

A Comparative Study on Gender Identity Construction in Item Songs of Lollywood and Bollywood

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Abstract

Songs have the ability to construct and reinforce gender identity when they are exposed to young audiences. It conveys these identities to adolescents in such a way that they adapt them unconsciously. Past studies have analyzed Lollywood and Bollywood songs separately but did not compare them. The purpose of this study was to find the role of Lollywood and Bollywood, particularly their item songs, in gender identity construction. Furthermore, the study compared the representations of men and women in Bollywood and Lollywood songs, which gives insight to the embedded similarities among them. The data analysis involved the thematic analysis of 10 item songs from both the music industries, i.e., Lollywood and Bollywood, selected through the purposive sampling technique. The analysis was conducted according to Clarke and Braun's (2017) method of thematic analysis. The results disclosed several elements of sexist language in the selected item songs. The major themes found in the data were misogyny, magnification of one-sided love, biasness towards men and women, and stereotypical description of men and women. The findings of this research may help scholars to comprehend diverse types of sexist element constructing gender and make suggestions to remove this component from the entertainment media.

Keywords: Bollywood, Comparison, Item songs, Lollywood, Sexism, Thematic Analysis.

Introduction

Language is an important equipment for communicating emotions, beliefs, and attitudes, and these beliefs, feelings, and behaviors are strongly impacted by language use and play a relatively important role in establishing gender roles (Wilson, 1997). Verbal language is one of the most effective means through which gender norms are executed and nourished. The basis of gender stereotypes like the expectation from women to display cooperative qualities (e.g., caring, loving, and soft), and expectations from men to display certain qualities (e.g., productive, and

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strong) are generated in the lexical selections of normal communication (Maass & Arcuri, 1996). Language does not only generate stereotypes but also influences people's awareness and attitude, the use of verbal language compatible with gender stereotypes establishing and reinforcing such notions and can generate real discrimination between men and women (Eagly, 2000).

There is a clear distinction between sex and gender. As per Thomas and Wareing (1999), sex means physical classification and gender means social classification. Gender is mostly used to explain the social attitudes and traits related to the sex of the individual. The differences in physical features affect social exercises. Therefore, gender is based on people's perception of themselves as either a male or a female (Bem, 1993). Gender establishment is not a short process; it takes a lot of repeated training and a long time to practice gender by the people (Zaidi, 2016). This idea is deep rooted in our everyday life. Resultantly, a person must adapt to the set of roles, characteristics, and rules, associated with gender. Gender is comprehended as reconciled and established through language and structure (Whittle, 2000).

Gender roles are systematic structures of behaviors and attitudes expected of people established on their physical sex (Lindsey, 2015). These structures of attitudes are established on gender standards, which are guided by attitudes in certain circumstances. Gender identity refers to the individual inference of someone as a man or a woman or sometimes both. Patriarchy is a system in which men are dominant over women and have all the privileges of society (Stacey, 1993). It is a set of social discrimination based on gender, which gives advantages to men while giving serious restrictions on women (Humm, 1989). In opposition to this notion of patriarchy, feminism came into existence. Daly (1978) argues that the purpose of feminism is to make both male and female gender independent from the strict societal roles, which are been required of them.

Background of Study

The people of Pakistan and India have a shared history of more than a millennium. Their cultures, attitudes, and beliefs are similar up to a large extent, as both are typical patriarchal societies. Another common thing between both countries is their love for cinema. The population of both the countries enjoy both Lollywood and Bollywood cinemas and their music. Lollywood and Bollywood cinemas are nurturing the cultural properties through films and songs, which are originated from the old history of the sub-continent. It has been verified that the media in general and music in specific has the power to influence people's thoughts and beliefs. Exposure

to music is a substantial component of youngsters' lives, as it becomes a tool of identity formation for them (Hargreaves et al., 2003). Traditional music affects and contributes the most in construction of youngsters' identities (Martino et al., 2006). Moreover, Nowotny (2016) argues that the sexual perceptions of the audience are influenced by the involvement of sexual scenes in music videos. As per Tager (1997), watching films and dramas leads the audience to another world of imagination, the imagination on which our opinions are shaped, and we compare these imaginations to our real-world knowledge. Therefore, it would be beneficial to investigate Lollywood and Bollywood songs as they are listened to and comprehended by almost two billion people living in both countries.

