

UNIQUE” MISOGYNISTIC FACEBOOK RESPONSES OF PAKISTANI WOMEN TO THE DRAMA SERIAL *KABHI MAI KABHI TUM*

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Abstract

This study examines internalized misogyny among Pakistani women through their English-language Facebook responses to the drama serial *Kabhi Mai Kabhi Tum*. Drawing on postfeminist theory, it explores how women, aiming to avoid “man-hating” stereotypes, often elevate men above themselves and other women, displaying a form of “unique” misogyny that devalues their own gender. Using Halliday’s (1994) Transitivity Analysis, 20 purposively selected Facebook comments were qualitatively analyzed to reveal linguistic strategies that construct this misogynistic stance. Results show that women frequently use language that both idealizes male characters and undermines female characters, reflecting internalized sexism. This research sheds light on how postfeminist attitudes sustain gender hierarchies and the role of social media in perpetuating internalized misogyny in contemporary Pakistani society.

The
Research Nexus

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

To many, the term ‘postfeminism’ may only mean the socio-political and economic wave that came post (after) feminism around 1980s and 1990s which dealt with individualism and women agency and went far beyond feminism, somewhere in the perspectives of pro and anti-feminism. But that is not the only definition as postfeminism has various layers of meaning. Budgeon (2011) mentions that Gill and Scharff (2011) highlight the different meanings of the term ‘postfeminism’. The first is the same, which the common understanding of this term is pertaining to the post in the name, i.e., it is the period that came after the second and third wave feminism. Second, postfeminism is an indicator of an epistemological break within feminism. Third, to Genz and Brabon (2009) post in postfeminism refers to the

temporariness. Fourth, ‘post’ could indicate the termination of feminism, something that according to them is obsolete. Fifth, it is a ‘sensible’ backlash against feminism as argued by Gill (2007).

Postfeminism tends to break this presumed confinement by placing the control in the hands of an individual. In fact, Braithwait (2002) argues that this current postfeminism admits and supports everything that the earlier feminism denied. This may imply that this postfeminism tries to mitigate between men and women as it looks beyond “shrill man-hating” (Gill, 2017) and focuses more on women as intrepid choice-making agents. This study intends to argue that in order to counter shrill man hating, in the postfeminist era, women tend to put men above them and other fellow women (McRobbie, 2009), as, by doing so, they believe they are not only normal (as in terms of

opposite of haters) but also “unique” (San Agustin, 2021) in terms of valuing men and while doing so they tend to sacrifice other fellow women and their natural needs. This implies that they exhibit internalized misogyny as they degrade other women. This study will explore the English language used by the Pakistani women while responding to the Pakistani Drama *Kabhi Mai Kabhi Tum* on the social media network named Facebook in order to see the transitivity system (Halliday, 1994) of misogynistic “uniqueness” of Pakistani women.

Literature review

During 1980s and 1990s, in North America the representation of women shifted to a more rational one in media. This ideology was named as postfeminism by Susan Douglas, Rosalind Gill and others (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Postfeminism is the set of ideologies, strategies and practices that assemble liberal feminist debates such as the freedom, choice and independence thereby incorporating them into media and consumer participation. It can broadly be defined as commodity feminism (Bloschmi, 2013) which channels the post-feminist attitudes (ethos) into commodity culture – where women are encouraged to empress themselves and demonstrate their liberty through participation in consumer culture.

Though, this may imply that young women can come forward in the society as per the idea that feminism has ended (Tasker & Negra, 2007), yet Gill (2007) argues that post is not a signal of end but it is an evolution of feminist thoughts addressing new challenges and complexities. Similarly, Hesford (2015) also argues that the post is not an end but it complements the collective goals of feminism with its ideas of individual agency and choice. This individualism, agency and choice-making resistance is what Banet-Weiser (2018) focuses on. She believes that since postfeminism focuses on the aforementioned salient features, it resists the gendered inequalities through a renewed focus. Thus, for Banet-Weiser (2018) too like Gill (2007), postfeminism is a sensible backlash against feminism as women’s focus has now shifted away from “shrill man-hating” (Gill, 2017) to being fearless and bold agents who are decisive and brave. This counterargument to man-hating leads to women

