



Exploring Transgender's Representation, Perceptions and Experiences: An Analytical Study of Portrayal of Transgenders in Bollywood Movies and Its Effects on Transgender Community of Lahore, Pakistan

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Abstract: *The study attempts to analyze the portrayal of transgender in Bollywood movies and also explored viewpoints of transgender's regarding their representation in selected Bollywood movies. The study focused on them with reference to their problems and challenges. Queer and framing theories provide theoretical implications for the study. The queer theory implies that media content establishes the identities of transgenders through characterization in stereotypical ways, while framing theory infers that media adopt particular frames to enable viewers to think about the transgender's community in a specific manner. Content analysis, survey and intensive interviews were used as research methods. The study concluded that there is a stereotypical representation of transgenders in Bollywood movies. They are portrayed as sex workers, beggars, criminals and dancers. However, the transgender community is looking for a change regarding the stigmatization and misconceptions about them.*

Key Words: Media Representations, Transgender's Experiences, Bollywood Movies

Introduction

The word transgender is used for those individuals whose gender identity, appearance or actions are dissimilar with their given sex at birth. In South Asia, the term “hijra” is commonly known. They are also denoted as “khawajasiras”. Both terms can be used interchangeably. The transgender

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community has a subculture that sets its own norms, values and traditions. The “farsikalaam” is referred to as a native language that is used by the members of the ‘hijra’ subculture. The transgender community has confronted discrimination at several stages like legal, official and social—the people deliberate transgender’s existence as parasites. The people learn conservative attitude from the society beliefs which described them to stay away from the company of ‘hijras’. They are thought to be diverse and also taken their presence as cursed being. The young children are reserved from their straight vision because of the groundless terror. Although the Constitution of Pakistan safeguards all population by protecting their civil rights, self-respect and position, unfortunately, these rights are not turned into safeguard mechanisms for the vulnerable groups, especially the transgender community. Society gives a lack of respect and acceptance for the transgender community and simply subjecting them to harass and violence on the basis of their gender identity. The current study has explored the portrayal of transgender in Bollywood movies and its impact on the transgender community of Lahore, Pakistan. Due to the advancement of technology, the influence of media has been increased rapidly among people. It is important to recognize that the media has the power to shape and modify public opinion ([Tahir, 2012](#)). Mass media is an influential tool and numerous trends, including novels, plays, poetry, films, photography and music videos; these have the basic aim to illustrate human beings and their objects in a realistic mode. However, films are considered that sort of medium where reality is characterized in a fake or exaggerated way. The different forms of media take the tangible imprint from the world and have the ability to reproduce the innovative identity of the original one, hereby viewing us as a perfect visualization of authenticity (Shayghnessy&Stadler, 2002). The media depicted transgender as a comic figure, prostitutes, violent in front of their viewers because media has an account to the influential world by telling their stories like that transgender people are constantly victims or villains instead of their accurate and positive representation, which considered them as a human being and also have right to deserved equality and respect as other citizens (Gay& Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, 2012). Media cannot act as an agent of change towards the equal depiction of transgender, but it illustrates their image in a bizarre and nauseating manner. It is showing an alternative side of their character that simply taken them as a source of all witticisms apparatuses. Most of the Hindi movies projected transgender characters in confused notion and being homosexual man ([Jain, 2015](#)). In Bollywood movies, a marginalized group named trans-people have continuously been exposed in a specific way labelled as stereotypical. The Bollywood movies hardly attempt to investigate the world and consciousness of transgender as a substitute; they produce movies that are generally shown the third gender as caricature substances of mimicry and criminal. The songs feature on eunuchs is distinctive as being arduous, noisy and vulgar. Typically, in Hindi movies, hijras are enormously portrayed loud, harsh and shameless, as well as one-dimensional characters who have no distinction at all ([Daruwalla](#)). The reason to select the portrayal of the transgender community is that they are still facing stigmatization, discrimination and disrespect from society. There is a backward mindset exist that consider them useless and not capable of doing anything, just like media content. Due to social discrimination, fear of rejection and lack of education, transgender

people do not expose their talent of being doing something positive and constructive for society. Media has the ability to inform, educate and entertain their viewers with objectivity, but it does not play a significant role to gain respect and right for the transgender community. Conceivably, the uncertainties about transgender people would not happen if their depiction is accurately visible in media. The study also selects transgenders of Lahore to know their viewpoints and experiences regarding their representation in Bollywood movies.

