A PATCHWORK OF FEMININITIES

Working-Class Women's Fluctuating Gender Performances in a Pakistani Market*

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Abstract: Scholars have studied multiple femininities across different spaces by attributing variation to cultural/spatial contexts or in the same space by attributing variation to class/race positions. However, we don't yet know how women from the same cultural, class, and race locations may enact multiple femininities in the same context. Drawing on observations and interviews in a women-only bazaar in Pakistan, I show that multiple femininities can exist within the same space and individual. Working-class women workers in Meena Bazaar switched between performances of "pariah femininity" and "hegemonic femininity," patching together contradictory femininities to secure different types of capitals at the organizational and personal levels. Pariah femininities enabled access to economic capital but typically decreased women's symbolic capital, whereas hegemonic femininities generated symbolic capital but could block or enable access to economic capital. The concept of a patchwork performance of femininity explains how and why working-class women simultaneously embody idealized and stigmatized forms of femininity. Further, it captures how managerial regimes and personal struggles for class distinction interact to produce contradictory gender performances. By examining gender performances in the context of social stratification, this article explains the structural underpinnings of working-class women's gendered struggles for respectability and work.

Keywords: hegemonic femininity, pariah femininity, class, labor, South Asia

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“Think of it like this, they’re India and we’re Pakistan,” offered Noreen by way of distinguishing between Angel Parlor, where she worked, and Diamond Parlor, the beauty salon opposite it in Meena Bazaar. Noreen’s comment introduced me to an ongoing feud and, in her opinion, moral difference between the women who worked at the two salons. I was taking my first beautician class at Angel and a heated argument had just erupted at Diamond where women were loudly cursing. Over the next days, I learned that the staff at Angel detested the staff at Diamond, whom they characterized as “bad women,” while taking pride in their own status as “good women.” Diamond’s workers frequently cursed, shouted, and embodied a hypersexualized femininity. In contrast, Angel’s workers appeared docile and modest. However, I soon noticed that the women at Angel embodied similarly aggressive and sexual femininities, even as they claimed to be different from, and morally superior to, the workers at Diamond.

Femininity is no longer understood as a monolithic “other” of masculinity. Rather, scholars show that multiple femininities emerge across diverse contexts and groups (Budgeon 2014; Hanser 2008; Salzinger 2003). While the empirical literature on multiple femininities focuses on variation in femininities across different spaces, classes, groups, cultural worlds, or time periods, we still cannot explain where and why variation may exist at the same time, in the same place, and within performances of the same person.

Drawing on observations and interviews in Meena Bazaar, a women-only marketplace in Karachi, I show that multiple femininities exist within the same organization and in the gender performances of any individual. Women regularly switched between performances of “pariah femininity” and “hegemonic femininity” (Schipper 2007) within the bazaar, engaging in what I describe as a *patchwork performance of femininity*. Pariah femininities are stigmatized femininities that typically decrease women’s symbolic capital, while hegemonic femininities are idealized femininities that increase women’s symbolic capital. In Meena Bazaar, pariah femininities enabled access to economic capital, and in rare instances, symbolic capital, whereas hegemonic femininities either blocked or enabled women’s access to economic capital but smoothed access to symbolic capital. Women switched back and forth between these femininities to accumulate both economic and symbolic capital. This patchwork performance operated at the organizational and personal levels. On the organizational level, women were embedded in managerial regimes, which required the performance of both types of femininities to reach various organizational goals. On the personal level, working-class women made decisions, independent of managerial dictates, to enact both types of femininities as a strategy to maximize status.

Working-class women’s class position simultaneously restricted, and necessitated, their attempts to patch together these divergent femininities. As Beverley Skeggs (1997) argues, the ability to perform hegemonic femininity requires prior access to economic, cultural, and social capital that working-class women do not have. However, because working-class women’s routes to these forms of capital are blocked, often their only chance of gaining status is through symbolic capital. Thus, women attempted to approximate hegemonic femininities in a last-ditch effort to gain status through establishing moral worth.

Following Skeggs, I theorize femininity not merely as an identity or an embodied disposition, but rather, as a tactic and an investment. I build on Skeggs’ work by showing that, in addition to

performing hegemonic femininity, women in Meena Bazaar also relied on pariah femininity to gain economic and symbolic capital to survive. Frequently, both at the level of the individual and the managerial regime, the pay-off from each type of femininity contradicted others. In the context of this lose-lose situation, women alternated between hegemonic and pariah femininities, in ad-hoc attempts to accumulate both economic and symbolic capital by “patching” together these different femininities. Significantly, this patchwork performance did not result in a new type of femininity such as the “hybrid femininity” (Ispa-Landa and Oliver 2020) or “new womanhood” (Hussein 2018) of elite and middle-class women. Working-class women in Meena Bazaar did not have the resources to author new types of culturally legitimated femininities. Hence, they engaged in a strategy of shifting between idealized and stigmatized femininities.

The concept of a patchwork performance of femininity explains 1) how, and why, working-class women simultaneously perform stigmatized and idealized forms of femininity and 2) the complex interplay between managerial regimes and personal struggles for class distinction that culminates in such contradictory gender performances. This article provides a framework for understanding gender performances in the context of stratified fields of opportunity. It argues that if social/class stratification exists, women will be differentially located in their desire for, and ability to use, different types of femininities as a tactic. Thus, they will use whichever performance of femininity allows them to improve their status.