Statement of the Problem

Gender identity is generated among people through exercise and repeated practice in such a way that people are restrained to accomplish gender uniformity. Passive Audience Theory of media suggests that the audience has usually no choices to select from when it moves toward media content and therefore, they consume whatever the media is generating (Wallace & Wolf, 1995). Like this view, songs can be perceived as influential stimuli in opinion construction whose content people do not get to select rationally. Ali and Batool (2015) asserted that media primarily promote and reinforce the patriarchal system, and their portrayals are approved as standard. Thus, songs should be viewed as the makers of socio-cultural beliefs and not only as a form of art (Cook, 1998). In addition, Holtzman and Sharpe (2014) argue that messages in songs give backgrounds that educate gender norms. The current study regards gender as a societal notion that affects visions and beliefs in the subcontinent community. It claims that the patriarchal system in the subcontinent is the root cause of gender inequality in present Pakistan and India. Item songs in Lollywood and Bollywood reflect patriarchal society and strengthen social values and beliefs. Item songs have been chosen because these songs are prevalent in both countries. They influence a large number of people in society.

The main objective of this study is to analyze how gender identity of both men and women is constructed in prevalent item songs in both Lollywood and Bollywood. The study also aims to find out the gender roles associated with both genders, by analyzing the sexist lyrics of the recent item songs in both film industries i.e., Lollywood and Bollywood. As the study exposes the sexist language, it is presumed that these songs leave psychological impacts on the listeners of Pakistani and Indian audience. Therefore, the study highlights the linguistic choices that have been made in these item songs, which exhibit gender identity construction. It also

compares both the music industries i.e., Lollywood and Bollywood, which may help understanding the behavior towards both the gender's mindsets.

Research Question

The study addresses the following research question:

- 1) How do Lollywood and Bollywood item songs construct gender identity through their linguistic choices?

Literature Review

Gender establishment is not a short process; it takes a lot of repeated training and a long time to practice gender by the people (Zaidi, 2016). This idea is deep rooted in our everyday life. Resultantly, a person must adapt to the set of roles, characteristics, and rules, associated with gender. Then this gender makes us work on distinct roles like a mother, father, son, or a daughter. Society has lofty expectations from a person to act in such a way that is according to that role (Chakravarty, 1989). Whittle (2000) specifies gender identity as a reply of a person to the question which is asked by themselves whether they are a woman or a man. Gender is comprehended as reconciled and established through language and structure. Theories of the social construction of gender demonstrate that there is no critical, worldwide-accepted identity that is either feminine or masculine. Gender is established and reinforced in an everlasting process of social relations (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). The construction of gender identity comprehends the effective role a person played in the formation of their identity. It demonstrates that a person can assume a gender from the range of male and female. The establishment of gender identity is dynamic, unstable, variable, and shifting (Carrigan et al., 1985).

In the past, several studies have explored the phenomenon of gender identity construction in various domains of society. For example, the application of male terms to refer to all people in general has been researched by many studies. Pauwels (2003) argues that women are often prey to sexist language, but it is not limited to them. Rasool et al. (2019) investigated the use of sexist language in the text of primary-level English textbooks in the schools of Punjab, Pakistan. He found that the male characters in these textbooks are over-represented. He also found out that the roles assigned to the characters are also stereotyped. He concluded that the language used in these textbooks is also gender-biased and promotes sexism. Similarly, Talosa and Malenab-Temporal (2018) conducted a study to analyze the presence of sexist language in the written discourse of

preschool teachers by doing content analysis. They found out that written discourses were generic pronouns ‘he’ and ‘she.’

