EXPLORING GENDER AND POWER IN PUBLIC RELATIONS IN PAKISTAN: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

By

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Dedicated to

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ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: <u>Exploring Gender And Power In Public Relations In Pakistan: A Feminist Perspective</u>

This exploratory study aimed to investigate the firsthand experiences of women working in the public relations profession on their perspectives on gender dynamics and power relations, and the nexus of gender and power in the public sector of Pakistan. Interviews with 10 women practitioners led to data saturation.

Data were collected and analyzed thematically. The study identified several key themes in the females' experiences including the glass ceiling—the invisible barriers in the line of duty, challenges concerning stereotypes, professional approach and dedication, press picture- the contextual media portrayal of PR events and trust, harassment instances, underrepresentation in the profession, and a sense of future outlook.

Findings revealed a significant role of gender in shaping both the challenges and achievements encountered by females in public relations functions. They highlighted hurdles like promotion barriers and lack of opportunities for leadership positions.

Moreover, the study discovered the perception of gender-related double standards between men and women practitioners and acknowledged workplace harassment. Despite these concerns, the respondents are hopeful of an evolving approach to fixing gender disparities in the profession, anticipating positive outcomes for female practitioners in the future.

Keywords: public relations, gender and power, feminist perspective, gender and power, and power control theories.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

Gender and power are important variables in describing public relations background. Role of gender in PR profession affects the power structure in organizations that influence the communication policy decision-making procedures. Gender impacts the role-meaning process differently for male and female practitioners in practice. Thus, the Feminist perspective provides an important insight into the meaning of female practitioners' roles (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001; Krider & Ross, 1997).

Though female practitioners are increasing in public relations as compared to the past but still female practitioners complain of a lack of power and control as compared to their male counterparts. Even at the start of the third decade of this new millennium, public relations literature reports a glass ceiling effect for female practitioners (Wrigley, 2002). The important aspects of this glass ceiling effect include lower salary structure, weak power exercise, less influence in professional tasks, and less support from employees and employers for female practitioners (Aldoory & Toth, 2002; O'Neil, 2003).

Inherent in the British legacy, the public relations industry in Pakistan has been progressing toward a more mature level from the start of this new millennium. To keep the public informed about the official policies, welfare schemes, and development plans of the government, the British government established provincial public relations departments in India. However, at the central level, the colonial government established Inter-Services Public Relations Department (ISPR) during World War II to motivate the public to join the armed forces following the establishment of the Press Information Department and the Department of Advertising, Films and Publications at the center (Mukhtar M., 2019).

After the independence, the government of Pakistan had to reorganize and reinforce the public relations departments as most of the public relations organizations and their PR staff in both the private and public sectors were dominated by non-Muslims who preferred to migrate to India. The government of Pakistan strengthened the public relations departments at the provincial level

and established the Press Information Department, Radio Pakistan, and the Department of Advertising, Films, and Publications at the federal level which was expanded gradually to other parts of Pakistan (Mukhtar M., 2019).

The status and structure of the public relations profession in Pakistan vis-à-vis gender is imbalanced as male PR practitioners are dominating the industry in both private and public sectors. The number of women practitioners in Public Relations is very thin although they can perform better due to their characteristics of being soft-spoken, hard-working, and committed to achieving the goals assigned to them. Therefore, applying feminist lenses to analyze the gender and power conceptions in PR profession in Pakistan would contribute essential literature to the scholarship. Thus, we are going to apply the lenses of gender and power to explore the conditions of the public relations industry in Pakistan in terms of key issues confronted by female practitioners concerning workplace roles and organizational culture.

1.2 Statement of Purpose

This research study is based on the literature and critical lenses from a feminist perspective in public relations gender and power control theories.

"The research will explore meanings of gender and power as given by female practitioners working in public sector of public relations industry in Pakistan. The study will also examine connections between power and gender and their implications on professional practice of public relations in Pakistan".

1.3 Objectives

Following are the objectives for this study;

➢ To explore Gender roles and Power dynamics in PR in Pakistan

➢ To explore challenges, female practitioners are facing in Pakistan.

Exploring gender means *"how do female practitioners define gender, their gender-related work issues, and their preferences of working with both genders. Exploring power means how female practitioners define power, work culture vis-à-vis public relations work culture for female practitioners at organizations reflecting their influence, relationships, knowledge and information, access, results-based credibility, and empowerment.*

1.4 Research Questions

This research study is based on the literature and critical lenses from a feminist perspective in public relations, gender and gender theory of public relations, and power and power control theory in public relations. Based on the earlier literature, the following research questions are answered in this study:

RQ1: How do female public relations practitioners in Pakistani Public relations industry make meaning of gender in Pakistan?

RQ2: How do female public relations practitioners make meaning of power in Pakistan?

RQ3: What are the intersections of gender and power in public relations industry in Pakistan?

RQ4: What challenges the women public relations practitioners face in Pakistan?