MULTIPLE FEMININITIES

Recent literature on femininities recognizes historical, cultural, and spatial variation in femininities and understands gender performances as inextricable from class, race, and national identities (Balogun 2012; Bettie 2003; Pyke and Johnson 2003). However, scholars continue to link specific cultural worlds, spaces, or classes with monolithic performances of femininity. For example, Pyke and Johnson (2003) show how Asian-American women perform different versions of femininity as they move between “Asian” and “White” cultural worlds. Salzinger (2003) demonstrates how femininities vary within the same cultural context in Mexico but analyzes each factory as having one type of gendered enactment. Other studies repeat this move by analyzing how femininities vary by workplace based on preferences of customers (Hoang 2015), relational struggles for distinction (Hanser 2008), and consumer status markets (Otis 2011). In contrast to these studies, Bettie (2003) shows how multiple femininities exist in the same space of a single school. However, she links specific femininities to certain class-race positions. Although both Bettie (2003) and Salzinger (2003) acknowledge that some women switched between different femininities as they moved between school/work and home, they describe women and girls as performing stable versions of a singular type of femininity in each space.

I argue that scholars underestimate the contextual variation of femininities by attributing fixed femininities to specific places (work/school/home) or demographic attributes (race/class/culture). We don’t yet have an account of how and why women from the same cultural, class and race locations enact multiple femininities, not just throughout their lives or as they move through cultural worlds, but within much shorter spans of time, according to the situation they’re in. This research shows that class and spatial dynamics shape gender performances, but distinct class positions or spaces are not always linked to singular performances of femininity.

HEGEMONIC AND PARIAH FEMININITIES

Scholars theorize idealized femininities in different ways using the labels of emphasized, dominant, and hegemonic (Hamilton et al. 2019; Messerschmidt 2020; Paechter 2018).¹ In this paper, I build on Schippers' (2007) relational framework that argues that femininities and masculinities must ultimately be categorized as hegemonic or pariah according to their role in reinforcing or undermining the hierarchical and binary relation between masculinity and femininity. Hegemonic femininities are idealized femininities which are in sync with cultural ideals of womanhood and uphold this relation. Pariah femininities are stigmatized femininities which refuse to emulate the traits of hegemonic femininity and embody what are considered exclusively masculine characteristics (in the local context) thereby "contaminating" this relationship (Schippers 2007). Although these categories are symbolic and social, rather than biological, people who are perceived as women embodying masculine characteristics are often seen not as doing masculinity, but rather, as doing pariah femininity.²

The specific content of hegemonic and pariah femininities differs across cultures depending on local constructions of ideal womanhood. In Pakistan, hegemonic femininity is associated with the categories of *achi aurat* (good woman) and *shareef aurat* (respectable woman) and rooted in the concept of *izzat*, which can be translated as honor, respect, dignity, or reputation (Haeri 2002). Sexual chastity is a crucial component of being an *achi aurat* but forms of embodiment and speech matter as well. Male family members consider themselves responsible for ensuring women's chastity, which is considered a marker of familial reputation (Walle 2004). Hence, families control women's access to spaces and people outside the home. A *shareef aurat* consents to these norms and is docile, obedient, soft-spoken and well-mannered. She is oriented towards the home and avoids participating in the public sphere.

Although over the years changing national, economic, and political contexts have altered the content of "respectable femininity" (the term scholars use to refer to idealized femininity in South Asia) it remains a classed ideal and is typically analysed in relation to middle-class and elite women (Khoja-Moolji 2018). Research shows that middle-class women's access to economic, social, and cultural capital allows them to successfully enact "respectable femininity" even when they leave their homes to work (Radhakrishnan 2009). For example, teachers in a village in Pakistan can mobilize their privileged status as *parhi likhi* (educated) women to retain their status as respectable women, despite working outside their homes (Khurshid (2015).

In contrast, a *buri aurat* (bad woman) is someone who is morally tainted by entering the public sphere, being agentic rather than obedient (Toor 2007), and/or deviating from the classed habits, speech, and embodiment of respectable femininity. Transgressing the norm of gender seclusion is commonly equated with sexual immodesty. Hence, a range of women, including healthcare workers (Jafree 2018), sex workers (Saeed 2002), social media stars (Maher 2020), and feminists (Haeri 2002) are routinely stigmatized, harassed, and considered *buri aurat* for their participation in the public sphere. Since middle-class women can typically shore up other types of capital to combat this stigma to some extent, it is working-class women such as factory workers (Hewamanne 2008; Lynch 2007), service workers (Grossman-Thompson 2017), nurses, and sex workers who are most commonly associated with stigmatized femininities.

I interpret the categories of respectable femininity or *shareef/achi aurat* and *buri aurat* as local manifestations of hegemonic and pariah femininity respectively. However, I move beyond a binary classification of *achi* and *buri* to show how working-class women simultaneously adopt both types of subject positions and are forced to do so precisely because of their class position.

DEPLOYING MULTIPLE FEMININITIES AS A TACTIC IN STRATIFIED FIELDS OF OPPORTUNITY

Skeggs (1997) explains how respectable femininity becomes a resource for working-class women in England. Given the paucity of their access to economic, social, or cultural capital, women have no recourse but to aim for the symbolic capital of respectability. Similarly, Hamilton et al. (2019) argue that women can mobilize hegemonic femininity to accrue a “femininity premium”. Organizations too, use idealized femininity to secure status, and relatedly, profits (Hanser 2008; Otis 2011).