putting men above themselves according to McRobbie (2009), who argues that it is a postfeminist way of inflecting gender inequality where female bosses treat young men more respectfully than their female counterparts, thereby giving them more work as freelancers, or more complicated and hence better paid work. As a result, these postfeminist practices of respecting and valuing men become so destructive towards the surrounding women that they become misogynistic in nature. Such misogynistic acts exhibit misogyny, which according to Gilmore (2018), are the hatred towards women and contempt for females. It is ‘a feeling of enmity toward the female sex, a “disgust or abhorrence” toward women as an undifferentiated social category’ (Gilmore, 2018, p. 9).

Even though the concept of misogyny was always there but its widespread use appeared during United States Presidential elections of 2016, where Hillary Clinton faced political-misogynist, gut-wrenching criticism. Ever since then, the debates around misogyny increased in both media and scholarship (Manne, 2018; Banet-Weiser, 2018). According to Manne (2018) the logic of misogyny includes words, behaviors and expectations that enforce patriarchal social relations through surveillance on women. Banet-Weiser (2018) argues that today’s misogyny is networked, thereby stating ‘expressed and practiced on multiple media platforms, it attracts other like-minded groups and individuals, and it manifests in a terrain of struggle, with competing demands for power’ (p. 2). These like-minded individuals are not necessarily men but also women as Sheppard and Aquino (2017) argue that females report greater exposure to incivility, not because the members of the majority group (i.e. men) discriminate against them rather because of the women who have to compete with each other for limited resources. These acts of women getting sexist to their own gender, exhibiting hatred towards other women are termed as internalized misogyny (San Agustin, 2021) even though they are sometimes overlooked and are referred to as natural behaviors (Joyce et al., 2021) as in terms of the survival of the fittest.

Internalized misogyny aims on devaluing as well as mistrusting women in order to increase and maintain the power of men (Piggot, 2004). Since internalized

misogyny is perpetuated not only by men but also by women (Piggot, 2004,) it can be analyzed by looking at traditional gender roles of women, such as the presence of the behavioral patterns that prioritize men, objectify themselves as women or place themselves as women in a subordinate position (Bearman, 2009, p. 19). According to San Agustin (2021) it is the real version of the mean girls, with the concept that women must fight for their place in the world, and there are only limited slots to survive, so they must tear each other down. Also, as mentioned earlier, internalized misogyny doesn't always manifest itself from boys but it is girls hating on girls and dragging each other down.

As misogyny views women as objects and supporting characters to men (San Agustin, 2021) and women project sexist expectations on themselves and on fellow women, including dissociating themselves from their Femininity. "Not like other girls" is the phrase associated with girls who tend to be "unique" (San Agustin, 2021), and neutral and different from the stereotypical women who don't neutralize man-hating. These women see each other as enemies because they are conditioned to do so. They also think they are cool and they strive to be "unique". In order to be so they degrade and sacrifice other women through different means including language, through different platforms including social media.

Social media and broadcast play important roles in conveying our messages to larger audiences but TV is the primary means of communication to reach the majority of general public (Gripsrud, 2004). It is the platform where critical topics and issues of society can be discussed in a very convenient and light way (Stewart & Alexander, 2016). In Pakistani dramas, one of these critical topics is women and so Pakistani dramas are highly focused on women (Ikram & Mushtaq, 2023). Also, TV drama involves the feelings and emotions of viewers as it allows participation in a controlled environment (Ikram & Mushtaq, 2023) and since the topic is about women, female viewers get affected by it more easily.

The TV drama serial *Kabhi Main Kabhi Tum*, literal translation 'Sometimes You and Sometimes Me', as per Dawn (2024) follows the popular romance genre of marriage of convenience. The story revolves around Sharjeena, the female protagonist, who faces

heartbreak and humiliation when her fiancé, Adeel, abruptly cancels their wedding after getting a proposal from his wealthy boss, Rubab. To maintain her dignity, Sharjeena comes up with a practical arrangement, thereby proposing to Mustafa, the male protagonist and the younger brother of Adeel. As they navigate through their relationship of marriage of convenience, a slow-burning romance develops amidst lingering doubts, personality clashes, and financial struggles. The on-screen romance between Sharjeena and Mustafa has captivated Pakistani social media, with fans enthusiastically shipping the couple. Fan-made content, including reviews, comments, video montages and romantic soundtracks, has flooded the social media platforms, fueling the show's impact. Dawn (2024) establishes that the *Kabhi Main Kabhi Tum* fandom has evolved into a pop culture phenomenon, transcending the show itself.