In the case of media, Ullah and Khan (2014) argued that television commercials depict women as sexual objects. Sexually objectification is communicated to women that if they use a specific beauty item such as shampoo, a whitening lotion, or body cream, it will boost their probability to find a handsome man. In Pakistani drama serials, the women are mostly represented as restrained, weak, and voiceless. The vastly tried and experimented procedure to get a large viewership in drama serials is to show a woman as a crybaby. Another example of extreme characterization is that a woman is portrayed as cunning and bitter. A drama that shows a suppressed woman, depicted as “white,” also characterizes a bitter woman, who is the ambassador of “black” (Armaan, 2021).

Qazalbash et al. (2021) conducted research on the songs of South Asia. They found the representation of women in South Asian Punjabi songs, using the same methodology. They found out that in South Asian Punjabi songs, the male singers often used certain lyrics in their songs that portray women as materialists. They also argued that men control language in South Asia, and they represent everything, as they want to. These songs give a notion that woman is unfaithful and disloyal. Hence, the women are represented very negatively in South Asian Punjabi songs. The study also revealed that the main cause of this biased representation is the patriarchal system in our society. Similarly, Zaidi (2016) analyzed Urdu wedding songs to find their role in the construction of gender. She translated the lyrics of Urdu wedding songs and analyzed them thematically. The study marriage is portrayed in these songs as the goal of women; they are not concerned about any other thing in their lives. The study then concluded that the wedding songs give the notion that it is the duty of married women to be submissive to their husbands and in-laws.

In the case of Bollywood, Rizwan (2011) conducted a study to find out how the femininities and masculinities are linguistically represented in the songs of a Bollywood film i.e., Dabbaang. He argued that the prevailing notion of women’s place and roles in society has been clearly depicted in the songs of this film. Using the same feminist lens, Siddiqi (2020) explored how lyrics of sexist songs promote patriarchal system and sexism. By analyzing nine Bollywood songs, he found out that these sexist lyrics depict women in their societal gender roles, and they portray women as inferior to men. Furthermore, Slatewala (2019) argued that Indian cinema has started to produce a lot more item songs recently, as compared to previous decades. As Bollywood has an enormous effect on everyday lives of people, it is wrong to say that these item songs do not affect the

mentality of the people. On analysis, it was evident Bollywood item songs promote sexual violence and normalize sexual aggression. Hence, Bollywood contributes to promoting gender roles, sexist behaviors, and sexual violence.

On the other hand, Zaidi (2016) analyzed the Lollywood Urdu wedding songs to find their role in the construction of gender. The study found that the brides are over-praised in these songs. The event of the marriage is the goal of women; they are not concerned about any other thing in their lives. The main aim of the women in their marriage is to look beautiful; their marriage will be happy and triumphant if they look extremely beautiful. The study then concluded that the wedding songs give the notion that it is the duty of married women to be submissive to their husbands and in-laws. Although some research, as discussed above, has already been conducted on songs of different genres in both Lollywood and Bollywood music industries, no study has analyzed the item songs of these industries specifically. Furthermore, the current study is unique in its approach as it compares the items songs of both the industries, thus reflecting the similarities between them.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach because it aims to explore the underlying themes, discourse patterns, and linguistic choices in item songs that construct gender identity. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable as it allows for an in-depth interpretative analysis of how gender norms are reflected in media representations (Creswell, 2013). Given that media discourse analysis is interpretative in nature, qualitative methods provide a deeper understanding of implicit gender ideologies and power structures embedded in song lyrics.

Sampling and Data Collection

The study employed purposive sampling because the focus was on highly popular and widely recognized item songs that had the most impact on audience perceptions. The selection was based on viewership data (e.g., YouTube views, music chart rankings), cultural influence, and social discourse surrounding the songs. The time frame (2011-2018) was chosen to reflect contemporary gender portrayals rather than outdated trends.