Objectives

The study aims to analyze the portrayal of transgender in Bollywood movies and to know the perspectives of transgender about their representations. The study also attempts to understand the experiences of transgenders about the role of media in creating sensitization regarding their issues and rights.

Literature Review

Media Representation of Transgenders

Media symbolized other faces in a typecast way which reveals their appearance as an isolated body of society from social custom. The immature role of media constructs destructive labels against them ([Panda, 2016](#); [Straube, 2014](#); [Miller and Sabharwal, 2012](#)). Most of the Bollywood movies portrayed the image of transgender as an entertainer in comedy, thriller and horror movies by using fixed visual codes like loud make-up, freak applause and vulgar body movements. Hence, this kind of characterization creates distance from their viewers ([Wellborn, 2015](#)). Media presents the image of the transgender community through their popular mediums, particularly films. The transgender presentation must be encouraged by media content to minimize fear towards them and also to provide education about gender roles among the masses because people learn things from it (Tasi, 2010). Several kinds of television advertisements only focus on depicting transgender personality by means of gay and lesbian relations ([Gill, 2008](#)). Pakistani television dramas were not presenting their actual image in front of society ([Raley and Lucas, 2006](#)). The majority of transgender depiction lies in the non-representative phase, and some stand in the regulation and respect stages ([Gibson, 2004](#)). News related to transgender issues like social, legal is not reported by media ([Sinnott, 2002](#)).

Impact of Movies on Transgenders and the General Public

Online and offline media gradually represent transgender to the up-to-date public about their lifestyles. Consequently, the general public perceived their identity as an injurious part of society through specific media messages ([Mcinroy and Craig, 2015](#)). Unconventional films were mostly persisted in the LGBT community in an uncultivated region, which may arouse conflicts and terrible consequences for them ([Mandeep, 2015](#)). Movies are considered a medium that reflects societal aspects and provides better understanding among their viewers. The diverse recognition of the third gender by movies generates complications for them ([Bhattacharjee, 2014](#)). Viewers

easily recognize and build their point of views through motion pictures based on transgender without using sense. That sort of biased representation arises negative outcomes for transgender people throughout their life. (Young, 2009) The film industry may portray an accurate representation of vulnerable communities rather than reciting injurious stereotypes because that may cause to develop believe root among viewers to behave with transgender as watched in movies. (Donnelly, n.d.)

Problems Faced by Transgenders

Transgender's are confronted with numerous health difficulties; endure harassment, illegal problems, sexual exploitation, forcefulness and denial of social privileges. They primarily entitled police, including traffic and railway police, as the main offenders of violence and abuse towards them (Chettiar, 2015). There was an extensive communication gap between eunuchs and society because people did not correspond and build any relation with eunuchs. Most people give them money because they believe in their mystic powers (Ali, 2011). Cross-gender people have a greater risk of suicide attempts. This is because of their greater refusal and separation from peer and family members (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2005). Transgender's undergo several problems to survive in a society like unemployment, non-legitimate facilities, shelter and health services as compared to other genders, which are facilitated by gender equality (Kenagy and Hsieh, 2005). HIV risk was greatly occurred among the transgender population because of their lack of knowledge regarding sexually transmitted disease and other issues such as social discernment, despair and suicide attempts (Bocking; Robinson; Forberg and Scheltma, 2005; Kenagy, 2002). Two-spirit participants had greater amounts of infant physical exploitation and distress within their families and also had severe mental signs. Usage of alcohol and other drugs were more expected among them (Balsam, et al., 2004; Beatty and Lewis, 2003). Young transgenders face issues like harassment and bullying. However, if they are dismissed from a job, they face problems like homelessness, excessive drugs usage or they may become a sex worker who may lead to violence (Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing and Malouf, 2001). Infant transgender frequently bears a great level of discrimination, particularly in their school atmosphere. That sort of social rejection constructs various health complications like suicide attempts, provocation and drugs usage. And isolation from family members may cause deprived outcomes in their educational career (Munoz, Quinn and Rounds, 2002).

