

Perfection and Working Women: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of a Pakistani Morning Show

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p- ISSN: 2521-2982

e- ISSN: 2707-4587

L- ISSN: 2521-2982

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Abstract *This paper explores how the individuals (women) constitute their own subjectivity through neo-liberal discourses in Pakistan. This paper examines the media discourses on perfection in Pakistan based on the claim that such discourses may function to spread neoliberal thinking in society. Foucault's notion of neo-liberal governmentality provides a theoretical basis for this work. This is an empirical study aimed at investigating discourse featuring in the Pakistani Morning show (Good Morning Show with Nida Yasir). This paper discusses the morning show in a way to reveal how technologies of neoliberal globalization produce and reproduce discourses in subjectivity.*

Key Words: Neo-liberal Globalization (NLG), Discourse Analysis, Subjectivity

Introduction

The book 'The World is Flat' by Thomas Friedman gives us a clue about how we are dwelling in this global universe. According to him, we are existing in the third phase of globalization which is called globalization 3.0. Since we are living in globalization 3.0, we cannot blame others for our failure? We are solely responsible for our life. As we are the global subject of this meritocracy base society of this global world. This meritocracy penetrated a poison of "perfection" into the individuals.

To answer the question 'how can we manage our life in a better way?'; and other relating questions we must look into the existing knowledge about the person how they form their own subjectivity. This work investigates how dominant discourses of contemporary societies through which people find their constituted positions. We are the citizens of a global world where our souls managed globally to make us more responsible and controlled.

Nevertheless, the global individual becomes more responsible, rational, and self-reliant, who can manage their life on their own without blaming the government or others for the troubles that they are facing in their lives. Consequently, the technologies of governmentality faded out many crucial social and systematic flaws in societies and serving neo-liberal globalization to preserve their status quo.

In this paper, we explore how dominant discourses of neo-liberal globalization created subjectivity in increasingly individualized societies of Pakistan with reference to women. Discourses produce different meanings that individuals use to make conversation with others [\(Burr 2003\)](#). It points up how discourses

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are socially constructed and serve to keep the dominated power system. Discourses incline to produce understanding about the social world in a way that encourages the individuals to develop their subjectivity (Connolly 1998).

This study aims to provide an empirical framework to understand contemporary women's subjectivities, what they perceived contemporary global practices in Pakistan. In a popular morning show, we explore media discourses, around the 'perfection in Pakistan. This study focuses on how such popular morning shows encourage women to become 'perfect'(who work outside perfectly and share all household burden nicely without complaining) through opinion leaders of all spheres in Pakistan. Such an opinion leaders emphasise on perfection discourse as the solution of all women's issues being in this world. This account seeks to explore how the media discourse of 'perfection' as a technology of globalization promoted it as a magical remedy of our all issues in life.

Literature Review

A literature review of this study highlighted how the media portrayed the image of perfect working women. Unfortunately, we have not enough data on that topic in the framework of Pakistani society. Most of the literature covered traditional strains of the orthodox practices of religion and culture. However, a recent study is aimed to construct knowledge on how media contributing to global subjectivity. There is an extensive study has been done on globalization, neoliberalism, and subjectivity(Rose, *Governing the soul. The shaping of the private self*, 1999; Walkerdine, *Reclassifying upward mobility: Femininity and the neo-liberal subject*, 2003).It is now suggested that neo-liberalism as a global discourse penetrated each and everything that shapes our way of thought and living.

The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen how neo-liberalism attracted many philosophers, researchers, economists, sociologists all over the world. This enduring research and discussion have engendered at different platforms like seminars, conferences, and workshops on globalization and neo-liberal globalization.(Meng 2017). In the production of subjectivity neo-liberalism persuading an individual to tag themselves 'global self' who are now more responsible and controlled_(Gill 2008, Rose 1999, O'Flynn and Petersen 2007, Walkerdine 2006).

The term 'neo-liberalism' is manifold. It produced multiple connections with the economy, history, language, social and cultural values, politics and many others. Neo-liberalism be an ideology or a theory of the political economy that reveals how it produces subjectivity on the name of well-being. How it promoted individual entrepreneurial freedom in skills and encourage the individual to take their own responsibilities_(Harvey 2005). Neo-liberalism has become a brand representative of the capitalist ideology that undermines the importance of the welfare state for citizens in modern states. These new capitalist states emphasized on the privatization of all private sectors that benefitted to the individual. It is further competed in the market and created more choices for an individual to make them more productive for the society and the state_(Bourdieu 1998, Harvey 2005, Bondi 2005, Plehwe, Walpen and Neunhöffer 2006, Roberts and Peters 2008, Kasser and Linn 2016).