RQ5: How do female public relations practitioners describe conditions of the profession in Pakistan?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This exploratory research will contribute to public relations scholarship in terms of the connection between gender and power in PR industry in Pakistan. This study will also significantly contribute to feminist scholarship in public relations by describing female practitioners' experiences related to gender and power relationships in practice (Aldoory 2005, Grunig, Toth and Hon 2001, Hon 1995). The study will not only provide an educational platform to students and practitioners but also help in providing an in-depth understanding of the females' influence on the public relations profession particularly in Pakistan and in South Asia in general and thus would help to propose different theoretical foundations applying which may help in achieving gender equality in public relations.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Literature Review

When we explore the nexus between gender and power in terms of empowerment of women, we cannot ignore the view of French philosopher, Michel Foucault who offers that power has diffused through institutions and pervades all social relations rather than possessed by certain men, women, or groups. He discussed that prevalent forms of control like discourse, norms, and information are used to exercise power including the technique of direct domination and force which caused to development of intersectional feminist theory. This theory laid stress on methods in which gender

intersects with other shapes of persecution, such as racism, ethnicity, and sexism. Foucault describes the value of the way, knowledge is produced and expresses his view that it is shaped by social and historical context, and not objective or neutral Feminist theorists seek guidance from Foucault's work to comprehend the complexity of power implications in gendered contexts and how knowledge is generated and applied in the service of maintaining social hierarchies (Discipline and Punish, Vol. 1)

This study explores how female public relations practitioners in Pakistan's public relations industry play their role in comprehending gendered power relations. Whereas literature review, I offer two separate literature bodies and concerned theory to examine topic of gender and power in addition to a connection between them followed by five relevant inquiry questions that shape the research. I analyzed literature containing P.R and GT. Feminist and gender study have provided promising opportunities and taken decisive steps to theorize under what circumstances female public relations practitioners experience gender-related discrimination in the workplace in public relations industry. Female public relations practitioners may face gender-related phenomena like lower status, adverse behavior, less influence, and failure. Secondly, I presented data regarding power and public relations. As compared to shared relational systems, power literature has historically believed that an individual or organization is more powerful in terms of influence, decision-making, and communication but such powers may not be able to counter or match female public relations practitioners' issues adequately or experience of actual power. Therefore, I presented literature about emancipation and feminist assessment of control emphasizing the idea that influence is only gendered framework.

Following, two distinct bodies of literature and study questions together could offer a structure that analyzes feminists' gender and power meaning-making and describes the intersection between gender and control in P.R. domain. Before moving toward topic applications in the context of public relations, I thought it was important to describe the subject matter of each section in detail due to the open-ended approach of the research.

I tried to make effective use of studies from public relations, institutional leadership, social structures, and philosophical patterns throughout the literature review providing an understanding of PR profession, gender, and power.

2.2 Public Relations and Gender

In an evolution process of Public Relations in Pakistan from male-influenced Public Relations practitioners to women professionals, PR profession has adapted to a gender-dependent phenomenon wherein women professionals encountered structured gender bias, a glass ceiling factor, less influence, and lower status. Organizational roles can be examined through public relations wherein how individuals can communicate and perform (Neill, 2016). There is a need for research to understand gender meaning and how PR practitioners' lives and existence of organizations are gendered to know the real meaning of the feminization of profession and its constructive consequences on the transformation of the profession to feminization (Rakow, 1989). PR explanations mostly proved unable to define profession's inherent femininity rather it conventionally describes the profession as communication organization between workers of an institution and generality. Center, Cutlip, and Broom (2000) described it equally "leadership position responsible for identifying, establishing, and maintaining reciprocal connections between an institution and the diverse communities that impact its achievements or defeat" (p. 6). Providing a similar definition of practice, Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, and Toth (2007) state: "PR is a command and supervision role that assists in achieving institutional goals, shaping values, and facilitating or re-structural overhaul. Individuals in P.R roles interact with pertinent inner and outer stakeholders to foster constructive connections and ensure alignment among management objectives and public ambitions. PR professionals create, implement, and assess structural initiatives encouraging reciprocal impact and mutual comprehension between an institution, and its constituents." (p. 4). Public relations undertake series of steps by engaging individuals and organizations in a dialogue to support mutual understanding and social cohesion (Heath, 2006, p. 67). PR experts hold debates to shape information for the facilitation of communication and to

influence organizational decision-making. Communication and information are interpreted through a debatable framing process before forwarding recommendations and drawing conclusions (Heath, 2009, p. 3).   Public relations is a complicated one-on-one interplay among PR professionals, workers, higher-ups, clients, and stakeholders to develop professional and interpersonal relationships and reciprocal respect (Rhee, 2007). Through the literature review, I made use of both organizational viewpoints and communicative perspectives wherein PR practitioners engage to find out the basic elements of public relations like influencing the communication process, relationship building, and interactive dialogue between an organization and its publics. Public relations can be aligned with the interactional and systematic description of gender and power. Organizational and gendered individual roles of communication, interaction, and performance can be examined through the field of public relations. I examined the theoretical overview of public relations and gender theory. I had a specific focus to look into complicated history of the feminist perspectives and gender theory of PR industry, produce evidence between gender theory and profession, and deal with directions of gender scholars to research intersections between gender and public relations in future. Finally, data regarding gender and public relations presents a structure that helps understand the gendered role that impacts practitioners' sense-making of professional practice.

2.3   Historical Perspective on Gender Studies in PR

Study has historically traced gender-based limitations of PR industry and female discrimination within profession (Aldoory, 2005; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; L.A. Grunig, 2006; Grunig, Toth, & Hon 2001; Hon, 1995). Viewpoint about liberal feminist perspective has evolved to examine power and gender roles critically. According to Tetreault (1985), L.A. Grunig (2006), six phases through which public relations' gender study has developed to the current level. Male scholarship was the first phase through which female's experiences in public relations were ignored or simply patronized and the women public relations practitioners were not allowed to work independently. As clear by the title, the second phase was compensatory scholarship wherein the profiles of successful females were featured and typically defined by the male standards. Bifocal research was the third phase that believed that males and females are different inherently leading to dichotomizing research on the experiences of males and females in public relations. The fourth phase was named the feminist phase in which research attempted to apprehend female's

experiences using their stories. The multifocal phase is the fifth phase which is placed on a continuum of finding out similar and different traits of both males' and females' existence. Last phase which L.A. Grunig contributed recently is named "integrative," which provides an opportunity for women to enhance their communal connections. All six phases, which exist and get attention even today, provide a tool for understanding gender research.