I show that pariah femininities can also be mobilized tactically, in addition to hegemonic femininities. Organizations and individuals use both types of femininities to achieve multiple, and sometimes, contradictory goals. Hoang’s (2015) analysis of sex workers reveals how women mobilize different technologies of embodiment and linked to those, performances of femininities, to maximize their economic capital by catering to the different preferences of men. Extending Hoang’s insight that femininities are shaped by desires for economic capital, I show the complex ways women mobilize femininities as a tactic to secure economic and symbolic capital at the same time, even in the absence of the male gaze.

Crucially, I propose a distinction between the way middle-class or socially advantaged women and working-class women combine idealized and stigmatized femininities. Scholars have explained the simultaneous embodiment of normative and non-normative gendered behaviors by deploying the concepts of ambiguity (Moore 2015), hybridity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Ispalanda and Oliver 2020; Wozny Forthcoming), re-signification (Budgeon 2014) and, in the context of South Asia, “new womanhood” (Hussein 2018; Vijayakumar 2013). I argue that the ability to create hybrid femininities, i.e., culturally legitimate performances that “fuse” together idealized and stigmatized femininities is not easily available to working-class women. Instead of generating a new type of femininity, working-class women may rely on patchwork performances of femininity and shift between contradictory femininities (hegemonic and pariah) to maximize capital in the context of class inequality.

DATA AND METHODS

This article is based on data collected for a larger project on working-class women’s experiences as workers in Karachi’s expanding service economy. Meena Bazaar is a unique women-only marketplace, consisting almost exclusively of small undergarments shops and beauty parlors. Pakistan’s female labor force participation rate is a mere 22.8 percent (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2018) and gender norms typically restrict women to their homes. Thus, Meena Bazaar is a rare space where women from heterogeneous ethnicities, religions, classes, and neighborhoods congregate outside their homes and conduct themselves more freely than they would in male-dominated public spaces. As such, it is an ideal site to explore femininities that

are not oriented towards the immediate male gaze and for understanding the interplay of hegemonic and pariah femininities.

When the bazaar was first established in 1979 it was a renowned center of beauty work and catered to a diverse class of customers. However, new malls and beauty salons have surpassed Meena Bazaar in status, which is now run-down and caters primarily to a low-income population. Workers in the bazaar, all women, were of all ages and the majority came from low-income households. Some were wage workers, others were self-employed shopkeepers, and others were seasonal workers or contract-workers. A significant number were unmarried, divorced, widowed, or had fathers, husbands, or brothers who were unable to provide for them.

During preliminary fieldwork, I befriended Saima, the owner of Angel when I interviewed her. To gain access to the bazaar, I paid to enroll in beauty classes in her salon. She was visiting family in another city for the first 6 weeks I spent in the bazaar and I was able to establish a relationship independent of her with workers, which allowed me to chat freely with them. I realized early on that my smooth access to the bazaar through Saima, who appreciated that I was an educated woman, depended on my performance of respectable femininity. Although my privileged class status put me in the sphere of respectable femininity, my status as an unmarried woman living abroad without her parents also raised questions. Hence, I paid attention to my hair, clothing, and manner of speaking in the bazaar to signal respectable femininity to ensure my unhindered access to the bazaar. I was inculcated into norms of middle-class respectable femininity growing up in Karachi and most of this came to me easily, although I struggled to modulate my physical appearance (for example, the way in which I made my hair) to fit the norms of respectable femininity, which required a neatness of self-presentation. I found myself consciously playing up my status as an educated “respectable” woman with some of the older women and letting down my guard with some of the younger girls to signal that I was willing to discuss boyfriends and exchange jokes. This ongoing modulation on my part heightened my awareness of the multiple femininities I noticed in the bazaar.

Over the course of 7 months, I spent 3 to 5 days a week in the bazaar. I spent the first two months taking beauty lessons at Angel and worked for a week during the busy season in the salon as part of my training and had my own clients. For the remaining 5 months, I sat in various shops, helped women run errands inside and outside the bazaar, observed retail workers’ negotiations with customers, talked with customers, and conducted informal interviews. I also spent time in food shops chatting with customers and workers who came there for lunch and tea breaks. Thus, I developed in-depth knowledge of one salon, while also observing the heterogeneous managerial regimes, femininities, and social relations in the bazaar. Additionally, I visited women in their homes and participated in leisure activities with them in the city, thereby observing their behavior outside work as well.

I conducted 42 semi-structured interviews with workers, employers, customers, and managers at their homes or during slow times in the bazaar. During interviews I asked questions about their work (entry into, experiences of, and reasons for choosing this work), family members’ reactions to their work, social lives, experiences of moving in the city, and leisure activities. I developed the interview guide after interviews with beauty and retail workers during preliminary fieldwork

in Karachi and conducted interviews alongside participant observation. I have used pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

A combination of ethnography and interviews allowed me to observe women's gender performances across situations and learn what women thought about them. Interviews allowed me to access women's classification schemas regarding gender and class, and their own anxieties and aspirations linked to these classifications. I used a grounded theory approach when analyzing and coding my fieldnotes and interviews (Charmaz 2006). During initial line-by-line coding, I used codes such as "multiple femininities" (an idea I explored in an analytic memo during fieldwork), "*izzat*" and "*achi/buri*." I then returned to the data to apply the more focused codes of "respectable femininity" and "pariah femininity". The interview guide did not include questions about *achi* and *buri* women, but discussions about women's experiences at work often elicited related comments, which I asked follow-up questions about.

