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ACTIONS TAKEN BY PAKISTANI WOMEN TO NAVIGATE THEIR CULTURE

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Abstract

The goal of the paper is to learn about cultural aspects that influence the lives of Pakistani women. In particular, actions taken by Pakistani women to navigate their culture. We analyzed 12 YouTube interviews of Pakistani women where they described an adverse experience in their life. Using the lens of four frames, their interview data were analyzed to learn about the actions taken by the interviewees. In addition, their lived experience as people influenced by their cultural frames of power, symbol, and structure was examined. Themes of communication and thinking emerged as tools for agency and change. Findings have implications for guiding future research on Pakistani women's lived experiences.

Keywords

Pakistani women, communication, thinking.



1. Introduction

This paper aims to guide the reader in understanding the nuances of women's lived experiences within Pakistani culture. In particular, the actions taken by Pakistani women to navigate their culture. We analyzed YouTube interviews of 12 Pakistani women who overcame adverse experiences in their lives. Our goal was to learn how the interviewees navigated Pakistani culture and took action to improve their lives. Since the formation of Pakistan in 1947, Pakistan has

experienced highs and lows in terms of development (UNDP, 2020). However, while the country is chugging along in economic growth (UNDP, 2020), its societal development has yet to catch up. In particular, the role of women in Pakistani culture is an area that needs unpacking, as the discrepancy between development criteria for men and women persists (Ali *et al.*, 2011). Continued efforts are in place to understand the factors that influence women's development in

Pakistan, but more research is warranted (UNDP, 2014). Pakistani culture is a male-dominated patriarchal system, and male dominance is maintained through thoughts and actions embedded in people's everyday dealings (Habiba *et al.*, 2016). Patriarchy in Pakistan is perpetuated and internalized through social norms upheld by people (Habiba *et al.*, 2016). People with any power within the culture discourage women from taking action to improve their lives (Parker & Reckdenwald, 2008). Further, male members of society often assert their right in society to make decisions for women (Parker & Reckdenwald, 2008). This is problematic because women are taught from an early age to accept their fate and compromise in any situation (Davaseeli, 2012). With this backdrop in mind, our goal was to understand how women navigate their lives within Pakistani culture. Our analysis focused on learning about actions taken by Pakistani women to improve their lives.

1.1 Literature Review

Pakistan is considered a heterogeneous and diverse country regarding social status, income disparity, and economic depravity (Bhattacharya, 2013). Against the backdrop of a diverse society, women from different strata of the society have multiple issues in addition to unfavorable infrastructure, legal systems, and the role of misogynistic attitudes altogether. These issues can include access to basic needs like medical treatment, dowry demands, child marriage, gender violence, acid attacks, and domestic violence, and they have different interpretations for the lives of Pakistani women (Critelli, 2010; Critelli & Willett, 2012). Studies

focused on women's lived experiences often point toward the undeniable role of patriarchy in Pakistani society (Zakar *et al.*, 2012). Patriarchy is a structure of male dominance which has historically existed in every culture across the globe (Hook, 2013). The patriarchal system functions through norms upheld by both men and women (Hook, 2013). In Pakistan, male domination is internalized through a range of societal norms ingrained in the family and kinship systems (Habiba, Ali & Ashfaq, 2016). Habiba and colleagues (2016) found that Family plays a vital role in maintaining patriarchy. They examined the role played by older women in the family to exert control over younger female members of the family in 17 households. These female in-laws communicated the expectations to a new daughter-in-law to uphold the existing family structure. The internalized norms of the female in-laws marginalize women and maintain the status quo of male dominance. Pakistani societal norms are often based on dogmatic interpretations of regional and local customs, resulting in completely disregarding women's autonomy and equal participation in society (Bhattacharya, 2013). Naz and Chaudhry (2011) interviewed 176 Pakistani women to learn that women's status as second-class citizens in Pakistan is a combination of socio-political and economic factors. Pakistani society's socio-cultural environment and traditional structure enforce women's roles and responsibilities as housewives who care for their husbands and children. Family members' beliefs, particularly the husband, also influence their employment prospects. Further, society views working women as neglectful wives