Halliday (1994) gave six process types under the transitivity system of SFG that construe human experiences and thoughts. First is the material process, which is the process of physical actions, physical happenings, and physical doings with the performer of the actions as the doer while the object of the action as the goal. The second is the mental process that comprises of perception, affection and cognitive abilities sensed by a sensor. The sensor senses a phenomenon. The third is named as the relational process. Relational process is about having and being. It can either be attributive or identifying. The fourth one is a verbal process and it is about saying a verbiage which is said by a sayer to a receiver. The second last one is a behavioural process, which construes a psychological and physiological behaviour and behavior as its major participant. An existential process, the last of the six processes, depicts the process of existence. The whole transitivity system is accompanied by a circumstances system that is an indispensable part of each process type, comprehended by either prepositional or adverbial phrases, and can be categorized as: the circumstance of extent (level) and location (place, space), of manner (means, quality, comparison), of cause (reason, purpose, behalf), of contingency (condition, concession, default), of accompaniment (comitative, additive), of role (guise, product), and of a matter and angle.

Theoretical framework

Postfeminism is a set of ideologies and strategies along with debates and practices that bring together liberal feminist notions such as the freedom, choice and independence and incorporate them into media and consumer participation. This individual choice, freedom and agency is what Banet-Weiser (2018) focuses on as resistance, arguing that postfeminism resists the gendered inequalities through a renewed sensible focus. Thus, Banet-Weiser (2018) like Gill (2007), also believes that postfeminism is a sensible backlash against feminism as women's focus has now shifted from "shrill man-hating" (Gill, 2017) to being intrepid, fearless, decisive and brave agents in the society. This argument to counter man-hating leads to women placing men above themselves and other women (McRobbie, 2009), thus they exhibit misogyny, which is the ideology of hatred towards women and contempt for females (Gilmore, 2018) as it is a sense of 'enmity toward the female sex, a "disgust or abhorrence" toward women as an undifferentiated social category' (Gilmore, 2018, p. 9). These acts of women getting sexist to their own gender, showing hatred to other women, and thus their own gender, is internalized misogyny (San Agustin, 2021). As this is internalized misogyny so it doesn't manifest itself from men only but it is also the girls hating on girls and women dragging each other down. Misogyny views women as objects and supporting characters to men (San Agustin, 2021) and women project sexist expectations on themselves and on fellow women, including dissociating themselves from their core Femininity and basic feminine needs. For these women, "Not like other girls" is the phrase as they tend to be "unique" (San Agustin, 2021), and different from the stereotype. They also believe they are cool and as they strive to be unique, they degrade other women and see each other as enemies because they are conditioned to do so.

Problem statement

According to Ikram and Mushtaq (2023) Pakistani drama industry shows complex women relations therefore these dramas sometimes inspire women and sometimes pose challenges to the male dominant society by showing that women can face challenges

with the same courage as men. Since Pakistani dramas inspire the general public and specifically the women, they are talk about on social media platforms where some Pakistani women tend to respond to these dramas. The current study attempts to find out what linguistic choices are used by the Pakistani women to construe their misogynistic *uniqueness* while responding to the drama *Kabhi Mai Kabhi Tum* on the social media platform Facebook by finding out the processes used by them through an analysis of the transitivity system (Halliday, 1994). The four keywords that have been used to randomly fetch data of 20 responses/reviews from Facebook are: 1. Sharjeena, 2. Mustafa, 3. Kabhi Mai Kabhi Tum and 4. #KabhiMaiKabhiTum and the fetched data was filtered to get the responses that serve the purpose of this qualitative research.

Research objective

To find out the linguistic choices used by the Pakistani women to construe misogynistic "uniqueness" while responding to the drama *Kabhi Mai Kabhi Tum* on Facebook.