A considerable amount of work in the literature on neo-liberal policies has limited the spirit of solidarity which was the core element of modern nation-states. It emphasized more on 'self' rather than social solidarity_(Bourdieu 1998, Layton 2010). However, the discourse of self- development is gendered, because it stresses solidarity when it talks about women, it motivates women to take part in national development. It has been suggested that neo-liberal globalization has altered the social ethics and values due to the economic preferences of the societies. These economic policies brought gigantic changes on large scales.(Foucault 2008, Gill 2008, Rose 1999).

Several studies have revealed that different kinds of relationships between neo-liberal globalization and different brands of 'self'. Hochschild and Garrett have been identified as the complex conceptual relationship between neo-liberalism and 'self' with reference to working life and unemployment (2011).

Much work has been carried out on how NLG transformed the terms of gender and femaleness through different discourses of changing social, ethical, and cultural values in modern societies [_\(Kelan 2008, Olssen 2006, Walkerdine 2006, Walkerdine 2003, Gill 2008\)](#). Other preliminary work was carried out on new discourses of materialism and consumerism of individualism [_\(Bourdieu 1998, Kasser 2015, Kasser, Cohn and Ryan 2007, Kasser and Linn 2016, Nafstad 2002, Nafstad 2005\)](#).

The ideology of neo-liberalism had made a considerable position in multiple fields of political science to gender studies, history to psychology and economy of international relations. However, due to ontological and epistemological preferences mainstream literature on psychology ignore the social and ideological changes [_\(Nafstad and Blakar 2012\)](#). However, some studies have been done neoliberalism from psychological perspectives. The current study based on societal and psychological literature which revealed the embedded neo-liberal subjectivity.

Neo-liberal Governmentality

Neoliberalism can be outlined as an ideology of politics, economy, hegemony, and governmentality. According to Hervey's interpretation, the prime purpose of government is to boost the economic system and international market competitions. They put aside the concept of social welfare and force individuals to take their own responsibility [_\(Harvey 2005\)](#). However, neo-liberalism as an ideology stays a vague concept for understanding how it governs individuals. The literature on neo-liberalism revealed how the state deregulation of urbanization, pension, health, education, and other social welfare policies changed as it was in the past. Some believed that it hijacked the state power to continue their agenda of the free capital economy across the world.

The notion of neo-liberal governmentality was given by Foucault in 1979. He referred this term in his lecture which he delivered in France between 1978-1979. According to him, governmentality refers to social and political forces which dictate us how to we behave as an individual in the society [_\(Read 2009\)](#). It guides an individual on how to be the part of free market as market value. In neoliberal governmentality, individuals become rational and name themselves as an entrepreneurial subject.

Hilgers found that neo-liberal governmentality is a recent phenomenon. Being the counterpart of neoliberalism, it shared common grounds with hegemony. According to the governmentality approach that it requires a monolithic interpretation for neo-liberalism. There are different forms of neo-liberalism, which is used by the various researchers. It is especially closer inspection of the Neoliberal political projects are more likely to reveal a complex and political thought than a direct action of an articulate philosophy.

However, the conceptualization of dominant neo-liberalism proceeded by various philosophers in different ways. Some discuss it as a capitalist economic system [_\(Harvey 2005\)](#), [Foucault \(2008\)](#) and his followers believed that neo-liberalism is a rational and normative discourse that is used as a justification of individualism [_\(Binkley 2007, Dean 2010, Lemke 2001, Rose 1999, Rose, O'Malle and Valverde 2006\)](#).

Foucault (2008) refers governmentality as a technique to governing individual. It can be defined as "conduct of conduct" that rationalized and internalized the dominating power. Through governmentality, dominating power excises their strategies over individuals to make them subject and obedient.

With limited welfare services, neo-liberalism stress on individuals to take personal responsibility and self-help to resolve their social and economic issues [_\(Binkley 2011, Rose, O'Malle and Valverde 2006\)](#). It produced an entrepreneur subject whose primary responsibility is to do anything for its well-being. Being a destructive force, neo-liberalism demolished the concept of welfare states across the world. However, it has gender application, for men, it delimits the notion of social solidarity and makes them independent and autonomous individual whose aim is to take charge of themselves. However, on the other hand, it keeps social solidarity for women and motivates them to participate in the national economy along with

the domestic economy. Discourses on individualism have created a sense of self-critique and self-blame. They seek solutions to their social and economic problem through work-family balance

Critical Psychology and Psycho-Complex

Psychology has two types of implications on society, one is endorsing the existing policies to preserve the status quo in the society and the other is disparaging the contemporary social, political and economic order (Parker 1999, L. Prilleltensky 1989). According to Cooper (2001), psycho-complex produced subjectivity to achieve feasible docility from individuals. This feasible docility defined as normalization of 'social practicality' and 'self' of the individuals.