Aldoory (2005) also discovered how public relations and gender studies devolved and maintained three kinds of research that have assisted in constructing a hypothesis to study gender. She was of the view that the first research named descriptive studies assessed the status of females in the PR profession. The secondary studies are explanatory approaches that contribute theoretical base of P.R theory and gender. The 3rd one is additional vital study that has persuaded logical perspectives in genderism, studies, and theoretical perspective (p. 670).

2.4   Core Principals of Gender Theory in PR Practice

Some notions in public relations contain gender theory. L.A. Grunig, Toth, Hon (2001) quoted problems that females face in the PR profession. These issues include sexual harassment in a work environment, supposition of employers that females are best available service or product concerning price, gender ideology, and assumptions regarding a female's suitability for PR profession (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001, pp. 33). To study the topic, I have examined basic principles of gender theory and PR relating to proposed RQs, including gender, socialization, power, sexual harassment, roles, and the glass ceiling effect.

2.4.1 Gender

According to public relations gender theory gender exhibits the identity of everyone that impacts individuals' work, social, and power dynamics. Aldoory (2005) suggests that gender scholarship emphasizes the role of gender and power in organizing, defining, and constructing social meanings in social realities to comprehend complex patterns. Gender reshapes our world's physical and conceptual features (p. 670). Watson (2014) provided an inclusive meaning of gender in public relations background. She is of the viewpoint, "Gender is what we believe or act and not fixed or we look rather it is constructed socially. Our interactions with others fix our gendered characteristics instead of sense of being male or female that is ingrained in a gendered core through our shared memories of relationships and described by norms culturally". Heise (2019) defines

professional and personal conversations as influencing norms and beliefs of gender. He described that organizations, events, and actions may acquire characteristics of gender because specific matters are preferred while others are relegated in discourse, it maintains organizational standards and creates suitable kinds of personality (pp. 2-3). Gradually, gender meanings changed from perspective of P.R studies. Aldoory (2005) described that historically studies normally theorized about gender as only "female". The act of giving meaning indicates that gender constructions, untrue expectations, and stereotypes influence women especially. Research has mostly overlooked the interdependent aspects that make meaning of gender and describe responsibilities in organizational setup.

2.4.2 Socialization

Public relations' gender theory proposes that people learn and assume gender roles through a socialization process that can support describing masculine and feminine characters displayed by both males and females in PR practice. (Amis et al. 2020;Madden and Levenshus 2021;Van Laer et al. 2021) suggested the notion of "sex roles" is significant to comprehending gender dynamics in the field. For example, this idea can be illustrated as description, wherein members of focus groups related role socialization to gender discrimination within a working setting. One female participant stated, "Males have been culturally socialized to emphasize values like confrontation, conflict, dominance, power, and masculine strength as important". She explained that traits traditionally linked with, such as taking care of children, are degraded by people in comparison to the values that have been culturally imparted to males. One female participant stated, " Males have been culturally socialized to emphasize values like confrontation, conflict, dominance, power, and masculine strength as essential". She proposed that traits traditionally linked to females like taking care of children, are degraded by society in comparison to the values that have been instilled into them (p. 46). Similarly, study by Aldoory and Toth (2002) on gender differences in public relations exposed that participants assumed females are less confrontational as compared to men. Participants informed that men are socialized from early age to improve feelings of right concerning progression within the hierarchy of an organization to display manager-like actions and females sensed that men who were married expected their wives to follow the same rules and held fewer duty assignments for them at home. Aldoory, Jiang, Toth, and Sha (2008) discovered that male and female PR professionals were affected by cultural norms and these practitioners

conveyed that societal norms and expectations enforced pressures on obtaining balance between personal issues and work balance (p. 9). In subsequent research, Aldoory and Toth (2004) revealed that particpants perceived females can perform best in leading positions of public relations due to distinct characteristics of femininity including shared efforts leading to the improvement of the inspirational guidance approach. They concluded that working settings within organizations can pose challenges for females to assume specific leadership approaches. Organizational standards and expectations may arrange leadership behaviors culturally related to masculinity over those associated with femininity.

2.4.3 Discrimination

Public relations' gender theory suggests that differences between genders can lead to discrimination and inadequate treatment in the field. Mostly, masculine norms and organizational policies formulated by males discriminate the females in work settings (Amis et al. 2020; Madden and Levenshus 2021; Van Laer et al. 2021). Blau and Kahn, 2017, Charles, 2011 acknowledged that the primary contributing factor to this discrimination is occupational segregation on a sex basis. They contended that females enter into varying occupations like public relations at different rates compared to males. This is mostly affected by employers permitting women into professions that may not appeal to men based on suppositions about females possessing characters that are believed beneficial for specific roles (p. 107). Discrimination persistence is fueled by misconceptions, stereotypes, and challenges to access they create. Frölich and Peters (2007) discovered the perceptions of women professionals in Germany, founding predominant stereotypes like inquiring about their managerial competency and categorizing them as excessively talkative. These stereotypes were frequently encapsulated by phrases such as PR Bunny, Clone, Slut, and, Agency Snipe (p. 241).