and mothers, fearing that a working woman might gain independence and forget their prescribed role. Isran and Isran (2012) found that within Pakistani society, it is widely believed that a woman's role is limited to her household and that her productivity is lower than a man's. Additionally, since she is only suited for domestic work, her domestic responsibilities will be adversely affected if she engages in outside activities. Such societal views signify that a woman's place is in her home, restricting mobility (Rabbani *et al.*, 2008). Pakistani women face major seclusion and exclusion due to socio-cultural norms and beliefs that impede their ability to exercise power (Critelli, 2010), make decisions (Isran & Isran, 2012), or even communicate their needs (Ibrahim, 2005). The patriarchal structural systems give the female population a rare chance to stand up against discrimination, let alone progress or grow (Bhattacharya, 2014). Due to the low female literacy rate, women cannot compete for their fundamental rights and fight for economic and social independence (Kazmi, 2005; Sheikh, 2009). One stagnant element in Pakistani women's lives is the lack of awareness about their rights and the recourse in times of need (Goodwin, 2002). Women are reliant on the distorted version of their rights preached by religious leaders or ingrained in them by their families, creating a subservient identity (Bhattacharya, 2013). The ignorance, passive and docile attitude perpetuates the psyche of subjugation to men (Adeel, 2010). Babar (2007) has further explained how women's lack of education and economic opportunities restrict women from thinking independently about their freedom to

express themselves and their due rights. Poverty also significantly affects their lives within a male-dominated society (Sheikh, 2009). In a study of 52 Pakistani women living in 7 women's shelters, Tarar and Pulla (2014) examined the role of poverty in influencing gender-power relations in Pakistani society. The analysis found that poverty can increase the instance of violence against women. A report published by Kirmani (2020) highlights the increased burden of unpaid work shouldered by women. From the context of Pakistani women, it is essential to see the income disparity from a gendered lens. Only 26% of the women in Pakistan are engaged in paid work, and the majority depend on their male relatives for financial support. Even if the women are independently earning, the gender pay gap is 34%, the highest in the world. The income distribution is disadvantageous in a poor household where male members are the only ones earning, thus having women face the brunt of getting the lowest financial benefits. In the face of an adverse backdrop, we hope to highlight the actionable steps women can take within Pakistani society to improve their lives.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

To guide our research and situate the 12 stories within the context of Pakistani culture, we found it necessary to use a theoretical framework to help us organize the complexities of Pakistani culture. We thus employed the four-frame model that describes culture through the lens of four frames: structure, symbols, power, and people that influence each other. The framework was initially introduced by Bolman and Deal (2008) but used by Reinholz and Apkarian (2018) in the context of change in higher

education. The four frames in this framework provide organizational guidelines that can help understand the context within which the stories are set. We share the four frames in the original theoretical framework below. **Structures** are roles, responsibilities, practices, routines, and incentives that dictate how people interact. Structures influence interactions such as responsibilities, expectations, supports, guidelines, and rewards. Changing the structures can be crucial in influencing sustainable change. **Symbols** constitute the cultural artifacts, language, knowledge, myths, values, and vision that department members use to guide their reasoning. Symbols are the underlying ways of thinking that give meaning to the structures within a department. Symbols are the basic thoughts and ideas that assist people in making sense of structure. These can include language, knowledge, and values. **Power:** Within a department, interactions between people are mediated by power, status, positioning, and political coalitions. Power differences may arise in several ways: from formal roles (e.g., department chair vs. associate professor vs. assistant professor), success and status within the field, or other aspects of identity such as race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability status. Power is the influence or control granted by position, affiliation, ability, and identity. **People:** Departments can be people with individual goals, agency, needs, and identities. This frame emphasizes that while communities have common ground, they are ultimately composed of individuals. People are individuals in a system with their own goals, needs, and identities. In light of these four frames, Reinholz & Apkarian (2018)

defined culture as "a historical and evolving set of structures and symbols and the resulting power relationships between people" (p. 3). Furthermore, they stress that cultures are dynamic, and the changes in culture, departmental culture to be precise, are influenced by internal and external factors. Therefore, an in-depth exploration of factors that influence changes in culture can allow change agents to target specific changes. The four-frame model describes existing or proposed changes to guide efforts in solving a recognized problem. The focus of our analysis using the four-frame model is on analyzing 12 Pakistani women's experiences to learn about cultural aspects that influence their lives. The specific research question guiding this study is: *How do Pakistani women navigate cultural structures, symbols, and power to take action?*

2. Materials and Methods

We used phenomenology as our research methodology (Merriam, 2015), which focuses on the lived experience of participants; it is "a study of people's conscious experience of their life-world" (p. 25). Interviews are the primary source to reach "the essence or basic underlying structure of the meaning of an experience" in this methodology (p. 25). Phenomenology is well suited for studying intense human experiences, for example, understanding how Pakistani women navigate cultural structures, symbols, and power to take action.