The above literature review illustrated the representation of transgender in movies and their impact on them as well as their issues due to which they suffer to survive in society; with the help of reviewing the article, the study formulated hypotheses and research questions for the targeted area. Most of the studies illustrate transgender representation by taking all types of media (print, electronic and online medium) as well as applied different phrases for their deeper investigation. Some studies point out that if media represent transgender in an odd narration in front of the viewers that sort of representation cultivate unhealthy consequences for them because few studies used face to face interview techniques which indicate that marginalized group named transgender

do not like their portrayal in media and they think that media has made us a cursed being just like a society that considers them as taboo.

Theoretical Framework

The study implies framing and queer theory as a theoretical framework. Framing theory, by Erving Goffman (1974), described that media effects the mindset of people and also helped to change their viewpoints. Media tell “what to think” and sometimes leads towards “how to think”. The rationale for applying this theory is based on the arguments that media representations of certain groups or communities set the perceptions and beliefs about them by determining their identities. The characterization of transgender using certain frames sets opinions and perceptions about them. Framing theory helped to analyze the portrayal of transgender in Bollywood movies by providing a way to know the nature of representations. The movies use structure frames to make logic about complicated information that also manipulate audience visions. Therefore viewers believe on what the media had shown to them.

The queer theory originated with the work of Teresa de Lauretis and Eve Kosofsky (Halperin, 2003), but Judith Butler's “Gender in Trouble” in 1990 is the key contribution to the queer theory. Queer theory talked about the identities that are not fixed and do not decide to establish who we are. According to the butler, the individual gender can be perceived as an unsolidified component that might be diverse by changing circumstances and times. Queer theory guided this research study in a way that gender identities are not fixed but fluid, and trans genders as individual share their own identities. The theory has applied to consider equal rights and self-determination of the transgender community. The representation of queer people indicates that in the actual and imaginary world, their existence is not recognized as human beings properly. Transgenders have been part of media contents, and their representation in movies and other media remains an important concern, so queer theory provides assumptions to this study to know the nature of portrayal and also to understand the experiences of the trans community regarding their media treatment.

Hypotheses

- H1:** Characterization of transgenders is stereotypical in Bollywood movies.
- H2:** Bollywood movies are having a negative influence on transgenders.

Research Questions

1. How have transgender characters been represented in Bollywood movies?
2. Do transgender feel appreciation about their projection in Bollywood movies?
3. Whether the representations of transgenders in movies having negative influences on the transgender community?
4. Do Bollywood movies play a part in giving awareness to transgender about their rights and issues?

Research Methodology

A triangulation research design has been adopted (content analysis survey and intensive interview) to collect data. **Content analysis** is a systematic analysis of texts. The *universe* was Bollywood movies released from 1997 to 2016. A sample of eight movies was selected through *purposive sampling method* based on the presence of transgender characters that included “*Darmiyaan, Murder 2, Sangharsh, B.A Pass, Rajjo, Welcome to come to Sajjanpur, Shabnummausi, Tamana*”.

Table 1. Unit of Analysis, Categories and Operationalization of the Terms used in Content Analysis

Unit of Analysis	Categories	Operationalization
Characters	Positive(+)	Lead role as well as talented, Knowledgeable, ethical
	Negative(-)	Villain (Supporting role), supporter of villain, vulgar
	Neutral(0)	Guest appearance, supporting role (positive), side role like passerby on a road
Visual Representation	Positive(+)	Unfitted and covered dresses, appropriate make-up and jewelry
	Negative(-)	Fitted, cleavage, uncovered outfits, loud make-up and jewelry
	Neutral(0)	Look in positive and negative category
Status	Positive(+)	A professional, educated social worker, strong
	Negative(-)	Prostitute, beggars, seductive dancers and criminal
	Neutral(0)	Whose status display fair representation

In order to get the point of trans-people about their representation in Bollywood movies *survey method* was adopted. *The population* was comprised of the transgender community of Lahore, while a sample of 200 respondents was approached by using a *convenient sampling method*. *Intensive interviews* of two transgender theater artists were conducted to understand the narrative of trans-people who were working in media.