Table 1. The details of selected songs

No.	Song	Album/Movie	Lyricist	Industry
1	Chirya	Chakkar	Sarmad Qadeer	LW12022
2	Noori	Superstar	Azaan	LW22019
3	Item Number	Teefa in trouble	Ali Zafar	LW32018
4	Billi	Na Maloom Afraad 2	Nabeel	LW42017
5	Tutti fruity	Karachi se Lahore	Shakeel Sohail	LW52016
6	Makhna	T-series	Honey singh	BW12019
7	Yeh Baby	Yeh Baby	Garry Sandhu	BW22018
8	Coca cola	Coca Cola Tu	Tony Kakkar	BW32018
9	Na Ja Na Ja	Na Ja Na Ja	Manav Sangha	BW42017
10	Main Tera Boyfriend	Raabta	Rakesh Kumar	BW52017

Technique of Data Analysis

The current research gave insights of the cinematic representations of men and women and the projection of sexist ideologies in the item songs of Pakistan and India i.e., Lollywood and Bollywood. The study was thus descriptive in nature. In this study, Clarke and Braun (2017) method of thematic analysis integrated with Saldana's (2013) codification technique was used to explore the representations of men and women and ideologies behind these representations in Pakistani and Indian cinema. Thematic analysis is a process of finding the themes within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The following six steps were undertaken for the data analysis:

- Familiarization with data – The lyrics were transcribed and examined multiple times.

- Generating initial codes – Gender-related phrases (e.g., objectification, stereotyping) were coded.
- Searching for themes – Codes were grouped into broader themes like misogyny, gender stereotyping, and objectification.
- Reviewing themes – Patterns across Lollywood and Bollywood were compared.
- Defining and naming themes – Themes were refined based on recurring linguistic elements.
- Producing the report – Themes were contextualized using feminist media discourse.

To ensure reliability and validity, the coding was cross-verified by an independent researcher, and data triangulation was conducted using secondary sources such as media reviews and audience reception.

Analysis and Discussion

The main themes found in the selected data were *misogyny*, *magnification of one-sided love*, *biasness towards men and women*, and *stereotypical description*.

Table 2. Misogyny in Lollywood

Text	Code	Category	Theme
“Me karaari karaari hun... Aa chabaa le supari hun... jo bhulaa dai saara jahaan... who nasheeli booti hun me" (LW52016), “Gutka me hun chabaa le... Baaja me hun bajaa le... Gadda me hun bicha le Jhandaa me hun lгаа le" (LW42017), “Nashe di me poori than... Me crazy puri han... Sab ka dil lay ur jau... Me aesi chiriya" (LW12022)	karaari karaari, chabaa, sup ari, nasheeli booti, gutka, baaja gadda, jhandaa, nashe di poori, me crazy puri, chiriya ,	Objectification	Misogyny
“Agar kaatu me rasta to dange krau” (LW42017)	dange krau	Women as conflict	

Table 3. Misogyny in Bollywood

Text	Code	Category	Theme
"Tujhe diamond jese sambhal ke rakhna (BW12019), "Teri life me dena chahta hu dakhla... Meri ex se milti hai teri shakal... Meri lambe sabar ka tu hai phal" (BW12019), "O Sandhua kabutri nu rakh saamb ke. Kithe hath chon pharak na jave" (BW22018)	Diamond Dakhla, phal Saamb, pharak, kabutri,	Objectification	Misogyny
"Mundyan vich sare paasay tere charchay... Daang na kharak kithe jave" (BW22018)	Charchay	Women as alluring	

The emergent theme of *Misogyny* was found equally in both Bollywood and Lollywood songs. The verses like "Tujhe diamond jese sambhal ke rakhna" (Safeguard you as a diamond) clearly show that women are considered a possession of men, which is a common form of misogyny. There are various shapes of misogyny present in the selected songs. These forms include objectification, women as alluring, considering women as possession, and portraying women conflict. Slater and Tiggemann (2002) argued that those women experience more sexual objectification than other women who live in those environments and cultures where the objectification of women is facilitated and celebrated. Hence, in most patriarchal societies like Pakistan and India where men enjoy dominance, they consider women as their possession. The second category of misogyny was *women as alluring*. It is often seen in sexual violence cases in sub-continent contexts that people blame the victim (women) for tempting men. They blame women for inviting men toward them. Victim blaming for sexual assault cases is quite common in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The filmmakers of these countries, such as those extremely well-known Bollywood directors, should also be held responsible (Shahid et al., 2021). The third category of misogyny found in the selected data was women as conflict. In patriarchal society, women are often called the apple of discord.