Research question

What are the linguistic choices used by the Pakistani women to construe misogynistic "uniqueness" while responding to the drama *Kabhi Mai Kabhi Tum* on Facebook.

Research methodology

This study employs Halliday's (1994) model of Transitivity Analysis to examine the linguistic choices in the Facebook responses of Pakistani women towards the drama *Kabhi Mai Kabhi Tum* in order to find out the misogynistic *uniqueness* construed in them. For this purpose 20 responses from Facebook have been fetched randomly using the following four keywords: 1. Sharjeena, 2. Mustafa, 3. Kabhi Mai Kabhi Tum and 4. #KabhiMaiKabhiTum. The fetched data has then been filtered to get the responses that serve the purpose of this qualitative research. The unit of analysis, in this research, as per the requirement of Halliday's SFG is clause therefore each response fetched from Facebook is broken down into clauses, and unnecessary embedded clauses or those not contributing to the meaning are removed.

Also, the ellipted clauses have been added back to, so as to maximize meaning-making. Since the data consists of 20 responses that are short and relevant, the findings of this study cannot be overgeneralized. Halliday's (1994) Transitivity analysis model has been employed so as to systematically examine the linguistic structures and meaning-making processes in order to find out what linguistic choices are used by the Pakistani women to construe their misogynistic *uniqueness* (San Agustin, 2021) while responding to the drama.

Further, since the data has been fetched from the social media (Facebook) and has slangs and other language deviations, in order to accommodate the norms of English, adjustments in terms of spelling correction, syntax correction, rephrasing of slangs, etc. have been made to the data, as and when needed, to ensure accurate analysis.

Furthermore, as the responses are Pakistani reviews so code-mixing and code-switching are found in them as they are prevalent phenomena in the multilingual country of Pakistan. Therefore, the Urdu chunks of the English responses have been translated into Standard English by the researcher to facilitate the data analysis at the clausal level.

Data analysis and discussion

The analysis of the data reveals that the responses of the female responders to *Kabhi Mai Kabhi Tum* on Facebook do construe internalized misogyny as these women through their language tend to put Sharjeena down who is the female protagonist of the serial. The language that has been used in the first response is loaded with relational processes. It is a response to the scene where female protagonist, Sharjeena, was rewarded a few thousand rupees by another character, Rubab (her ex-fiancé's wife) and her husband, for cooking well like skilled chefs at her elite home. Sharjeena had refused to accept the amount and had declared it as her insult, since it was more a comparison with the chef, a servant, which mattered to her. The relational clauses construes how the social media user and responder thinks that Sharjeena, the female protagonist, is creating unnecessary fuss that is not needed at all as a response to the monetary reward given to her. The relational clause signifies that there is a phenomenon present that has an attribute of

being unnecessary. One of the relational clauses "this is quite usual for new brides when they cook" construes that the responder believes that nothing unusual happened in the scene, and a comparison of a well-educated girl with a servant is okay, rather Sharjeena is a new bride and giving tokens in terms of money as a reward is normal for young brides. This also implies that the responder tends to ignore the insult she faced through a comparison with a servant, like most of the viewers. The third clause, which is a behavioural clause, reads as "she is acting all cold with Adeel and his wife" construes internalized misogyny as the responder is highlighting Sharjeena's behaviour towards Adeel and his wife as cold but not looking at the context of cheating that Adeel did to Sharjeena as her first suitor. Even though it was clearly established in the drama that Adeel as a fiancé' had humiliated her yet the responders want her to be a 'supporting character' (San Agustin, 2021) to the men of the family no matter good or evil. This representation of Sharjeena as the evil one, and a degradation of her as a female thereby signaling that she is doing wrong to a man and a man's wife due to shrill hatred, is again internalized misogyny. To add to her argument, the responder adds another relational clause "which doesn't make sense" with which (the attitude and behaviour of Sharjeena) as a carrier of the attribute i.e., sense that is not present in it as shown through a relational process. This addition of a relational clause supplies as a ground for the material clause the responder used in her response. On the basis of this clause, she clearly degrades Sharjeena's normal human response to cheating as cold and nonsense thereby sacrificing her basic needs. At the end of this response there's another material clause which reads as "if she doesn't have any feelings she should act normal." The addition of a circumstance of condition "if she doesn't have any feelings" adds precision to the claim thereby showing that Sharjeena has (feelings of) hatred towards Adeel and it is not him who has done it to her. The clause also has she as an actor and normal as an action thereby signaling that her normal human response to cheating is not normal rather is abnormal and needs amendments to become normal. This demeaning of femininity to look *unique* is clearly misogyny (San Agustin, 2021). This is clearly a degradation of the normal human feelings of the

