body dissatisfaction and abnormal eating attitudes in the larger women category. Thus obsessive stress on exaggerated femininity and beautification was conceptualized by Naomi wolf 'beauty being political weapons against women' (Wolf, 2002). Men through the dominant discourses create unachievable beauty standards which require women's to spend all their intellectual and physical energy by meeting these standards and not focusing on developing themselves as rational independent human beings. This obsession with beautification on the part of women, in Wolf's thesis of *Iron Maiden and Beauty Myth*, pushes women to subordination & oppression in the larger society and enables men to maintain their dominancy in the public domain and superiority over women. This, we argue, converts women bodies into cultural sites that are visited by men for their gratification. It is safely argued that men's controlled capitalism uses women's bodies as marketing tool, leisure and pleasure for the males gaze.

## **Conclusion**

It is concluded from the above analysis and discussion that television dramas and commercials reinforce and perhaps even worsen gender-role stereotypes by associating public spheres with men and private with women as natural and inevitable (see discussion under the heading 'The Reinforcement of Public and Private Sphere'). In majority cases women are portrayed in roles that show them to be subservient to men and demonstrate an obsessed femininity (i.e. super-mom, good looking, expert in cooking, successful in managing relationship, good in saving money from kitchen budget). Men, on the other hand, are encouraged to express exaggerated masculinity (competitiveness,

business successes, winner in sports, independent and financial supporter of the family and being women protectors). The increasing erotica television dramas and commercials have objectified women and have reduced them into sexual object. This has pushed Pakistani women, especially young girls, into a state of self-objectification and self surveillance. The study's findings conclude that society is portrayed from a males' point of view with males still superior. This representation of status quo and power structure fits in very well into Hall's thesis-television is an ideological *site of struggle*, in which the different categories' views are fought out but dominant category successfully monopolizes and projects its perspective of the social world as the best and natural into which they socialized the subordinate.

The concern we voiced in this study is that television in Pakistan required a careful and systematic reform which challenge the stereotypical portrayals of women and men with gender based division of labour. Media, at least, should represent the actual picture of society as today women are visible in the public arena as sales women, businesswomen, politicians, police officers, drivers, professors, parliamentarian, technicians, and ministers.

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