Table 4. Magnification of one-sided love in Lollywood

Text	Code	Category	Theme
“Me item number nahi karu gi... Jo karna hai karwa le. O tera item number full chale ga... Tu likh ke ye rakhwa le” (LW32018)	Nahi karu gi, bht chale ga	Self-created beliefs	Magnification of one-sided love

Table 5. Magnification of one-sided love in Bollywood

Text	Code	Category	Theme
"Kyu ghabraati baaten chupati... Paas Bula ke dur kiyu jati" (BW12019)	Ghabrati, Dur kiyu jati, Han kara ke chadni	Inability to accept refusal.	Magnification of one-sided love

The next emergent sexist theme found in the selected songs is the *magnification of one-sided love*. The selected item songs of Bollywood and Lollywood have many examples where several men are portrayed as one-sided lovers. The lyrics portray that the persuading of women by the one-sided lover is considered heroism, even though they are repeatedly answered ‘no.’ The young audience believes that the reel is real and eventually makes ideas about them. However, when these expectations are not fulfilled in real life, it leads to disappointment. The first category that emerged in this category was the *inability to accept refusal*. This concept is also deeply rooted in the sub-continent context. This is a typically patriarchal notion that being rejected by a woman is a danger to a man's manliness. Thus, they do not accept the fact that they are rejected and keep on trying repeatedly to achieve their goal. The next category of this emergent theme is *self-created beliefs*. This belief has emerged from the very concept that men are the ultimate power in society. According to Fuller (2001), the expression of masculinity for a man in a patriarchal society is correlated with governing the women in their households and assuring that women play their roles excellently. The women who fail to fulfill those gender roles are said to threaten a man's manliness.

Table 6. Biases towards men and women in Lollywood

Text	Code	Category	Theme
"Tutti frutti hu me... Bari beauty cutie hu me... Dekho koray malmal jesi meri jawani ko" (LW52016), "Patli kamariya, teekhi nazariya" (LW12022), "Billi tere roop kay jalway zamana jaanay" (LW42017)	Beauty, cutie, jawani, patli kamariya, roop	Power in form of appearance	Biasness towards men and women
"Mere nakhre utha le jo. Us ki sari ki sari hu me" (LW52016)	Sari ki sari hu	Power in the form of wealth	

Table 7. Biases towards men and women in Bollywood

Text	Code	Category	Theme
"Patli qamar teri OMG... Tight jeans teri D & G" (BW12019)	Qamar, jeans	Attention to the appearance of women	Biasness towards men and women

The next emergent theme in the selected data was *Biasness towards men and women*. The first category under this emergent theme is *power in form of wealth* for women. Notably, this sub-theme is present in all the selected item songs of Lollywood and Bollywood. It is quite common that women are given extra importance because of their looks and physical appearance. In these sexist item songs, the extra focus of the lyricist is on the minute physical details of the women's body to catch the attention of the viewers, as portrayed by the lyrics. The second category in *power in form of wealth for men*. These criteria are visible in sub-continent societies in specific and the entire world in general. Men are judged based on their earnings and financial status in society. Zhang et al (2019) who defines Evolved Preference Theory examine this problem. It states that men look for fertile partners who can produce healthy children for them. On the contrary, women look for potential men who have healthy resources. Such notions give depression to those men who cannot earn a significant amount of money and think that they have failed badly.