Frölich and Peters (2007) described these preconceptions may add to women professionals' fall, seclusion, or "ghettoization" of women professionals. Likewise, belief also involves implications of gender. The misconception that females entered into field because they are unable to write better. Prejudice might also arise from how someone appears and personality (Eaton, Saunders, Jacobson, & West, 2020). For example, Weidman (2001) discovered females working in the field of mass communication were confronted with bias due to several factors like race, age

group, voice, gender, physical appearance, physical abilities, body size, way of working, or numerous mixtures of those elements (p. 87). Weidman noted race, aging group, and volume of size arose as substantial factors in the statements about discrimination shared by females.

As we grow older, females I know have reflected on their past experiences and acknowledged that bias and prejudice we met in our teenage days was linked to our immature age and insufficient experience of life that time" (p. 89). Weidman asserted, "Individuals like myself are frequently treated like children being a petite woman, and our potential for performing responsibilities is suspected. Our stature may be utilized as a reason for discriminatory conduct when the actual motive may be sexism…" (p. 90). Females of color are insufficiently represented when it comes to issue of racial discrimination(Aldoory, 2001; Weidman, 2001). Aldoory (2001) maintained, "Non-white individuals encounter discrimination for being absent from public relations, an expression of White male-dominated system's endeavors to control and maintain its power" (p. 107). Weidman (2001) observed that people changed their dressing style and ignored specific situations with laughter to manage discrimination" (p. 97).

2.4.4 Sexual harassment

By investigating both overt and covert manifestations of sexual harassment, public relations gender studies try to reveal power imbalances that impact experiences of those who are in practice.

Leslie and Catungal (2012) discovered that molestation in PR organizations involved males ignoring the presence of a single woman in any meeting, interrogating females for their intentions to marry and bear children, cracking mockery about females at work, and assuming that females getting promotion have been engaged in inappropriate relationships with those in higher position. Women participants reported workplace bias and sexual harassment that badly affected their ability to perform their responsibilities. (De Beauvoir 2011, 229f.; 249) termed "lookism," experience as a type of sexual advancement that prefers female's appearance over their professional performance irrespective of whether the emphasis is positive or negative. It is notable, Doorley and Sierminska (2015) uncovered females involved in lookism. For instance, one respondent indicated that she may not regard an attractive woman with the same level of seriousness as a woman with an average physical beauty. Female professionals need to be involved in lookism to attract attention and influence. For instance, Doorley and Sierminska, 2015)

discovered that females in the profession revealed how lookism might be beneficial to captivate males and become attractive for them to utilize their maximum resources.

2.4.5 Glass Ceiling Factor

Over time the constant gender discrimination contributes to finding a glass ceiling phenomenon for females in role of PR. Ramos et al (2022) outlined invisible barriers like unseen hurdles within the organization that stop females from excelling and attaining equality in the professional domain. In her research about glass ceiling perceptions of female practitioners, she noted that women who worked in the profession rejected any idea concerning career barriers but explained also experiences that indicate the presence of the glass ceiling factor. Findings revealed that the concept of 'Good Ole Boy' is even today present in organizational cultures, with the glass ceiling phenomenon being related to the aspect of socialization and historical designs. Moreover, organizations were discovered to strengthen the perception of females as assistants and males as supervisors. To cope with glass ceiling factor, the research proposes changes in the socialization patterns to challenge engrained gender prejudices and stereotypes that constrain women's progress in the profession.

2.4.6 Power

Studies argue that gender generates force variances in societal and organizational culture. Power in P.R is mostly defined by an individual's perceptions about one's different range of resources including connections, characteristics, and skills in organizational design (L.A. Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2001). Aldoory (2005) explored that institutions frequently make wrong assumptions that power is ownership that can be transferred or possessed by individuals (p. 673). She described that women's empowerment by the authority concerned strengthens the reliance of females on paternalistic protectionism. Instead, the study needs to investigate the numerous forms of submission and examine how these connections are being organized (p. 673). Public relations professionals may possess power due to their personality, and communication skills and specific knowledge important to the organization, The public relations department has the power for its role to build an image among the publics and within the organization for possessing institutional power (Nwanmuoh & Udu, 2023). Individuals' informal social groups and formal organizational structures come together to establish power dynamics that can influence the function of the PR

organization. L.A. Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2001) found females, for power, engaged in employing strategies such as self-promotion, professional networking, underlining their accomplishments within working cultures and confirming that the right people conveyed existing concerns and attainments (p. 274). Study reveals women public relations professionals often have less power than men colleagues (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001;O'Neil, 2003). Women may face a shortfall in the power structures of an organization being limited to the level of technician position, receiving a lower degree of employee backing, holding token roles within male-dominated groups, missing opportunities of mentorship, confronting exclusion from networks, and not receiving sufficient regard (O'Neil, 2003, p. 154). Wrigley (2005) uncovered that females exercise might to influence fellow women. By investigating the 'Queen Bee' pattern, she argued that males maintain persistent dominance and influence in corporate leadership despite the growing feminization in the field. Some women in leading positions have assumed authoritarian communication traits rather than addressing the challenges of prevailing power structures. According to Wrigley the term Queen Bee is used to explain the females who exhibit discriminatory behaviors towards other female colleagues in the workplace to control power instead of helping other females to advance by using their authority and addressing the core gender biases and disparities. Wrigley proposed that organizations introduce mentorship initiatives, offer chances for entrepreneurship, hold a variety of awareness training events, and ensure the provision of equal pay packages and career achievements. These steps empower women with progress by removing 'Queen Bee' disorder (pp. 22-27).