Findings

Table 2. Analysis of the Nature of Characters of Transgenders in Bollywood Movies

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	3	3.846%
Neutral	42	53.84%
Negative	33	42.30%
Total	78	100%

Interpretation: The negative representations of transgender characters were the highest as compared to the positive and neutral nature of portrayal in Bollywood movies.

Table 3. Analysis of visual Representations of Transgender in Bollywood Movies

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	107	20.112%
Neutral	113	21.240%
Negative	312	58.6466%
Total	532	100%

Interpretation: The visual portrayal of transgenders was found majorly negative as compared to positive in Bollywood movies.

Table 4. Analysis of transgender status in Bollywood movies

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	2	0.86%
Neutral	58	25.10%
Negative	171	74.02%
Total	231	100%

Interpretation: The majority of the transgenders characters were assigned negative status in Bollywood movies.

Table 5. Frequencies, Percentages and Mean of the Designated Questions for Transgender Community of Lahore, Pakistan

Questions	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Bollywood movies portray equitable image of transgenders	40	20.0	2.34
Yes	53	26.5	
To some extent	107	53.5	1.24
No			
Transgender presented as entertainer in bollywood movies	169	84.5	1.24
Yes	25	12.5	
Somewhat	6	3.0	2.57
No			
Bollywood movies change general public behavior	149	74.5	2.57
Yes	36	18.0	
Somewhat	15	7.5	

Questions	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
No			
how do people behave with transgenders in social gatherings			
Laugh on	65	32.5	
Misprized	27	13.5	2.86
Both	63	31.5	
Respectable	1	.5	
Miscellaneous	44	22.0	
What income source of transgenders does show in Indian Films?			
Dancer	37	18.5	
Beggars	14	7.0	3.90
Prostitute	27	13.5	
Violent	9	4.5	
All of them	113	56.5	
Bollywood movies represent transgender in a stereotypical way			
Yes	14	7.0	1.84
Somewhat	29	14.5	
No	157	78.5	
Do Indian films give positive information to trans-people about your rights?			
Yes	46	23.0	1.97
Somewhat	69	34.5	
No	85	42.5	
Do Indian films highlight your social and emotional issues of transgender community?			
Yes	55	27.5	1.86
Somewhat	84	42.0	
No	61	30.5	
Usage of Drugs			
Yes	164	82.0	2.67
Somewhat	30	15.0	
No	6	3.0	
Reasons behind the usage of drugs			
Family rudeness	16	8.0	2.98
Sexual Relationship	65	32.5	
Presume as wonder	18	9.0	
People bad behavior	58	29.0	
	43	21.5	

Questions	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Enjoyment			
Face harassment			
Yes	22	11.0	
Frequent	123	61.5	1.59
Rarely	46	23.0	
No	9	4.5	
Satisfied on the bill of protection of rights			
Yes	95	47.5	
Somewhat	63	31.5	2.16
No	42	21.0	

Hypotheses Testing

H1: Characterization of transgender is stereotypical in Bollywood movies.

H0: Characterization of transgender is not stereotypical in Bollywood movies.

Table 6.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.629(a)	4	.013
Likelihood Ratio	14.942	4	.005
N of Valid Cases	200		

Here the chi-square value is 12.629, and the p-value is 0.01 which is lesser than the level of significance (0.05). Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted significantly, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

H2: Bollywood movies are constructing a negative influence on transgenders.