2.1 Data

Data constitutes 12 interviews from a YouTube series, "Conversations with Kanwal," where Pakistani women share their experiences ranging

from marriage, domestic abuse, and child labor to cyber harassment. All 12 interviews are conducted in the Urdu language (the first language of the participants and the researchers) with a duration of about 12 minutes. All interviews were transcribed in English, and the authors used the exact names of

the participants as in the series available on YouTube. The show's host Kanwal was contacted before the project was initiated to seek permission and share the research intentions about her series. Table 1 provides the names and brief descriptions of the 12 participants' stories.

Table 1: Conversation with Kanwal interviewees and their stories

Interviewees	Stories
Adeela	Escaped abusive husband with help from her father
Hina	Earned a dentistry degree with support from her father, experienced challenges in the arranged marriage process due to hearing impairment
Rahat	Experienced challenges in arranged marriage process due to weight
Maham	Became a national-level cricket player despite no family support
Bisma	Experienced challenges in arranged marriage process due to weight
Sidra	Experienced challenges in conception and childbirth
Ainee	Experienced challenges in arranged marriage process due to skin color
Madiha	Coped with the untimely death of her husband
Shama	Survived online harassment exacerbated by an unsupportive family
Madiha	Achieved academic success while managing a physical disability, experienced challenges in arranged marriage process due to physical disability
Momina	Fought cancer with support from family
Gulnaz	Overcame adverse childhood experiences, child labor, abusive parents, and employers

2.2 Data Analysis

We used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to code our data using the definitions of four frames. We modified the original definitions of the four frames during our iterative coding process because the original definitions were not sufficient

for our context. After our initial coding round, we engaged in several follow-up rounds of coding to learn how the 12 interviewees made sense of their lives and took action. Our codes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Coding scheme

Level 1	Level 2
Power	Access-Access to resources (ex: parents, healthcare, knowledge)
	Access- Access to taking action (ex: decision-making, communication, abuse)
Structure	Access-Access to resources (ex: family, education, domestic help)
	Access-Access to taking action (ex: decision-making, communication, planning)

	Responsibility (ex: parental responsibility for their children's marriage, taking care of aging parents, proving oneself innocent)
	Routine (ex: routing in the process of arranged marriage, educational routine, domestic violence)
	Belief (ex: the birth of a daughter a joyous event, self-worth, importance of husband in a woman's life, belief about human value based on physical appearance)
	Feeling (ex: pain, pride, relief, humiliation, acceptance)
Symbol	Knowledge (ex; medical knowledge, evidence/information to support a claim)
	Norms (ex: girls playing on the street with boys considered inappropriate, acceptance of child-labor, becoming a mother, proper age for marriage)
	Thinking (ex: comparison to others, cognitive dissonance, questioning norms)

Our definitions of culture and people are the same as 4-frames. However, we define structure as the routines and responsibilities of a group. Routines are actions followed regularly (For example, habits, educational trajectory, physical or verbal abuse daily, allowing girls to play outside with boys, and poor working conditions for domestic staff); Responsibility is a duty towards people. Responsibility can provide power to make decisions for others and exercise control over others. Responsibilities within a culture may be assigned with little or no individual choice. For example, a parent's responsibility to find a suitable husband for their daughter can put immense pressure on the parent, but it's a societal responsibility that is assigned to Pakistani parents. We agree with the 4-frame definition of symbols and that they are the underlying ways of thinking that give meaning to structures. For us, symbols constitute personal beliefs, feelings, norms (societal beliefs), and thinking that guide people's actions. We also agree that symbols influence structures. In addition, they influence and are influenced by structure and power within a culture. We define

Beliefs, Feelings, Norms, and Thinking as follows: Beliefs are principles and convictions held to be true by individuals; Feelings are people's emotional state and emotional response to their surroundings; Norms are principles and convictions held to be true by a large group; Thinking is an act of reasoning through information [Within thinking, decision-making is the act of selecting one option. It's an example of taking action. So decision-making is related to thinking but warrants a separate code because not all instances of decision-making result from thinking]. We agree with the 4-frames' definition of power and used it as a means of access and influence. We added Access as the ability to use resources (For example, access to people such as a supportive father is a type of resource) and take actions (For example, communicating and making friends through social media).