2.4.7 Job Satisfaction

Females' job satisfaction is influenced by the dynamics of the PR profession. In their investigation concerning females, Serini, Toth, Wright, and Emig (1997) explored that females look to uncover a sense of innovation and responsiveness in developing setting of public relations (p. 111). Woman PR professionals linked work contentment with fresh prospects, growing working cultures, the evolving position and recognition of women, enhancing advantages, and encounters at working structures (p. 112). In addition, it was discovered that "females underlined the importance of being recognized for their endeavors and having their inputs appreciated as vital features of gratification" (p. 114). Females emphasized the significance of feeling such as "respected individuals of the organization" (p. 114). Female professionals can also face shortfall

in work fulfillment. Aldoory and Toth (2004b), as cited in Toth and Cline (2007), explored that woman participants in their study conveyed a feeling of non-control when family-linked responsibilities influenced their assignments. Furthermore, respondents of both genders considered carrier-life duties concern of females. Krider and Ross (1997) noticed that females faced examples of sexism, gained fewer awards and acknowledgments relative to male fellows, held various tasks like that of mother and practitioner, experienced feelings of being stressed due to work pressure, extended work timings, and struggles. Occasionally, woman participants voiced dissatisfaction with the expectation to act as a "superwoman" in a public relations role. One respondent mentioned, "The superwoman syndrome is harmful! It's encouraging to know young females convey their hesitance to accept that syndrome" (p. 444). In managing the contradictory identities, females described crafting fresh lexicon to explain their emotions and practices and desired to find an uncomplicated type of life.

2.5 Power and Public Relations

Power study discussed different approaches and explained how public relations practitioners face issues in exercising power in public relations organizational structure (i.e. L.A. Grunig, 1990, 1992); how roles of individuals can affect power of professionals (i.e. Berger, 2005; Kanter, 1977; O'Neil, 2003; Serini, 1993). Following is the hypothetical study analyzing public relations and power, and provides a framework to examine power of gender in public relations. This section emphasizes especially countering practitioner power, power-control theory, gender and power, and making females in PR roles empowered.

2.6 Power-Control Theory

This theory explains to what level PR professionals possess power in organizational structure. The theory offers that the environment does not affect the superiors working in an organizational setup to make decisions as they mostly decide by choice (McDonald and Bubna-Litic, 2012; Mumby, Thomas, Martí and Seidl, 2017). Some circumstantial factors put constraints on the individuals with the power to decide about strategic choices (Dozier & Grunig, 1992, p. 413). According to Dozier and Grunig (1992), outlook of leadership oversight emphasizes that powerful alliances play a basic role in fixing institutional structure in certain ways that fulfill general organizational requirements and conflicting interests of the dominant employees of the organization (p. 407). Moreover, power control theory states the existence of organizational structures has remained and traditional practices are exercised within them. Dozier and Grunig

(1992) explain that the overall organizational outlook does not always recommend the structural preferences of dominant coalition partners. Structural decisions, however, fulfill all the general needs of the organization and allow the dominant coalition in the organization to maintain power in a firm organizational framework (p. 407). Finally, Gandini (2019) and Gerdin (2020) suggested the theory of power control believes that the individuals working in a PR organization may exercise and retain power by controlling resources and functioning in a systematic setup. Berger (2005) explained PR practitioners adopt three types of power in his research on power-control theory which include first one the power over relations, the second one is power with relations, and the last one is the power to relations serving as different forms of power to build relationships, strict types of power, and opposing to hegemony. Berger discovered that the existence of these kinds of power remains constant. Public relations professionals are required to perform more actively to exploit their control and power in the organizational structures and among dominant coalition on behalf of the organization against the authoritarian dominance practices.

2.7   Practitioner power

Public relations professionals recurrently execute, attain, and maintain power. Coombs (2012) is of the viewpoint that crises mostly provide an opportunity for practitioners to use power while framing the communication process on behalf of their relevant organizations. They also uncovered that public relations practitioners find no part in the policy-making procedure due to the unacceptability of their status as managers and the non-recognition of the public relations profession. Berger and Reber proposed that PR practitioners adopt different tactics to wield power which include past experiences, support of fellow individuals, coherent influences, and insistent performances. Public relations practitioners use two main components of power control theory which are be-all and end-all approaches. Respondents of Berger and Reber's (2006) research about influence and P.R., termed dominant techniques, like data collection, study report dominant coalition, employee associations, and firm communication techniques, as formal strategies of persuasion in the profession. The respondents termed the Omega approaches as non-formal strategies which include whistle-blowing and pointing out mismanagement in organizations, leaking prohibited information to media, avoiding the coalitions, and favoring the workers' activist groups. Omega strategies cause a quicker change in the organizational structure as compared to alpha approaches, although public relations practitioners consider the function of some omega

approaches unethical. Finally, the authors stated that to perform an effective role in PR profession on behalf of an institution, public relations practitioners may use tactics of conflict and fight along with conventional ones inside an organization. Aldoory and Toth (2004b) found in the data they collected that female public relations professionals preferably engage in using omega-like strategies to retain and maintain power. To get more flexibility, focus group participants stated that they had started their own business or joined different public relations organizations to leave the traditional public relations roles (as mentioned in Toth & Cline, 2007). Likewise, Holtzhausen (2000) contended that public relations professionals need to play their role actively to discourage any form of discrimination and abuse of power in the workplace. She, referring Lyotard's idea of 'tensors,' proposed that public relations practitioners' active engagement and conflict of interests in an organization can promote new meaning, creativity, and equality among the members of the workplace. Public relations professionals can enact more comprehensive and trust-building public relations practices if they separate themselves from the central decision-makers in an organizational setting as suggested by Holtzhausen and Voto (2002). Individuals in PR roles should exercise influence to retain power. Berger and Reber (2005) have uncovered that an organization survey has revealed that influence can shape or reshape decisions inside an institution (p. 10). Reber and Cameron (2003) stated PR professionals consider their influence as an activity of 'bridge-building' in an organization. They can enact power through dialogue as a balanced two-way communication process can influence positively in an organization. Sriramesh, Grunig, and Dozier (1996) revealed that people can affect the communication process at any point through participatory cultures because the participants can engage easily in changing the nature of the internal communication process instead of bringing cultural change in an organization (p. 257). Therefore, the communication process acts as a changing agent and exerts influence in an organization. Communication skills and professional experiences can enhance public relations professionals' power. Golensky et al., (2020) discussed that the accumulation and implementation of scholarship of technical and managerial skills into their daily life affairs can enact power to public relations professionals.