Thus, Sampson (1977) contends that psychology could serve a confining, atomizing, individualizing, and capacity to recreate the domination of power over individuals. It restricted the truth by placing a lot of accentuation on the 'self' in its reductionist speculations and clarifications. Such examine of psychology was created by researchers affected by Foucauldian thoughts (Rose 1999). Many studies have been conducted that analysed the relationship between psychology and neo-liberalism (Madsen 2014, Nafstad 2002, L. Prilleltensky 1989).

To understand psycho-complex, critical psychologists keep different types of surveillance and self-mechanized individual life. It also discussed how psychological 'truth' has been functioning within the culture. This study investigates how particular psychological expertise was used in the media to promote the idea of perfect. This study found out how media strongly indorses 'perfection' as a route to become a perfect working woman. This burden on the women is imitated dominance of the discourses of neo-liberalism.

Research Question

The central question in this paper asks:

RQ1 How media discourse of 'perfection' encourages women to be a perfect? The perfect woman who:

- 1) Created work-life balance
- 2) have a successful career.
- 3) Role model for other women.

Research Methodology

This study is qualitative in its nature to inquire how the media discourse of perfection created subjectivity. This study is based on social constructionist epistemology to deconstruct the discursive construction of subjectivity. The methodological approach taken in this study is a Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA). Willig (2008) outlined a six-step method for conducting FDA is the toolbox for this study (Willig 2008).

- i. Stage first (Discursive Construction)
- ii. Stage Two (Discourses)
- iii. Stage Three (Action Orientation)
- iv. Stage Four (Positioning)
- v. Stage Five (Practice)
- vi. Stage Six (Subjectivity)

Data Collection

This study offers important insight into how the media discourse developed a relationship between the audience (women) and opinion leaders are socially and politically based. This empirical study is conducted to highlight the discourses practicing in the Morning Show (Good Morning Pakistan with Nida Yasir on

ARY Digital). The Morning Show serves the function of technologies of neo-liberal governmentality. Such technologies produce and reproduce the discourse of subjectivity.

By employing Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) of the morning show, this study attempts to adopt social theory about subjectivity and neo-liberalism as well as social psychological literature on individualism. This study aimed to address how morning shows function to disciplined and obeyed the individuals and made them more productive citizens.

Time Frame

This study based on Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) of a video of a special occasion of women's day which is taken from a Pakistani Morning Show (Good Morning Pakistan with Nida Yasir on ARY Digital). The program was on aired on 8th March 2018 on ARY Digital Official YouTube channel.

Opening and Background

This morning show is one of the most views in Pakistan and it aims to entertain women. This show discussed a variety of women related things like health, beauty, weddings, working women, celebrity interviews, etc. The practice of the idea of the perfect woman makes use of in this show, whereby Foucauldian Discourse Analysis is applied and the agenda behind the discourse of 'perfection' shall be explored through the discussion on working women and their perfect life.

That show had three special guests who are working women and very famous and successful in their fields. These three women appear often as opinion leaders in the morning show. This show prices us how these working women balancing their work and life. The 8th March episode had special Guests: Saba Ansari, Dr. Umme Raheel, Dr. Bilquis and Naheed Ansari. These women were interviewed by program host 'Nida Pasha.

Saba Ansari is a renowned beautician in Pakistan. She runs her own beauty salon since 2001. She is married and has three children. She is a businesswoman who is a successful homemaker as well as a strong work-life balance. Saba Salon that has successfully expanded from catering to the masses to branching out into the world of fashion and showbiz(2011).

Dr. Umme Raheel is a famous beauty scientist and Naturopath. She has done a Ph.D. in Alternative Medicine. She frequently appears on TV as an opinion leader and shares simple herbal tips and techniques to cure beauty and health-related problems. She is a single mother of four kids. She has clinics in different areas of Karachi.

Dr. Bilquis is a famous herbalist. She received the degree of Alternative Medication Doctor (AMD) from Colombo, Sri Lanka in 2005. After she went back to Pakistan and did a homeopathy course. She appears as an opinion leader on many morning shows on different channels. Dr. Bilquis Sheikh is the owner of Kare and Cure Homeo & Herbal Clinic. She is the mother of two children.