3. Results

Through this research, we sought to answer the following research question: How do Pakistani women navigate cultural structures, symbols, and power to take action? In this section, we share emergent themes from our analysis about the

agency of Pakistani women in navigating cultural structures, symbols, and power to take action.

3.1 Experiencing the structural challenge of arranged marriage

The traditional process of arranged marriage was an issue faced by most interviewees. They mentioned finding the process humiliating and demeaning. Within Pakistani culture, the structure of arranged marriage emerged as both a routine and a responsibility. Interview data revealed that parents have an assigned cultural responsibility to arrange marriages for their sons and daughters. The routine of match-making puts pressure on the families because of their perceived responsibility and often leads girls to depression. The routine of arranging a marriage between a boy and a girl is a family affair and emerged as a significant theme in most interviews. However, the practice of setting the match itself proved to be a painful and humiliating process for the girls. One interviewee summed it up as follows, "The reality is that in the society we live in, [marriage] proposals are practically called upon. Mothers are calling someone up every day, asking for a good proposal option. And those are not proposals. Those people come to see you like when we go to Sunday bazaar [flea market], we see stuff, and it's up to us if we decide to purchase it or not." As gleaned from the interviews, this process starts early for girls with an age threshold beyond which girls are considered too old for marriage. Several interviewees made age-related comments like, "The pressure of getting married arose, 25-26 years old. Oh my God, overaged! The proposals started pouring in." Thus, age appeared as a critical selection criterion in the arranged marriage process.

In addition to age, interviews revealed that the match-making process involved gauging the girls on several other measures such as skin color, weight, height, family's socioeconomic status, not having any physical disabilities, and not being outspoken. The routine involved possibly getting an initial phone call from the prospective husband's family. This initial phone call was followed by a visit from the boy's family members to the girl's house. The interviews showed us the impact these visits had on the girls. As one interviewer shared, "One day, I came in and found out some people had come to see me. My mother would always keep my clothes ironed... 2 - 3 dresses in which I looked exceptionally pretty would always be hung outside. My poor mother always used to do this work. His sisters came when he was in Dubai. When they got a chance, his sisters asked me, *did you ever have Jaundice?* I said, *what?* So they said, *I don't know, we feel like your eyes and complexion indicate that you are sick. Is your daughter sick?*" Such comments were reported by several interviewees and were humiliating for the girls. Experiencing the structural challenges of arranged marriage made the participants feel like a "burden" to their families. Especially the expectation to get married by a certain age. When considering the arranged marriage process, Annie stated, "I would feel more hurt for my parents than myself." She was not interested in the idea of marriage, but she would worry about her parents as they were responsible for finding a suitable partner for her. Several participants shared this concern about feeling the need to help their parents as they empathized with their plight.

3.2 Using social media to navigate the structural challenge of arranged marriage

Interview data revealed that communication through social media provided an alternate platform and a new option to find prospective marriage partners. Several interviewees used their access to social media to find suitable marriage partners. For example, Madiha, who had muscular dystrophy, was approached by one of her classmates in her MBA program. He later proposed to Madiha, and they got married with their family's consent. An alternate routine to the traditional match-making process was found through matches made at work or through interactions on social media. Ainee, whose dark complexion had been a challenge for her family, seeking a suitable marriage partner for her, found a suitable partner for herself. Likewise, Hina, who had hearing and speech impairment, met her future husband online. The interviews revealed that when girls communicated independently with their potential spouses, they had a better chance of developing their relationships. The interviewees shared that meeting their prospective spouses online provided an opportunity to learn about each other. Pakistani society is predominantly segregated, where it is taboo for men and women to socialize publicly. This norm makes the arranged marriage process essential to connect individuals and form matches for marriage. Communication through social media provided the girls an alternate route for selecting their future husbands, albeit with their families' consent. Here, social media or independent communication mediums allowed them to interact independently. This alternate structure seemed less burdensome for the families

regarding their responsibility to arrange their daughter's marriage. Girls and boys already understood their future shared lives, and the parents' responsibility was reduced. Instead of finding a future partner through the traditional arranged marriage process, they now had a new obligation to accept and support their children's decisions. Also, it is essential to note that the alternate route to marriage allowed boys and girls to communicate as equals. In contrast to the traditional arranged marriage routine, where girls felt like objects up for sale. The interviewees found this new routine more humane. Here, access to social media became a medium to communicate and seek help.