PARIAH AND HEGEMONIC FEMININITY IN MEENA BAZAAR

In this section, I describe how both pariah and hegemonic femininity circulated in the bazaar. I first became aware of the stigmatized femininities associated with Meena Bazaar and its workers, when I noticed how women concealed the identity of their workplace from their extended families and prospective in-laws. Retail and beauty workers in other settings disparaged workers in Meena Bazaar and shuddered at the thought of working there, even though they otherwise liked the idea of working in a women-only space. They considered workers in Meena Bazaar to be uncouth, morally suspect, foul-mouthed, aggressive, and hence, *buri* women. As I show later, women keenly felt the stigma associated with the bazaar and contested it by performing hegemonic femininity.

Pariah femininity was institutionalized in the hawking system of the bazaar. As soon as customers began ascending the staircases to the bazaar, workers clustered around the landing and overwhelmed them with a cacophony of pleas. "What do you want? Come here! Do you want a bra? Do you want a bra? I'll show you! Come here, we have the best henna girls. What do you want to get done? Threading?" When customers reached the landing, women amplified their attempts to recruit customers by blocking customers' paths or physically steering customers from their elbows. Fights repeatedly broke out at the landing over who had the right to negotiate with a customer. Shouting, drawing attention, and acting physically and verbally aggressive, especially in public spaces, are considered exclusively masculine traits in the Pakistani context. By shouting openly about lingerie, women also transgressed norms of modesty which are a key component of respectable femininity. A desperate desire for money, as encapsulated in these hawking attractions, was relatively more acceptable in men, who were designated breadwinners. In women, it became a cause of stigma. When women adopted masculine traits, they were not seen as doing masculinity or as "manly women" but rather, as doing the wrong kind of femininity, i.e., *buri* women.

In contrast to the stereotype of interactive service workers as deferential, polished, and docile, women in Meena Bazaar were rude and unaccommodating with customers, managers, and co-workers alike. For instance, when a customer cut ahead of a worker in the bathroom line, the worker confronted the customer, which led to a physical fight that was eventually broken up by a

policewoman. Most women in the bazaar did not embody attributes of idealized femininity; they did not speak in a low voice or avoid fights and were not submissive. Furthermore, they were often unkempt and unfashionable. They were not required to perform the type of embodied capital that service workers in other beauty and retail settings are often expected to and were not invested in presenting refined femininity.

Cultural associations of beauty work with vanity, promiscuity, and sex work also contributed to the reputation of these women as *buri*. Although a few women hotly contested these allegations, others discussed how some women in Meena Bazaar recruited others into sex work. Some women took advantage of the women-only space of the bazaar and openly made lewd jokes and expressed their sexuality. Women subdued such loud and sexual performances in mixed-gender public spaces as performing sexuality in the presence of men had higher social costs than performing it in the presence of women.

Yet women consistently performed respectable femininity in the bazaar as well. Women foregrounded the gender-segregated attribute of the bazaar to present it as a reputable place. Saba, a self-employed beautician, stated, “You can’t protect your honor working in a garments factory. The same goes for working in hospitals. This is the only place that’s completely safe, just like one’s home.” Indeed, several women who worked in the bazaar were only allowed by their family members to work there precisely because it was a women-only space and chances of women losing their sexual chastity in a gender-segregated space were perceived as lower. Parveen, an elderly shopkeeper, narrated, “The bazaar is very convenient for women from *shareef* (respectable) homes as there are no men here.” Thus, the bazaar had a paradoxical reputation as a place where both *buri* and *shareef* women worked.

Women in Meena Bazaar also claimed a type of domesticity, and hence respectability, using the women-only aspect of the bazaar to liken it to their homes. Some women referred to themselves as *gharelo aurtain*, a term used to indicate housewives or those traditional and respectable women who are foremost oriented towards the home. Mushtaq Bhai, the male manager of the bazaar, described workers there as “Eastern women” in contrast to women who worked office jobs whom he considered modernized or Westernized women.

Some women in the bazaar came from middle-class backgrounds and used their class status to enact respectable femininity. For example, some of the older women who had been working in the bazaar for a couple of decades had entered the bazaar as small shopkeepers rather than waged workers. These women performed respectable femininity (although, as I describe later, they also embodied pariah femininity on occasion) by performing religiosity and modesty and invoking their “family background” to draw symbolic boundaries (Hussein 2018) between themselves and other women in the bazaar. Thus, visitors were likely to encounter both pariah and respectable femininities in the bazaar.

TABLE 1: Characteristics of Hegemonic and Pariah Femininity in Pakistan

	<i>Hegemonic femininity</i>	<i>Pariah femininity</i>
Local iteration	<i>Shareef/achi aurat</i>	<i>Buri aurat</i>
Status	Idealized	Stigmatized
Associations	Domesticity, private sphere, gender-segregation, education, moral worth, sexual chastity, tradition, middle-class	Working outside the home, public sphere, vulgarity, moral disrepute, sexual promiscuity, materialistic, “westernization”, working-class
Behavioral characteristics	Docile, soft-spoken, religious, modest, restricting relations with non-kin men, prioritizing family and home over friends	Insubordinate, loud, hypersexual, drawing attention to herself, socializing with friends and men, aggressive

CRAFTING A PATCHWORK PERFORMANCE OF FEMININITIES

Hegemonic and pariah femininity did not exist as clear-cut binaries in the bazaar. Although hegemonic/respectable femininity continued to be the desired route to upward mobility and status, women had to perform pariah femininity as well, to secure even a chance at achieving this status. Thus, women often made contradictory claims as they crafted a patchwork identity, which incorporated both types of femininities. In this section I show how this patchwork operated on an organizational and personal level.