2.8   Power, Gender, and PR

Studies about P.R indicated that male and female practitioners interpret influence uniquely. Tench and Topić (2017). PR scholarship advocates that females and males perceive and perform

power in distinct ways (Aldoory, Reber, Berger & Toth, 2008). Aldoory, Reber, Berger, and Toth by re-examining previous data, found that the definition of power for males is having proper sitting arrangements, a role in the process of policy-making, and achieving success. A study revealed that females in the PR role perceive the concept of power not as meeting targets but as playing a part in shaping decisions, having a seat and table, and say in the organizational system. However, men and women in the PR practice agreed equally that they share two mutual power sources including occupational backgrounds and connections with fellow employees and publics of the relevant organization. Aldoory, Reber, Berger & Toth's (2008) research found out what sort of vocabularies of influence men and women use to complete the professional process. Researchers revealed through the study that males are mostly encouraged by referring to codes of ethics, honesty, and accountability, and to complete these factors, males employ terms like challenge, confront, and fight. While women used logical reasoning citing codes of conduct, morality, and credibility about the needs of stakeholders. Authors finalized that males and females were of the viewpoint that experience may increase personal power but institutional power can be enhanced through building links with others. However, men and women had few differences in defining influence and its key sources. Study proposed that women professionals are mostly deficient in influence and power. The main reason for the lack of power of women practitioners is their demotion to the role of a technician in organizational structures, the level of organizational support, nominal position in a man-controlled environment, and lack of importance (O'Neil, 2003, p. 154, Place, 2015). Feminine interpretation of PR showed that women practitioners do have not enough formal structural power as their male counterparts in the profession. Organizational structures of power were considered vital for increasing recognized institutional effect. Reduction in prescribed structural influence causes loss of female P.R. professionals' control (Place, 2015). Female practitioners often engage in indirect aggression to enact power and influence (Litwin & O'Brien Hallstein, 2007).

2.9   Gender Equality Through PR

Research in PR is required to comprehend how females can be empowered and the approaches through which they can enact empowerment. Tam, Dozier, Lauzen, and Real (1995) have talked about females' empowerment adding that women managers must engage in practices to obtain power and influence in organizational structures. Women required more involvement in important decision-making processes in addition to availing the authority to arrange training

courses and positions for the subordinates. (p. 270). Scholarship has sought the role of women to employ different types of strategies empowering them, including creating relationships and deciding about work-home proportion.   Mentor-mentee relations can impact the career development of PR professionals (Tam, Dozier, Lauzen, and Real, 1995). Women practitioners paired with female seniors create an ideal environment for building robust mentoring relationships (p. 268). The authors uncovered that professional women often performed the role of management, perceived as powerful, with male superiors (p. 269). Females in PR roles when associating with influential mentors may gain more empowerment stated by Tam, Dozier, Lauzen, and Real. Scholarship discovered that to gain power, women usually disassociate themselves from customary institutional structures. Research by Gill and Ganesh (2007) on feminist enterprisers, stated that females reframed the situations to empower themselves in adverse situations.

They demonstrate determination in case of discrimination and utilize the support of helping networks (p. 283). Aldoory, Jiang, Toth, and Sha (2008) also explained PR professionals were deemed satisfied and empowered when they quit their workplace environments. They found that their contributors started self-employment from home (p. 13). Females enact empowerment through adjustment in their work and life stability in a bid to achieve the goals of their profession. Aldoory, Jiang, Toth, and Sha (2008) stated that females in PR profession have reshaped patterns of communication process, revised daily personal routines, and learned to utilize new technology for communication to improve professional-personal balance.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The researcher reviewed the theoretical research significant to this study as below focusing on strategies to empower women. This examination included diverse frameworks designed to understand the dynamics of gender and power and analyze data related to public relations industry incorporating relevant theories.

3.2 Power-Control Theory

This theory explains to what extent public individuals in public relations roles pose power in organizational structure. The theory offers that the environment does not affect the superiors working in an organizational setup to make decisions as they mostly decide by choice (J.E. Grunig, 1992; Pfeffer, 1981). According to Dozier and Grunig (1992), influence outlook emphasizes that influential groups play a basic role in fixing institutional framework in a way that fulfills general organizational requirements and conflicting interests of the dominant employees of the organization (p. 407). Moreover, power control theory states the existence of organizational structures has remained and traditional practices are exercised within them. Dozier and Grunig (1992) explain that the overall organizational outlook does not always recommend the structural preferences of dominant coalition partners. Structural decisions, however, fulfill all the general needs of the organization and allow the dominant coalition in the organization to maintain power by maintaining a stable organizational setup (p. 407).

Berger (2005) explained three kinds of influence adopted by PR practitioners in his research on power-control theory which include first one the power over relations, the second one is power with relations, and the last one is the power to relations serving as different forms of power to buildup relationships, strict types of power, and opposing to authority. Berger discovered that the existence of these forms of power remains constant. Public relations professionals are required to perform more actively to exploit their control and power in the organizational structures and among dominant coalition at the behest of the management against the authoritative dominance practices.