female protagonist and is also her leg pulling, that San Agustin (2021) further calls as misogynist women's unique attempt to look different from other women. This response also positions Adeel above Sharjeena, even though he was the one who cheated, thereby the responder tends to be more postfeminist by sacrificing women to avoid "shrill-hating" (Gill, 2017) of men, even the evil men.

Another response reads as *"Didn't she force him to pursue his passion and work hard? Honestly that's how people work when they are passionate about something."* The clausal breakdown of this response reveals that there is a material and a relational clause, where the material clause works as the contextual foundation of the relational clause, thereby putting the onus of the act on the female protagonist who is the doer of the action in the first clause. The prevalence of material processes implies that the response targets the actions of Sharjeena more in order to put her down. The first clause, a material clause, reads as "didn't she (actor) force (material process) him (receiver) to pursue his passion (goal)?" showing that if Mustafa is busy enough to ignore his basic duties like to be around his wife while she is unwell and attend to his home and family, is because Sharjeena forced (material process) him to do so. The blame has been shifted to the woman (San Agustin, 2021) even though the main culprit is the male protagonist, Mustafa. Very subtly the responder has put the blame of Mustafa's carelessness on Sharjeena. This response is to a scene from the drama where Sharjeena single handedly struggles through her day-to-day chores because of her deteriorating mental and physical health due to the absence of Mustafa. Also, this is an attempt to put the female character as a supporting character to the man in the picture thereby implying that her role is to serve and facilitate (San Agustin, 2021) and not to fight for her rights and basic needs like companionship, no matter how bad things go. This is also a way to sacrifice women's worth as equal to men to display a neutral tone towards man-hating, as a shift from shrill man-hating (Gill, 2017)

Another response reads as *'What kind of a partner is she? She wants cheap jobless kind of romance yet she forces him to work. Isn't this what she wanted him to be serious in life?'* This response has two relational clauses and two material clauses. The two relation clauses are the

clauses that identify her character as a spouse where her partnership is questioned and also her wants and desires for her spouse are questioned in terms of her seriousness. The third clause which is a material clause talks about her demand of cheap romance thereby labelling her as someone who seeks for cheap romance and not practical things, a way to degrade her (San Agustin, 2021). The one more material clause talks about how she has forced him to work thereby signaling that she is being controlling and not facilitating, which is the traditional role of a woman, to be positioned in a way that she becomes the supporting character to men around her (San Agustin, 2021). Overall, the whole response puts the female protagonist down and discusses how she is controlling, is confused and is not accommodating her husband who is the male protagonist. This also implies that she is not being normal towards the male counterpart which is what misogynists want women to do as the facilitators of men. The female in her response also puts Sharjeena in a position that is below Mustafa thereby questioning how credibility and choices in the light of Mustafa's life, his priorities and his decisions to imply that Mustafa, as a man, comes first and his needs, his wants, his priorities, his requirements should be taken care of by Sharjeena despite her normal hormonal needs of pregnancy as women are the facilitators (San Agustin, 2021) as spouses and family.

Another response has a clause that reads as *'Sharjeena has become too clingy with time'*. This relational clause exhibits the judgment and critique done by the female responder. It shows how female responder thinks that the female protagonist, Sharjeena, has become too clingy with time thereby ignoring the facts that have caused this clinginess including her feminine needs, her need for companionship, the duties of a marriage, the fluctuation of pregnancy hormones and other factors like loneliness and nuclear household. This response is a clear attempt on the part of the female responder to put the female protagonist in a degraded position so as to put Mustafa above her thereby showing that Sharjeena's normal feminine needs are not only extra but also unnecessary 'clinginess' and should be disassociated from (San Agustin, 2021).