Managerial Regimes: Maintaining a Balance Between Respectable and Pariah Femininities

On an organizational level, I found that employers actively encouraged pariah and respectable femininities in the bazaar. A decline in customers in the bazaar over the years had precipitated cut-throat competition. A salon or shop’s ability to generate profit depended on workers being aggressive, and at times, physically violent. Employers needed to ensure their workers could participate in the brash hawking system and recruit customers. Shops opened directly on to the alleyways in the bazaar, and customers did not have to enter a shop to start negotiating fares. Thus, workers in different shops could simultaneously solicit a customer. This caused fights between shopkeepers who accused each other of stealing customers. Successfully navigating these fights necessitated the performance of pariah femininities.

Employers trained women out of any proclivities towards shyness or politeness by insisting that they become accustomed to the hawking system and validating them for excelling in it. Humera, who started working at Angel a few months before I joined, noticed my hesitancy to hawk at the staircase. To encourage me, she proudly described her own transformation: “At first, I couldn’t speak even a word to the customers and would just hang in the back. They all used to make fun of me. Now look at me! I’m completely changed.” Humera had quickly learned that a good employee in Meena Bazaar was not necessarily a “good woman” who was docile and quiet. The aggressive femininity she performed at the staircase was now her badge of honor, as opposed to a cause for shame.

Although employers required the performance of pariah femininities, they simultaneously relied on gendered discourses of moral worth and respectability to control and recruit workers. For example, employers frequently directed workers to stop socializing to make workers more vigilant and efficient. They achieved this by linking moral worth to having fewer friendships and juxtaposing friends with family, which was meant to be the real priority of women. Hina, a senior manager in her forties, who supervised the hawking operation at Angel, advised the younger henna workers: “You’re not here to make friends, you’re here to work so you can take this money to your family.” Although women had to leave their homes to become breadwinners, they were taught that they could signal domesticity, and hence respectability, by foregoing friendships that took their time and attention away from their familial duties and could also be a source of moral corruption. By doing so, they could appear family-oriented despite being outside their homes.

Such directives were an extension of the maternalistic managerial regime common in the bazaar. Employers played the role of benevolent mothers responsible for their workers’ moral well-being. Amna, a shopkeeper, laid out the following to a prospective employee’s mother:

Tell your daughter not to go around here and there making friends and getting mixed up in the wrong crowd. She should bring her own lunch from home and not take any days off. After 9 pm, she’s your responsibility and before 9 pm, she’s my responsibility. Don’t worry, she’ll be completely safe working here.

Similarly, when another manager sent a young worker outside for an errand, she added, “Cover your head before you go down and make sure you don’t go alone, take another girl with you.” Such managerial regimes ensured labor supply by guaranteeing to parents and husbands, who were otherwise hesitant to send their daughters or wives to work, that employers extended the patriarchal “protection” and control of the home to the workplace.

Positioning themselves as guardians allowed employers to enact harsh modes of labor control. I was sitting with Saima near the cash counter when a young worker asked if she could go home early as she had a headache. Saima lovingly, yet sternly, denied the girl’s request and offered to get her medicine instead. When the worker returned to her station, Saima turned to me to say, “This is the third time she’s asked me today, but I can’t just let her go home in the middle of the day. How can I be sure where she’s going and with whom?” By adopting a maternal posture, Saima achieved two things. One, it was the busy season, and every worker was indispensable. Her concern for the workers’ safety and morality allowed her to simultaneously control the

workers' movements, extract maximum labor, and produce a docile labor force. Two, as employers could indeed be held somewhat accountable by workers' families for actions undertaken by a worker, during the workday, or right after leaving work, Saima minimized the possibility of being held liable by the worker's family.

As these examples show, employers relied on both pariah and respectable femininities to meet divergent, and sometimes contradictory, organizational goals. Often, women workers' outward displays of pariah femininity continued to be embedded within managerial politics and the broader politics of respectability. How employers chose to navigate this tension differed from person to person. As Salzinger (2003) shows, the aspirations and personalities of managers play an important role in constituting the gendered subjectivities of workers. Bano, the very successful owner of Diamond salon, embodied a loud working-class femininity, took public transport to work, and encouraged her workers to be aggressive with competitors and clients. Saima, the owner of Angel, on the other hand, embodied a middle-class respectable femininity. She took a car service to work and prided herself on maintaining a veneer of respectability and virtue among her workers—even if she encouraged them to be aggressive and, on occasion, abandoned respectable femininity herself, to navigate the culture of the bazaar.

The divergent preferences of Bano and Saima were reflected in their hiring practices. Saima shared how she recently fired a new employee because one of her senior workers advised her to do so, saying, "Something doesn't seem right to me about this girl." A few days later, Bano hired the same girl at Diamond. When Saima went to Bano and suggested that Bano also fire this girl, Bano refused. She told Saima that the girl was willing to work for extremely low wages as she had left her home and wanted to work just for food. In retelling this story, Saima gave me a knowing look and said, "Of course the girl must be living with someone (implying she was living with a man), no wonder she can work for almost nothing." Although both Saima and Bano required their workers to enact pariah femininities, Saima positioned herself as a respectable woman. She was more selective than Bano in the behavior and temperament she expected from her workers.