3.3 Using critical thinking to understand and navigate societal norms

The interviewees often did not have the agency to take actionable steps against societal norms but we noticed a pattern of thinking where they all questioned these norms. We found their use of critical thinking powerful because it allowed them to compare various situations, come up with their own conclusions, and eventually make better decisions for themselves. All interviewees experienced moments of reflection that led them to a deeper understanding of their lived conditions. Analysis of the interview data revealed that all 12 girls had limited decision-making ability to take action in their lives. Their families' adherence to societal norms discouraged women from communicating their needs. Thinking clearly about their situation allowed them to consider possible solutions that would improve their lives. Rahat who had experienced humiliation at the hands of female

relatives of prospective suitors finally stood up to a boy's mother during an arranged marriage meeting. Speaking her mind gave Rahat a sense of empowerment, albeit small. She shared, "I heard a voice inside me say, *Rahat, this was your day!* Why? Isn't it our right to refuse someone? We can't fall into the arms of anyone who approaches us. We won't fall." Such moments of reflection allowed her to make decisions for herself within the confines of her living situation. Asking "why?" was often the first step in unpacking an unfair situation. This question alone allowed them a chance to consider alternate situations. Often, these women had internalized societal norms that were communicated to them. For example, Adeela, had developed a low self-esteem after years of verbal and physical abuse at the hand of her husband. Her husband routinely manipulated her by making comments like, "Have you seen your face? Would you have ever even dreamt that you would get a man like me?" He stressed that Adeela would never leave him and that she would not survive without him. Adeela had accepted her situation and internalized her husband's claims that she had no choice but to stay in an abusive marriage. Till she finally challenged her beliefs by thinking, "I have to and want to stay alive, and I can't stay alive with this person." Once she decided to leave, she found ways to seek help and was able to escape. Sidra had the firm belief that there was something wrong with her because she could not get pregnant and give birth. She explained, "My cousin and I got married at the same time. She was having a baby, and all my other cousins had babies too. I used to feel it a lot. Also, the things people used to say would hurt me a

lot. They would tell me the problem is with me, not my husband, so I am doing a disservice to him". She believed this narrative and it influenced her life. At one point, she challenged her belief that having a baby was her primary purpose in life. She began to focus on other things, started working and socializing with friends. This led to a change in her self-perceptions. For all three girls, their internalized beliefs led them to limit their actions to improve their living situations. They finally challenged their own beliefs and were able to work towards a better life.

3.4 Communicating to navigate societal norms

Though not found in abundance in the data, some interviewees did use their voice to offer resistance against existing norms. We found that their communication was rarely well-received. Perhaps due to the lack of decision-making power gleaned from all twelve stories. Often decisions impacting the girls' lives were made for them, with them facing the repercussions of these decisions. The decision-makers were fathers, brothers, husbands, mothers-in-law, mothers, grandmothers, or even employers who ensured that societal norms were maintained. Communication that led to any change was often dependent upon these decision-makers agreeing to help. For example, Hina's father supported his daughter's education, and Adeela's father helped her escape from her abusive husband. With limited power, their communication also had a limited impact and warranted tact, often requiring evidence to support their case. In the case of Gulnaz, when she tried to inform her parents about how her employers had physically abused her, they did not believe her because she did not have any

proof. She explained that she told her parents about her employer's mistreatment, but by the time she saw her parents, "the bruises would heal, so they wouldn't believe me." With no evidence to prove her story, her parents accused her of lying and would beat her, so she would return to work. After an episode of violence at the hands of her employers, she escaped. The parents finally believed her after she showed them evidence in the form of bruises. Evidence also played an essential role in Shama's story, who was being cyberbullied and had escaped a sexual assault attempt. Shama hid her experience from her family, but when her mother found out, she blamed her. The mother did not believe Shama till she saw CCTV footage of her daughter being attacked. Shama's word did not hold much weight; her mother needed proof to believe her own daughter. We found that the interviewees knew they had a voice to stand up for their fundamental rights even though they were discouraged from speaking up. It took them time to voice their concerns but even when their initial attempts at communication were not successful they continued to find ways to bring change in their lives.