The last response for this study has the following clauses along with some other clauses: *"..But wise ones*

[wives] remain patient, [wise wives] give him some space and we all do that!" This response along with other clauses has three material causes that have been stated already clearly construe the misogynistic uniqueness of the responder thereby showing that the whole onus of the responsibility has been kept on the female protagonist since she is positioned in a way that is below Mustafa and she has to be a facilitator in the picture so that Mustafa functions well. The response also has a very generalized statement that mentions how wives are supposed to do that and how this is something that is very normal on part of all the wives, as all the wives are supposed to do it. So no matter how abnormal or wrong it is Sharjeena has to do it and if she is not doing it she is being evil. This is clearly what San Agustin (2021) argues that women put other women down, sacrifice their needs and degrade them in order to establish their misogynistic uniqueness.

Findings and conclusion

Since Braithwait (2002) argues that current postfeminism supports most of what the feminism denied, thereby meaning that this postfeminism tries to mitigate between men and women as it looks beyond "shrill man-hating" (Gill, 2017) and focuses more on women as intrepid choice-making agents. The purpose of this study was to argue that in order to counter shrill man hating, in the postfeminist era, women try to put men above other women (McRobbie, 2009) to believe that they are not only normal but also "unique" (San Agustin, 2021) in terms of valuing men and not showing 'shrill man-hating' characteristics. While doing so women tend to sacrifice other women. This implies that they exhibit internalized misogyny as they degrade other women. The purpose of this study was to explore the language used by the Pakistani women while responding towards the Drama *Kabhi Mai Kabhi Tum* on Facebook in order to see the transitivity system (Halliday, 1994) of misogynist "uniqueness" of Pakistani women reviewers.

The analysis of the data reveals that the highest number of clauses in the responses are that of the relative processes and the second one is of material processes. The highest prevalence of relative processes implies that the reviews are full of judgments, comparisons, or attributions made about Sharjeena

with respect to Mustafa so as to put her down, e.g., "Sharjeena has become too clingy with time". Even though it's a basic feminine need in a marriage, that women tend to seek companionship. Relational processes are dominating the analysis, as the data is full of comparison, judgment, or criticism of others, which is a characteristic of internalized misogyny and post-feminist discourse. This has been done to sacrifice Sharjeena's natural needs, during pregnancy, while she is unwell physically and mentally, and basic femininity so as to look "unique" as San Agustin argues. These relational processes typically involve three types (1) Attributive relations (e.g., "Sharjeena is so annoying"), (2) Identifying relations, e.g., "She's just too cold", "He's the best actor". (3) Possessive relations (e.g., "it is her worst mistake"). This also shows that relational processes do construe internalized misogyny in the form of attributive relations of degrading, identifying relations of comparisons and possessive relations of qualities.

It was also found that the second most prevalent type is that of material processes, showing actions, events, or states related to the drama's plot and characters like Sharjeena and Mustafa e.g., "But wise ones [wives], remain patient," "[wise wives] give him some space." and "We all do that!". This has also been done to sacrifice Sharjeena's feminine needs and basic femininity and replace them with certain expectations that keep men (Mustafa, in this case) above women (Sharjeena, in this case) so as to look "unique" as San Agustin (2021) argues. This also implies that material processes do construe internalized misogyny as the second most prevalent types, in the way where men are positioned above women, as they construe what women didn't do to make things right, what women could have done to make things right, what women should do to make things right without paying little attention to the fact who made these things wrong, so as the neutralize hatred towards men as Gill (2017) argues.

The Hallidayan transitivity analysis also reveals that the third type, as per the count, is of mental processes. The mental process construes thoughts, feelings, or emotions expressed by reviewers about the drama or characters (e.g., "I feel that Sharjeena over reacted") and also the emotions of the characters, i.e. Sharjeena, and Mustafa. (e.g., " He loves her// and [he] cares for

her//. He doesn't want his child in that dingy apartment./").

Author's Biography

Rabail Haque is a PhD English Linguistics Scholar at International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan, with research interests in Systemic Functional Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, ELT, SLA and Corpus Linguistics. She has also taught several Theoretical Linguistics and Applied Linguistics courses at the graduate level.

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