Both salons stood to gain and lose from incorporating these multiple femininities. Encouraging pariah femininities in the salon increased Diamond's profit; women who were not too dedicated to enacting respectable femininity stayed later than others to work longer hours, in some cases, for little pay. On the other hand, Angel's prioritization of respectable femininity ensured a steady labor supply and docile workforce. Two girls at Angel had previously worked at Diamond but quit on the insistence of their parents, who wanted their daughters to work under "good women." The final calculus between the two femininities was determined by the personality and investments of the employers who decided how they deployed multiple femininities to achieve different organizational goals.

Personal Struggles: Mobilizing Multiple Femininities for Economic and Symbolic Capital

Women's personal attempts to maximize economic returns and dignity were interlaced with, and existed alongside, managerial imperatives to behave in certain ways. Rehana, who worked at Angel, derided the bazaar's hawking system, along with several other workers. One day, after

completing her shift hawking at the staircase, she came and sat next to me. Nodding towards the staircase, she said,

All this must seem so strange to you. When I first started here, I told Saima that I won't do this. You have to plead with customers as if you were a beggar! But then, some people just have a way. I was so good with customers that now everyone keeps asking me to do this. But I really hate doing this, I get so flustered.

Although Rehana had embodied pariah femininity at the staircase just a few minutes ago, as required by her employer, she now enacted a respectable femininity; she made sure I knew that this behavior did not indicate her identity and was only a job requirement. At the same time, she took pride in how she performed this task well and mentioned it to establish her value as a worker. She too, like managers, tried to straddle the line between enacting both types of femininity, a pariah femininity to secure her wages and worth as a worker, and a respectable femininity to secure her status as a woman.

In addition to enabling economic capital, pariah femininity could also be a route to status in the context of Meena Bazaar, even if it detracted from women's dignity overall. Nazia, a shopkeeper, lamented one day about the central management's inattention to her requests: "No one listens to respectable women here, you must know how to fight to be heard." To be taken seriously in the bazaar, women had to be tough. On an otherwise quiet Sunday, Beenish and Fauzia, two henna girls, got into a fight with a self-employed shopkeeper. Afterwards, Beenish walked away, loudly declaring:

How dare she call me a worker? The nerve! She's telling me to go call my manager, saying she's not going to argue with a worker. I've been here for years and I've never made a distinction between worker and manager, but look at her, it's hardly been two days since she's set up shop here and she's speaking to me like this.

The shopkeeper's dismissal of Beenish as a "mere worker" necessitated that Beenish embody a pariah femininity to publicly secure her worth as someone who could not be spoken down to. Enacting aggressive femininity became a way to maintain status in front of customers and workers and similar fights occurred frequently between co-workers, competitors, and customers.

Occasionally, women mocked men and highlighted all that women were capable of, thereby enacting a pariah femininity by undermining the hierarchical and binary relationship between masculinity and femininity. For example, Rani, who had worked in the bazaar for 25 years, said:

Women can do everything. It's just these delicate men who think that women can't do things. There is no one more powerful than a woman. She earns money, cleans the house, washes clothes, takes care of children, and despite all this, doesn't let a single wrinkle appear on her forehead. Men, the most they do is earn, and even then, they whine and complain.

In general, women were stigmatized for deviating from gendered expectations by working outside the home in low-status jobs. However, women like Rani rejected that stigma by taunting

men, taking pride in their own achievements, and rejecting the ideal of submissive femininity in need of male protection. In doing so, they claimed a type of status embedded in being strong and fearless, rather than respectable.

Despite the economic capital and status women gained through mobilizing pariah femininities, they remained stigmatized in broader society as *buri* women. Hence, women attempted to enact respectable femininity whenever possible. Women frequently drew symbolic boundaries between themselves and their co-workers, customers, and other women to mark themselves as respectable. However, given the fluctuating femininities in the bazaar, there was no fixed or singular “other” against which women could draw a symbolic boundary. Thus, these boundaries often relied on a variety of crisscrossing and shifting logics and heightened the patchwork nature of this performance of multiple femininities. For example, Ruby and Tooba were two of the most insolent workers at Angel and Saima often complained about them. However, when a seasonal worker joined the salon for the week before Eid, Ruby and Tooba set out to mark her as more of a *buri* woman than they were. They constantly mocked her, referred to her as *Dus-Bara* (Ten-Twelve) because she once claimed that 10 or 12 men were wooing her, and warned me to stay away from her, telling me she was not an *achi larki* (good girl). Indeed, Ten-Twelve usually performed a hypersexualized as opposed to a respectable femininity and was an inefficient worker.

However, Ruby and Tooba also performed pariah femininity. They were unproductive workers, quick-tempered, foul-mouthed, and were involved with men. In fact, shortly after Eid, Saima fired Ruby because she was worried Ruby’s behavior would taint the salon’s reputation. Indeed, Ruby did elope soon after she was fired, and her parents came to the salon to inquire if any co-workers knew her whereabouts. Yet, despite Ruby’s own performance of pariah femininity, she still successfully drew a symbolic boundary between herself and Ten-Twelve. Other workers in Angel also considered Ten-Twelve a *buri* girl, whereas Tooba and Ruby appeared as better workers and women in contrast. As this anecdote shows, aspirations towards respectability, no matter how half-hearted or fleeting, remained a structuring force for working-class women, even as they otherwise enacted pariah femininities.