3.5 Employing agency to make decisions and take action

The story of Gulnaz exemplified her agency as a woman determined to improve her life. In the case of Gulnaz, we saw a progressive increase in the agency she exercised. Gulnaz worked as a child in the capacity of a domestic servant to support her family. She explained, "When we came from Punjab (a province in Pakistan), we were in need. My father was at home, and he needed our help and

support. My elder sister used to work day and night, so my father told me that I should work as well". Starting at age 12, she started working as a babysitter and a domestic employee, working and staying at the employer's house who treated her with cruelty. Determined to get a better life, Gulnaz pursued grooming and cooking classes in the evenings. However, she decided to withhold this information from her father. She felt that her father would not understand her decision and would stop her learning. Her efforts to develop her skills allowed her the opportunity to improve her economic situation. Eventually, she opened up her own restaurant and became a proud single mother and head chef. She also decided to take on the responsibility of looking after her ailing father and other family members. Gulnaz's story highlights her continuous decision-making and her belief that she could shape her own life and her family. Depending on the circumstances each interviewee exercised agency in a different way. Maham loved playing cricket and, as a child, played cricket with the neighborhood boys. As she grew older, her family forbade her from playing cricket with neighborhood boys. She felt disheartened because she dreamt of playing cricket for Pakistan at the international level one day. Compelled by her belief in her ability and her desire to pursue cricket as a career, she continued to communicate her wishes to her family. Her family resisted for a long time but finally agreed and found a way to have her continue her passion. Maham had a supportive family, and they had the means to support her. She never took her support for granted and worked hard to stay focused throughout her career. Eventually, her hard work

paid off, and she was selected for the national women's team, allowing her to play internationally against Australia. She shined in the end because of her focus and belief in her abilities. These examples where girls use their agency to advocate for themselves indicate that their self-worth can influence their actions. However, this sense of self-worth can fluctuate through constant signals from society.

4. Discussion

Our findings present how women as people employ structure, symbols, and power to function within Pakistani society. The findings of particular interest to us were women's actions when navigating cultural constraints. For example, we found thinking and communicating as two possible actions that women could engage in within the constraints of their living situations. Here we unpack these two actions as navigation tools used by Pakistani women. When it came to communication, the interviewees used it with caution. This restraint in communication was warranted because of concerns about a possible backlash they would have to face if they spoke up against the norms, even when asking for their fundamental rights as human beings. Interviewees shared examples like asking their teacher for basic accommodations in their education, confronting a stranger in response to verbal abuse regarding physical appearance, and standing up to an abusive husband after years of domestic violence. Communication as a possible course of action is complex, as families play the role of decision-makers on these girls' behalf. In addition to being discouraged from speaking, not experiencing

communication as an effective method to change their lives may prevent the girls from speaking up. Despite communication being discouraged and not being effective all the time, we saw many examples of women communicating. They communicated to ask others to take action, ask for help, seek safety, request access to resources, or share their thoughts and feelings. Women also used communication to self-advocate. These were all instances where communication did not lead to an instant change in their circumstances. Instead, communication brought them temporary happiness and temporary access to resources like a safe living space or a place to share their thoughts. Communication benefits were brief, but many of these experiences allowed the women to feel good about sharing their opinions. Women felt good about exercising their agency even if it didn't always yield a desirable life change. While we noticed that communication was discouraged by family members, communication via social media emerged as an effective platform for sharing ideas and concerns. Social media served as a space where many of these women could communicate. In several examples, women even used social media to connect with potential future partners. This powerful effect of social media provided a parallel structure to the cultural process of arranged marriage, which is often a source of humiliation for girls. It also showed a power shift in contrast to the traditional arranged marriage structure. In the examples of social media matches, the influence of parents on decision-making was reduced. For several interviewees, the process took place smoothly with little to no trauma as experienced during the traditional arranged