3.3 Gender Theory

Literature review on gender theory of public relations has examined gender-related phenomena providing insights from gender and feminist research that clarify the reasons behind the experience of females in PR roles. These studies revealed challenges like discrimination, lesser status, adverse behavior, non-acceptability as public relations practitioners, less influence, no role in strategic decision-making, and finally, loss of powers. Organizational and gendered-based roles that individuals adopt when communicating, negotiating, and performing in the profession of public relations can be examined in a wide context. I examined theoretical scholarship about gender theory and traced out the history of feminist theory of public relations and gender theory. This examination explored core premises connecting gender theory to public relations profession and countered the perceptions of gender scholars to establish a framework for future research in PR field. Literature finally presents a structure to understand gendered roles properly and all that accompanies them affecting public relations performance and public relations professionals' meaning-making.

3.4 Evolution of Feminist Studies in PR

Employing Tetreault's (1985) feminine evolution theory, L.A. Grunig (2006) described that studies on gender in P.R field have undergone evolutionary procedures of six phases which include the male scholarship phase, compensatory scholarship stage, bifocal research phase, feminist phase, multifocal phase, and "integrative," phase making the females practitioners ties strong with the community. All phases still exist today and act as tools to comprehend gender study.

Aldoory (2005) also found out about the progression of PR and gender studies. She maintained that triple forms of research including descriptive research, explanatory research, and more critical research have brought about structured adjustments in gender perspectives, studies, in addition theory (p. 670).

3.5 Central Ideas of Feminist PR

Several perceptions in P.R profession are based on gender theory. L.A. Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2001) mentioned the sort of challenges females face for seeking work in the profession. These problems encompassed a demand for sex-based roles, a perception of females as a product,

a new demographic in the workplace, a gender paradigm, and presumptions about females' desirability to the profession (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001, pp. 33-34). Organizational and individual dissertations form mixed gender ideas (Wilson, 2001) and added: events, activities, and institutions may embody gender-specific characteristics. As discussion tends to support specific subjects while excluding beings, it strengthens administrative principles defining satisfactory forms of personality (pp. 2-3). Aldoory (2005) noted initial studies mainly described gender as feminine. Here definitional approach indicated that gender constructions, stereotypes, and misconceptions influence female practitioners within the workplace settings. Research has consistently disregarded systemic and organizational dynamics that are gendered and determine suitable roles in organizations.

3.6 Grounded Theory

I applied a grounded theory technique to analyze data and interpret my research topic. This methodology established by Glaser and Strauss (1967), aims to describe and hypothesize a manifestation based straight on empirical findings. This theory relates systematically to research, its examination, and data explanation. Throughout the process of qualitative data collection, analysis to identify themes, and interpretation to make conclusions, the grounded theory relies on a systematic data comparison. For instance, Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggested to researcher start coding the notes and transcripts, make a compilation of codes, categorize data, and compare them as the researcher proceeds with further data collection process through additional interviews, participant-observations, and focus groups and so on.

4   CHAPTER 4

4.1   Methodology

In this chapter, I examine the reasoning behind employing a qualitative approach, explore its objectives, and elaborate on the methods to collect, analyze, evaluate, and present the data.

4.1.1   Qualitative Methodology's Rationale

This study aimed to explore female PR professionals' understanding of gender roles and power patterns as they perceive them. Primarily, it focused on exploratory research aimed at explaining the experiences of females' encounters instead of testing or proving a theory.

I made an analysis and categories of each of the sixteen research questions after holding talks with females in public relations in Pakistan provided enough amounts of descriptive data.

As Corbin and Strauss (2008) explained, "Interpretive studies permit scholars to go through interviewees' phenomenology, comprehend how culture constructs and define meanings, and classify variables that can be later tested" (p. 12).

They explained the basic reason to conduct qualitative research as, "peep into the sphere of participants, to look the situation from their angle and subsequently discover their contributions in progress of experimental understanding" (p. 16). So, descriptive technique is more suitable for explanatory research of females' observations as PR experts.

4.1.2 Objective of Exploratory Study

To theorize a research problem, collect data, make its analysis, and present results, a qualitative study is a suitable approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) explained it as "a positioned action to find the viewer in the world filled with explanatory, substantial activities making the world observable because qualitative research incorporates analytical, realistic perspective. This indicates natural settings are employed for qualitative research to comprehend phenomena about the meanings people interpret" (pp. 4-5). The method adopted by researchers, who pursue investigating problems qualitatively, highlights the importance of social constructivism in our reality understanding, the linking between the researcher and his topic, and institutional constraints that influence the investigation process. Scholars stress the value-laden nature of judgments. They explore the results of how social reality is experienced and interpreted" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003,

p.13). Finally, scholars seek to apprehend the perception of an individual, review the limitations of everyday life, and ensure detailed descriptions and one's perceptions. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003 p. 16).

4.1.3 Qualitative Study Advantages

Interpretative approach is robust due to its capacity to generate enough rich expressive data and explain intricacies of interpretive realities of life experience. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Geertz, 1973; Hodder, 2003; Potter 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Quantitative results cannot offer the same level of deep explanation for a phenomenon as extensively as descriptive data can. Corbin and Strauss (2008) described explanatory aspects enhance richness and disparity and elevate the results beyond the ordinary. It is the profound substance that differentiates hollow and unexciting findings and results that can potentially impact policy and practice (p. 306). According to Hodder (2003), actions, past situations, and specific meanings can be understood through thick descriptions of experiences and backgrounds (p. 169). Qualitative study also plays a vital role in the context and meaning it conveys to intricate experiences of the people. For instance, Rubin and Rubin (2005) described, "digits cannot express a story… reducing responses into numbers removes the context, reducing the richness and details that enhance the accuracy of research" (p. 2). Similarly, Patton (1990) described depth insights into complex phenomena through qualitative analysis due to its ability to assess a phenomenon as a whole.