Women signaled their knowledge of, and investment in, respectable femininity by policing the behavior of co-workers, embodying religious identities, and pontificating about “right” and “wrong”. When I asked Zainab, who worked at Angel, if she had friends in the bazaar, she replied, “Not really, most women here are bad women, some are good, but that’s why I don’t really venture out of this parlor. The owner here is very good. She encourages us to say our prayers.” For Zainab, and many others, subscribing to the idea of “good” and “bad” women was crucial in drawing a symbolic boundary between herself and others.

However, other women were quick to mock such investments in virtue. For example, in the bus to a picnic on the beach, all the workers at Angel were listening to music and discussing how they danced during the last picnic. Someone loudly exclaimed, “I’m not going to dance, dancing is a sin.” Within seconds, someone else shot back, “Yes, of course, because listening to music is a virtue, right?”, mocking the woman’s posturing as a “good woman” and exposing her arbitrary stance of listening to music but refusing to dance. Such exchanges indicated the tenuous ground on which these femininities had to be enacted.

If some women deployed virtue to mark themselves as better than other women, others bristled at being labeled “bad” and contested these efforts to draw symbolic boundaries. Still others embraced pariah femininity not just to access economic capital but also to have fun and express themselves, ensure they were not taken advantage of, and claim worth as strong, independent women. In these instances, embracing stigmatized femininity allowed women to gain symbolic and social capital of another kind, which was predicated not on being “good” but rather, on being fun, strong, and bold. Rarely however, did women brazenly self-identify as *buri aurtain* and frequently enacted both respectable and pariah femininities, both inside and outside the bazaar.

In attempts to secure respectable femininity, women often insisted that “a woman’s honor is in her own hands.” Emphasizing individual responsibility for securing honor was the flip side of drawing symbolic boundaries against others; both were ways of establishing respectability. Although women insisted that respectable status depended solely on how they behaved, they simultaneously spoke of how husbands, students, or employers “gave them respect,” indicating that respect is something given by others, not merely determined by oneself. This tension undergirded the performance of multiple femininities. Subscribing to this idea of individual responsibility allowed women to add value to themselves while working in a low-status occupation. However, prevailing gender norms meant that people continued to stigmatize workers in Meena Bazaar who were hence, unable to control whether others considered them good or bad women. Although women actively enacted a patchwork performance to secure different ends, society also allotted them such a patchwork identity by ultimately refusing to consider them fully respectable women, no matter how they conducted themselves.

CLASS AND THE PATCHWORK PERFORMANCE OF FEMININITIES

As the previous section shows, women exercised individual agency in crafting a patchwork performance of femininities. Yet, how the patchwork emerged, and the ability to deploy certain femininities, was shaped by several structural factors. First, the status ambiguity of feminized service work in Karachi resulted in more opportunities for status struggles as compared to other working-class jobs such as factory and domestic work. Second, the hybrid public-private nature of the bazaar generated specific routes for women to establish moral worth. Here, I focus on a third factor: women’s class position, which shaped women’s desire for, ability to, and way they deployed multiple femininities. Rather than creating a new type of hybrid femininity, they alternated between contradictory femininities.

Many women in Meena Bazaar were working-class and did not have access to the types of capital required to successfully perform respectable femininity. For example, Hina’s father had abandoned her as a child and she since lived a life of poverty and insecurity, shuttling between the homes of relatives until she got a job and moved out with her mother. She was quick-tempered and often shouted at customers or henna girls as she tried to maintain order. Years of overwork showed in the lack of attention she gave to her physical appearance, despite being a beauty worker, and she lacked embodied cultural capital. Despite the pariah femininity Hina enacted because of her life experiences and work requirements, she simultaneously did her best to approximate a respectable femininity, as and when she could. She was heartbroken and separated from her husband who had been unfaithful and robbed her. However, she refused to get a divorce as she thought that would further lower her and her son’s status in society. One

month she spent most of her salary on gifts for her family and neighbors for a small religious festival, partially to approximate expectations of middle-class respectable femininity, even though she was financially precarious. Both her motivations to perform respectable femininity, and the routes available to her, were shaped by her working-class status.

Unlike Hina, some women could draw on their life trajectories to deploy respectable femininity to interrupt their performance of pariah femininity in the bazaar. Shagufta, for example, was an elderly shopkeeper with a graduate degree. She had experienced downward economic mobility after her marriage, when she had to quit her job as a teacher to take care of her mentally unwell husband, and a further decrease in social status once she separated from her husband and started living alone. She lived in a one room home and took two buses and a rickshaw to work every day. However, she concealed her living situation and precarious class position from her co-workers by using her cultural capital to appear religious and dismiss the rest of the workers in the bazaar as illiterate and uncouth.

At the same time, Shagufta was enmeshed in the same desires for, and routes to, economic capital as the other workers. I often sat with her and noticed how she immediately switched from her calm and refined manner of speaking to me, to shouting and hawking at customers whenever she sighted one. To make a sale, she abandoned classed markers of respectable femininity such as sticking to decorum, and not exhibiting a desperate desire for money. A patchwork performance of femininity allowed her to navigate the tension between organizational demands and her personal aspirations towards respectability. Her previously middle-class status provided the cultural capital required to enact respectability. Yet, her downward mobility necessitated she temporarily suspend her performance of respectable femininity to secure economic capital.