Table 8. Stereotypical Description in Lollywood

Text	Code	Category	Theme
"Dil jalon ki hai... Mann chalon ki hai... Mere piche kattaar" (LW52016)	Kattaar (line)	Men as stalkers	Stereotypical Description
"Mere nakhre utha le jo. Us ki sari ki sari hu me" (LW52016)	Sari ki sari	Women as materialistic	

Table 9. Stereotypical Description in Bollywood

Text	Code	Category	Theme
"Me or mere kalakar... Sab beth ke karen cheer" (BW12019), "Ruk te ja meri gal te sun le, o mainu kehendi na na na na" (BW52017), "Rurka da munda piche mar da ae geriyan... Vekh de aa morni aj kiven bachdi" (BW22018)	Beth ke, cheer Ruk te ja, Mar da ae, geriyan	Men as stalkers	Stereotypical Description
"Nakhre tere da tapmaan kiven jhailan" (BW22018), "At tera nakhra tera hi kusura" (BW42017)	Nakhre, tapmaan, kusura	Women as tantrum showers	

The fourth and final emergent theme was the *Stereotypical description*. This theme indicates the role of lyrics in producing and maintaining gendered stereotypes. These songs work as catalysts in creating a gender gap. A gendered stereotype that was found in the data was *women as materialistic*. Notably, no man in these songs was portrayed as materialistic. This trait was given to only female characters. Unconsciously, the media illustrates the norms of society and thus reinforces them through its portrayal. It is a usual notion in these societies that women always go after money and the financial status of men. In the lyrics found in the selected data, the woman is asserting that he will be that man's possession who will take care of her finances. These words give a notion that a woman is always materialistic and always goes after a man who can feed her and make her happy and satisfied with his money. This

makes the next category of *men as stalkers*. The one-sided lovers in sexist songs are often depicted as stalkers. When they cannot approach a girl directly, they start to stalk her to achieve their goals. Many films and songs show that one-sided lovers often use the means of stalking to fulfill their desires and achieve their goals. It is also worth noting that there was no sign of men being stalked in these item songs. They were always portrayed as indolent stalkers and women as victims. Thus, the songs contribute to the stereotype that only men are stalkers, forgetting the effects of stalking on the human mind.

The last category of this theme is *women as tantrum showers*. In many of the selected item songs, the women were shown as tantrum showers, although there is not such research, which show that women are more tantrum showers than men are. Freeman (2020) conducted a study to find out the trend of throwing tantrums between men and women and found that there was a very slight difference between men and women, and men were slightly high on the list of tantrum showers. Still only women are shown as tantrum showers and not men in item songs of the selected data.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to see how gender identity was constructed linguistically in the item songs of Lollywood and Bollywood. The study also compared both the music industries i.e., Lollywood and Bollywood, which may help understanding the behavior towards both the gender's mindsets. To find the role of item songs of Lollywood and Bollywood in gender identity construction, ten item songs (5 each) from both Lollywood and Bollywood music industry were analyzed according to Clarke and Braun (2017) method of thematic analysis. The major themes found in the selected data were misogyny, magnification of one-sided love, biasness towards men and women, and stereotypical description of men and women.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its applicability, the study is restricted in various ways. Firstly, the sample data selected for this study is limited. Only 5 item songs from each music industry, i.e., Lollywood and Bollywood were analyzed. Secondly, the genre of the songs was only of one type i.e., item songs. Other genres of popular music like romantic songs and sad songs were not included, which could give a further comparative approach to the study. Moreover, the study did not find the effects of the construction of gender identity through these songs, in the minds of the audience.

Implications of the Study

The study is of interest to the researchers of both the countries i.e., Pakistan and India, due to its comparative approach. The findings of this research may help scholars to comprehend different types of sexist element constructing gender; it may provide a guide to lyricists and entertainers to reassess their linguistic choices to eliminate social tussle in terms of gender and make suggestions to remove this component from the entertainment media. Furthermore, it was also noted during the analysis that all the selected item songs of Lollywood and Bollywood music industry, were written by male lyricists. Hence, future studies can be conducted to find the role of men (male lyricists) in constructing gender identity through these songs.

Future Recommendations

Future researchers can use comprehensive data, i.e., use more songs in their studies, to find more elements in songs which construct gender identity. They can also compare several genres of popular music of both Lollywood and Bollywood music industry, as the current study used only one genre i.e., item songs. Furthermore, studies can be conducted using a psychological approach to find out the impact of these songs on the minds of the audience of both countries.

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