H0: Bollywood movies are not constructing negative influence on transgenders

Table 7.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	24.870 ^a	8	.002
Likelihood Ratio	20.560	8	.008
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.554	1	.033
N of Valid Cases	200		

Here the p-value (0.002) is less than the level of significance (0.05); therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Findings of Intensive Interviews

Transgender 1

“The projection of transgender in media matters. If filmmakers do not adopt the criteria to represent the affirmative side of their lives, then the people think about them in a destructive manner. The movies highlight the transgender community as homosexual, while not all transgenders are homosexual. The media must take some particular steps to represent the transgender community in a realistic way. Social institutions, like media, need to transform their policies towards the trans-people. The bill represented in the legislative body here in Pakistan needs modification because it is a duplicate copy of the Indian transgender bill. The bill does not highlight the other major issues of transgender’s, which are necessary to solve. Another important issue that we face is the prevalence of HIV aids which is high among transgender because of unemployment”.

Transgender 2

“All the film industries represent the image of the transgender community as illiterate. They always portray us in a negative way and makes fun of us. There is a need to change the character representation of the transgender community, which may cause to build their real image among viewers. Transgender people face the threat of social stigma, discrimination and harassment when they speak to others. The government of Pakistan has not made any welfare policies regarding the transgender community that can make us acceptable and valuable to others as a part of society. There must be a quota in the annual budget for us so we may spend a happy and better life. Most of us attempt suicide because of unemployment and rejections in society”.

Discussion and Analysis

Bollywood movies are presenting stereotypical images of transgenders as pimp, dancer, sex worker, comic, violent and beggars. However, the movies “*ShabnumMausi*” and “*Welcome to Sajjanpur*” are somehow depicted positively. The transgender community watch Bollywood movies, but they are not satisfied with their representation in movies. Additionally, they argued that most of the times, they are taken as amusing characters to please the audience. They think that the major reason behind the people hostile attitude about us is the negative projection of their characters, visual representation as well as status in orthodox mode by media, specifically Bollywood movies. Moreover, the public looks transgenders as inferior objects and consider that they have no right to having a respectable status in society. This sort of harsh attitude may cause emotional and mental distress among trans-people. The study further found that people make fun of the existence of transgenders and pass on derogatory looks just like a worthless creature in the world. This has construct unease and pain between transgender, which has forced them to consume drugs to some extent. But to somewhat, these movies projects their socio-economic awareness among them. Transgenders want a change in their roles in movies means projected

their existence in a meaningful way. The intensive interviews taken by the psychologist, Pakistani film directors and transgender theatre artists have suggested that there is a necessity to provide gender education information in terms of a subject like social studies, Urdu and English and also to provide a quota system in government allocated budget that sort of modification would encourage them to comprehend about their distinctiveness in a better way and also respect other non-conforming gender instead of constructing abuses thoughts towards them. Consequently, it is tough to found while tuned the t.v or other electronic media like movies and perceive the image of transgender by playing a doctor or teacher roles and receiving education from a college; this projection still conveys among trans-people cannot transport from the dimness of communal wildness and assurances that they cannot achieve the same civil rights as non-trans people have as the general public. If the media illustrated their knowledgeable personality, then this is considered the only way to promise them that it is citizenship, humankind and depiction of transgender. To fill this distance, media should take significant methods because it has the power to shape and mold people attitude as well as also projected the positive perspective of their personality instead of presenting a negative manner.

Conclusion

Bollywood movies do not represent the objective picture of transgenders. Instead of presenting their existent social problems like unemployment, lack of education, health and mental issues through Bollywood movies, sketch them as a comic figure, sex worker, violent criminal, beggars, and dancers. For the sake of entertaining viewers, movies also used exaggerated elements concerning transgender's appearance, such as uncovered dress pattern, loud make-up, abusive language and humorous lyrics of songs. Transgenders face anxiety and depression after watching movies based on them because they agree that movies have the capacity to change the general public attitude towards them by illuminating different themes. Consequently, people feel hesitation to interact with them. Moreover, in social gatherings, the young generations show negative behavior towards transgenders by making fun, laugh and passed derogatory expressions on them. Hence, nobody gives them a respectable notion as a human being.

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