For the most part, women navigated their path towards economic and social value, which was structured by these two poles of femininity, without necessarily reconfiguring or contesting either. Generally, women in the bazaar proudly clung to their association with “traditional femininity”. For example, they compared themselves to the salesgirls who worked in mixed-gender department stores and dressed in “western clothing,” insisting they would never dress so immodestly.

CONCLUSION

Women in Meena Bazaar switched between hegemonic femininity and pariah femininity to maximize dignity and economic capital. Both managerial regimes and women’s personal status struggles shaped this oscillation between femininities. Significantly, these patchwork attempts were distinct from the “hybrid” femininities and masculinities of socially advantaged persons (Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Wozny Forthcoming) or “alternative femininities” (Schippers 2007) of feminists. Women in Meena Bazaar did not reject, re-signify, or “fuse” idealized and stigmatized gender performances to produce new types of culturally legitimate femininities. Rather, women accepted the tropes of “bad” and “good” women and used these labels to disparage other workers and make sense of the world. Rejecting these tropes would have closed off rare routes to capital available to these women. The concept of a patchwork performance of femininity explains how, and why, working-class women who otherwise defy prevailing gender

norms, continue to aspire towards respectable femininity, even when this femininity is ultimately used to stigmatize them.

This article makes three key contributions to our understanding of gender performances. First, I show that it is not just hegemonic femininity that can be a resource, but that organizations and individuals rely on both idealized and stigmatized gender performances to accrue symbolic and economic capital. On the surface, pariah femininity enabled access to economic capital and respectable femininity to symbolic capital. However, femininities have a more complex relation with capital. Pariah femininity can also be used to gain symbolic and social capital not rooted in ideas of “respectability” and hegemonic femininity, which typically ensures symbolic capital, can both enable and block access to economic capital. The shifting and contradictory rewards of capital associated with each type of femininity reinforces the ad-hoc characteristic of patchwork performances of femininity.

Second, I show how gender performances do not just vary across spaces or groups but also vary within workplaces and individual subjects. I expand on Salzinger’s (2003) analysis to show that managerial regimes may encourage contradictory, rather than singular, types of femininities. Further, gendered subjectivities are not just created on the shop floor by managers but are also created in relation to women’s personal struggles for status, which may converge or diverge from managerial regimes.

Third, I outline a distinct way working-class women enact gendered struggles for class distinction. Scholars are increasingly examining relation among femininities although this research has so far focused on elite or middle-class women (Hamilton et al. 2019; Ispa-Landa and Oliver 2020). Here, I examine the relationship among femininities in a working-class context. Women in the bazaar did not embody different gender performances to undermine or reinforce gender hegemony or cater to male bosses or customers. Rather, women’s own attempts to gain various types of capital, and ultimately, the class status enabled by this capital, resulted in patchwork performances of femininity. Ultimately, gender performances are inextricable from struggles for class distinction (Bettie 2003; Hanser 2008; Skeggs 1997).

I argue that multiple femininities must be analysed in relation to social stratification. Hamilton et al. (2019) claim that women who perform hegemonic femininities to accrue individual benefits are “actively complicit beneficiaries of the matrix of domination” (322). However, women who perform hegemonic femininities when occupying a lower position in this matrix cannot be considered complicit in reproducing it. Hegemonic femininity may reproduce class, race, and gender hegemony, but social stratification forces working-class women to enact hegemonic femininity in the first place; it is often their only route to status. Further, on the collective level, it is elite men (Otis 2016) and women (Hamilton et al 2019), not working-class women, who profit from working-class women’s hegemonic femininity. Until broader structures of class stratification that produce stigma and economic precarity are undone, working-class women will continue to fluctuate between gender performances in attempts to gain dignity and economic security. Since these structures are not maintained by gender performances alone, analyses of individual performances in upholding or undoing the status quo must be complemented by strategies for structural change.

The unique spatial attributes of Meena Bazaar intensified women's patchwork performances by allowing women to draw on their association with the bazaar in multiple ways. However, women engaged in these patchwork performances outside the bazaar as well. My related research shows that managers in department stores in Pakistan require "salesgirls" to perform both pariah and hegemonic femininities in order to meet divergent organizational goals. Retail and hospitality sectors in South Asia that rely on the commodification of sexuality, are particularly dependent on pariah femininities but organizations in these sectors also require hegemonic femininities to secure status. Thus, the framework developed here can help explain variation in gender dynamics within other workplaces, especially those that are not the domain of "professional" middle-class women. The scope and manner of doing patchwork performances of femininity may vary across spaces, but women's position as working-class subjects invariably motivates them to grasp for both types of femininities.

Women in South Asia and the Middle East are reconfiguring gender norms as they leave their homes for work and leisure. We know that hybrid masculinities and femininities often reproduce gender hegemony (Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Wozny forthcoming). How do patchwork performances of femininity interact with gender hegemony? Hegemonic masculinity in Pakistan benefits from maintaining "decent" and "indecent" women (Walle 2004) or *achi* and *buri* women (Saeed 2002) as distinct groups. Patchwork performances of femininity, however, muddle this neat distinction. Future research can explore if such muddling challenges or reproduces gender hegemony.

NOTES

1. See Paechter (2018) and Messerschmidt (2020) for an overview of this debate.
2. An example Schipper (2007) cites is that authoritative men are considered "bossy" (a masculine trait) whereas authoritative women are considered "bitchy" (a feminine trait).

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