marriage process. Social media also provided a space for the interviewees to share their life stories with others. These women's access to social media gave them a passage to explore avenues they are usually not exposed to. In this regard, social media has emerged as a platform for having difficult conversations. In recent years social media has been a focus of research on feminist and queer digital activism, with its beneficial aspects like fostering communication, supporting social movements, and also problematic practices like critiquing or 'call out' culture (Keller *et al.*, 2018; Rentschler and Thrift, 2015; Ryan and Keller, 2018). Our analysis also unpacks how social media is emerging as a platform providing access to resources for improving Pakistani women's lives. Communication through social media is a tool that can improve women's lives and must be a focus of further research. In addition to communication as an action, the interviewees used their thinking to wonder about their lives in complex ways. While thinking might seem a passive way to cope with their situations, they were often actively engaged in sense-making and planning possible actions. There were instances when they tried to make sense of other people's actions (for example, not being selected for a role in a play or processing harsh comments made by others). Their thoughtful reflection to understand the actions of others resulted in them developing strategies to deal with people, understanding how others perceived them, and developing a self-image shaped by their experiences. Often this self-image was not positive, but the women also questioned their negative self-perception when reflecting. While reflecting, the

interviewees questioned their own lives and planned to take future action (For example, starting or ending medical treatment, taking action to remove the stigma of being a daughter, or leaving an abusive husband). It took courage to take these actions. Thinking allowed them to muster that courage as they did not always have support. Some women found that support through their faith, while others found support by sharing ideas on social media. Thinking and communicating were the two strategies that emerged as being the most impactful for these women. Thinking allowed them to make sense of their lives, and the actions of others around them, think about the possible courses of action available to them, and plan out possible ways to communicate and improve their lives. Their actions provide a window into the Pakistani culture and how it operates as studied through the lens of the Four Frames framework. We learned about these women's coping strategies as they lived through challenging situations. Coping is often defined as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources" (Lazarus, 1991, p. 112). Coping is an active process, but it can take several forms that are labeled using different terms such as active, passive (Yoshihama, 2002; Finn, 1985), "disengagement" versus "engagement" (Kemp, Green, Hovanitz, & Rawlings, 1995); "avoidance" versus "approach" (Moos, 1995); "avoidant" versus "active" (Holahan & Moos, 1987) to name a few. It is essential to understand the complexity of coping mechanisms used by people who find themselves in demanding life situations. In terms of

understanding the actions taken by Pakistani women as they navigate their lives, we found thinking and communicating as coping mechanisms employed by them. Future research will focus on unpacking the power of thinking and communicating used by Pakistani women to improve their lives.

5. Conclusion

In this study, we described actions taken by Pakistani women as they navigated their lives within Pakistani culture. We analyzed 12 interviews by Kanwal in her series, "Conversation with Kanwal," and employed the four frames of structure, symbol, power, and people (Reinholz & Apkarian, 2018). Through this process, we adjusted our definitions of structure, power, and symbol as they apply to the Pakistani context. During the in-depth analysis of these 12 interviews, we found arranged marriage a phenomenon where all four frames intersect. It is particularly interesting because all the interviewees mentioned how arranged marriage impacted their lives. We also observed that these women felt helpless and lacked agency throughout the arranged marriage process. Access to social media provided a way for many interviewees to exercise their agency and allowed them to connect with their future spouses. We shared their experiences regarding arranged marriage and its deep-rooted foundation within Pakistani culture. Thinking and communicating emerged as tools women used to change their existing situations. However, their communication was often discouraged. When they did get a chance to share (for example, via social media), this act of power gave them a sense of self-satisfaction. They

demonstrated their resistance by thinking about and questioning societal norms that affected them and sometimes used mild communication to share their concerns. However, there was a difference between their thoughts and their spoken words. Although the words were discouraged, these women continued to think. Their thinking was often insufficient to take action and change their living situations. Still, the thinking allowed them to process problems, consider possible solutions, perceive others' actions and words, and develop strategies to react. While communication and thinking could be used as a coping mechanism, we found that these women needed an environment that was receptive to their communication. If they were encouraged to communicate, if they felt safe communicating their needs, and if their families were actively seeking out their point of view, these girls were more likely to express themselves. For example, speaking to a mother instead of a father, deciding to share a concern with family members, or keeping it inside, depended on their perception of how their communication would be received. This is an area that needs further research. With communication being a powerful tool for change, future research will focus on examining channels that can allow Pakistani women to voice their concerns, share their thoughts and work together to improve their lives.

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