Naheed Ansari is a very notable woman around food management. She is considered very experienced in cooking and interior designing. She has come along as a cooking expert every morning show in Pakistan. She has built herself a very popular cooking expert due to her ability in cooking and presentation. She is leading her own Finesse Finishing School. This institution grooms young Pakistani girls, housewives and working women in the areas of food preparation, preservation, presentation, serving, table setting, etiquette, dressing, event management, etc. (Ventures n.d.).

The show length about 1:42:02 begins with a presentation of host 'Nida Pasha' means of women's international day and including the home visits and interviews of the participants. The narratives of the participants were serving the normative discourse of "perfect-woman". The host arrived at the homes of

each participant, and after greeting, the host sees how the houses are well decorated. The host says that all beautiful women are experts in their own fields and that their work and families are well balanced.

The host started her show by telling this:

“Woman does not fight for herself, she always fights for her child, sometimes for their family, and sometime for another woman. She is very potent and never loses her courage.”

“She just does not know how to fight for oneself. We teach them a great deal, but even so, we do not recognize our rights”.

Analysis and Discussion

The term ‘perfection’ is used in ‘morning show’ in a context in which women beautifully balance their work and household in a perfect way. Media construct a discourse of perfection is only a way out to become empowered. There are two important discourses rationality and entrepreneurship, which creating a perfectly balanced life.

Discursive Construction of “Perfection” in Media Discourse

This show teaches you how do you look at other people’s lives and compare them to your own life which is totally dissimilar from these opinion leaders or media celebrities. And if really you do the same, then you may be a “perfectionist” who considers itself strives for perfect manage life. This “perfection” would be achieved with hard work and performance. In the quest of “perfection”, women neglect their happiness, families or even their work. However, the media do not show us the harsh reality behind the discourse of “perfection”. Media only makes us watch opinion leaders and celebrities leaving a “perfect” life. They are rational, skilled, and disciplined to manage their lives.

According to some studies, the discourse of “perfection” largely affects women, due to double burden most of the women failed to meet the high standard of “perfection” set by the media. Regrettably, these insecurities are not easily documented in Pakistan. The desire to be perfect seems to influence the thinking of women even who stay at home.

However, “perfection” has serious implications such as anxiety, depression, and other health issues of women who did not balance their lives between work and household. Women spend ages watching TV and go through with many celebrities who are very perfect in their lives. The audience thinking about how they should like them, how they get a perfect life like them, even though a lot of time they are lying about their lives. A sense of guilt has been penetrated them which they do not have.

If the media did not objectify women in a thorough going way, they would not need to be upwards to an unrealistic expectation of unattainable “perfection” of work-life-family balance. If society could not accept women the way they are an as a normal human organism, not a robot or machine, women would not have to be equally worried about perfect lives.

“saba ney socha bus buhat bacho ke pavarish kr li ha ab bus tumhary sath kuch mil kr shuru kro or tumhy support kro” (Urdu)

English Translation: - *“Saba thought, a lot of done by me for kids, now I just start something else with you and support you.”*

This statement of Saba can have been rammed out of two possibilities, either she is referring to Nida Pasha in general regards, but specifically, her motives other women to operate outside and financially support their husbands.

“saba wo khaton hain jis ko ghrdari atihy, jis ko khana bnana aatahy, ghar kay sary kaam jo bunyad hy ghar ke jo khawateen ko karny prtey hain, jo kay buhat zarori hain, wo sab aty hain kya saba ko?” (Urdu)

English Translation: “Saba is one of those women who know very well how to cook food and know very well how to do household. These chores are women's responsibility which she must have to do.”

“Nida asked. . . . Saba really you do all that.”

In this show, work-family balance is hardly posited as a double burden that requiring attention to sort out. It is an unrealistic expectation from women who naturally are not built for heavy tasks. It rather put as “perfect” and women's ability to perform multitasking actions. The discursive structure of the “perfection” provided in the media programs posits it as the individual's own problem to get perfection that is important to balance both public and individual arenas.

In each segment of the show, they have presented an opinion leader who has built her own identity as a “perfect” balancer in her lifetime. These labelled women morally condemned those women who are not perfect as they are successful in getting high living standards.

“Ye din tribute hy un khawateen ko jo aam khawateen say barhkr hain” . . .(Urdu)

English Translation: -“we are celebrated this day to pay tribute to those women who are more honourable than ordinary women”

Here, they constructed the identity of ordinary women, who is less known to others, who failed to achieve a high living standard like celebrities. They tag them ‘ordinary’ women who have not too worth living a good life because they are not dying to produce perfection in their life. The ‘ordinary’ subject is identified as an individual who is fighting and needs too much personal transformation or needs to engage themselves in self-maintenance activities.

“Saba ap ky lye buha tbari inspiration ha. Ap nay in ka parlor dakha ha, in ka makeup dakhahay. Aj ap nay in ka ghar dakha, ap nay dakha ya kaisi housewife hain”(Urdu)

English Translation: - “Saba is a great inspiration. You experienced her as a working lady, but today we visit her house and you find out how she is being a housewife.”

Media has a big role to play an influencing women's life. Above extract mention how women certainly feel the pressure to be like those who are portrayed as a perfect combination of women. It has attained to the spot where it damages women's health. The impact of all this pressure on women's mental health and well-being.

“Nida: Pehly ki Dr Umme Raaheelor aj ke Dr Umme Raaheel main ktna fark aya hy.

Dr.UmmeRaaheel: ager ap appearance kay lyhaz say dakhayin to 100 percent.”(Urdu)

English Translation: - “Nida: How much difference has there been between the previous Dr Umme Raaheel, and the Doctor of today.

Dr Umme Raaheel: if you look at the appearance then you say it would be 100 percent.”

Another discourse this encounter throughout the show is the responsibility to be ‘perfect’. Women who not take responsibility for their own wellbeing are constructed as ordinary women because they are not rational, they did not find their hidden talent to get “perfection”.

“Jisterha say inhony struggle ki ha apni zindagi ko bnaya hy. Hr orat ky andar kuch na kuch talent chupa hoa ha. Is lye ham ap ky amisalain dekha rah hain jo akialy apny balboty py banihain, apni family ko bnadiyah, tu ap kyonahi” . . .(Urdu)

English Translation: - “The way she made her life and dis a lot of her family. Every woman has the same talent inside her. If she performed it alone, so why not you?”

The discourse of individualism increased individual responsibility. Opinion leaders taught techniques to become a better version of themselves in order to achieve an improved living standard.

Dr.Bilquis :“Jab main apnybacho ko dakhti hu to main sochti hu inketerbiatmianmairathora hath or honachahytha.

Nida: apkoptahyya jo ap kamkrrahi hu. Jab apkbachy ap ko dakhty ho gay tuyaktna proud feel kerty ho gay”...(Urdu)

English Translation: - “Dr.Bilquis: whenever, I see my children, I think I should have done more. I feel regret inside

Nida: do you know when your children looked at what you are doing, they must feel proud.”

While talking to the camera, sometimes, opinion leaders wanted to share their regret about what they get due to a double burden. They wish to provide people with the only positive image of the double burden that is why women motivate and get inspiration to take the double burden and personal responsibility.

Naheed Ansari: “Main boutique bhi run krti hu main wedding planner bhahun, main interior designer bhahun, cooking expert hu, bachyperhakerunkshadiakr di,Ghar ka khanahamaisha main khud bnatihun”.....(Urdu)

English Translation: “I also run a boutique, as easily as I am an interior decorator, wedding planner, and cooking expert. I brought up my children perfectly educated and married them.I always make myself a homemaker. My husband says you are a real paradisaical.”

The media portrayed the opinion leader as a knowledgeable individual who performs their multiple tasks as a priest with perfection. And always ready to help to increase confidence in other women with their abilities. They never tired being taking the burden of multiple tasks. They look so fresh and confident as they have no issue and any tension regarding their workload. The psycho knowledge deployed by these opinion leaders conceals the working of the discourse of “perfection”. Individualization of the “perfection” and personal responsibility of the women normalized the double burden in a perfect way.

“Kamyabzindagi kay ley work or family ko parallel la kerchalye”...(Urdu)

English Translation: “Bring your work and family parallel for a successful and perfect life”

There is a strong tendency to posit the perfect life of working women and balancing work and family becomes personal responsibility. Moreover, positing women as perfect working woman promote the discourse of “perfection” which directly contributing to the neo-liberal globalization demands of more human capital.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of the current study was to investigate working women's subjectivity as embedded in contemporary societies. This was attained by analysing the dominant discourse of “perfection” in balancing work and household. We argued that neo-liberal globalization through media has managed to change the women's soul' without knowing what the implications of this change. This would be the implication for further works on that subject which is quite an infant in the Pakistani context.

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