4.1.4 Selection of Participant

I conducted interviews with 10 female PR practitioners for this research topic, from January to February 2024, who were of different geographic settings, educational backgrounds, professional titles, ages, and work experiences, and were known as leaders in the public relations field within the public sector. The researcher, while collecting data, reached the data saturation level after interviewing 10 public relations practitioners of public sector organizations. Reaching data saturation level with sample size has been a result of the fact that the study consisted of homogeneous sample including only female public relations practitioners operating within the specifically defined bureaucratic hierarchical work structure. Since these individuals were employed in public sector organizations which all follow the same bureaucratic model,

organziational culture and climate, and even the same patterns and formats of press releases and event coverage, their working routines fall in conformity of each other. The researcher started getting the saturation level after getting seven PR practitioners interviewed with slight differences in responses, possibly due to difference in age, socio-economic and family backgrounds and geographic ethnicity.

I expected females of different experiences would provide a profound and diverse comprehension of gender and power perceptions. Sampling process was designed for those females having experience more than five years of credit in the profession to ensure getting enough volume of work experience and can reflect a significant contribution to the discussion. Rubin and Rubin (2005) explained that engaging persons with related direct work experience and information about questions provides strong and persuasive data (p. 65). I used mixed sampling techniques that combined snowball sampling, purposive sampling, and maximum variation sampling to collect data. Patton (1990) described that snowball sampling involves well-positioned informants with profound information and asking them to specify other people who possess relevant knowledge about the research questions. Therefore, I started to interview female professionals and sought their references to find other professionally sound female PR practitioners for interview. They recommend those who agreed to respond to study questions. I applied purposive and maximum variation sampling techniques after conducting snowball sampling methods in a bid to locate more public relations professionals having knowledge and differing backgrounds. Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated that the participants when interviewed, offered a wide range of insights and provided diverse perspectives or collaborative understanding can enhance the reliability of the research study" (p. 67). Strategic and systematic sampling techniques assisted in locating public relations professionals with varied expertise and backgrounds beyond initial snowball sample. Patton (1990) stated that maximum variation sampling seeks to encompass a diverse spectrum of basic concepts or main results to gain a comprehensive understanding of the study topic. According to Merriam (1998), purposive sampling is "rooted in researcher assumption to find, comprehend and get understanding; therefore, the sample selection must be chosen to maximize learning and enlightening perspectives" (p. 61). I distributed a recruitment letter-cum-questionnaire to women public relations practitioners through WhatsApp with a direct message before conducting in-

person, semi-structured, and in-depth interviews. The message included details of the research, its purpose, the confidentiality measures in place for the participant, and how potential benefits can enhance our insight into PR profession (see Appendix A). Once, I came to the point of saturation or new data ceased to emerge, I ultimately stopped the process of sampling and interviewing (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It seemed like I had come to a point of saturation when respondents of my research started to repeat the identical themes and did not respond differently from the responses I got from participants earlier in their interviews. As cognizant of the sensitivity of cultural diversity and conservative societal norms, I was very careful to interview and stay aware of females' sensitivities concerning their age, racial backgrounds, and professional profiles. I sought to recruit and interview a varied sampling in a bid to attain a comprehensive knowledge of female professionals' untold expertise and perspectives which may differ from my opinion and biases about PR profession.

I anticipated that female professionals with diverse cultures, social sections, and settings may have different observations and experiences related to gender influences and professional interactions. I understood their perspectives may guide me to a deep comprehension of the wide-ranging memories of women practitioners and an understanding of the concept of gender dynamics and power. Pompper (2005), quoting Green (1994), described that scholars of different profiles, their participants, may make them more comfortable by emphasizing the beneficial aims of their study and by exhibiting an understanding of the intricacy of race and gender.

Subsequently, At the time, I contacted females in PR roles with varied backgrounds, I explained openly the objectives of the research and conveyed my genuine intentions to develop a comprehension of the experiences of the participants in the profession.

4.1.5 Sampling

➢ *Environment of Workplace***:** 4 public relations practitioners worked for federal ministers of different political parties, 2 worked with corporations at the federal level, and 4 worked at the regional (provincial) government departments responsible for federal government publicity.

➢ *Job title***:** 1 participant identified herself as public relations director general, one respondent introduced herself as public relations director, 4 participants presented

themselves as public relations deputy directors, 1 participant identified herself as public relations/media consultant, and 3 contributors showed themselves as PR practitioners.

➢ *Geographic location*: 6 public relations practitioners worked in Islamabad, 3 worked in Lahore, and 1 worked in Peshawar.

In terms of age, public relations professionals' ages spanned from their late thirties onwards, and one of them did not reveal her age. About education, one practitioner had an MPhil., another held double M. As, several had an M.A., and one had a B.A. LLB.

4.1.6 Procedures of Data Collection

To gather data for my research, I conducted in-person, in-depth semi-structured interviews with female PR professionals. The interviews varied in length from 45 to 2 hours duration. In the interview, "the scholar establishes the structure and agenda through the questions and focus on conversation" (Corbin & Morse, 2003). Leech (2002) stated that to understand the interviewees better, gather maximum data for research, and assess hypotheses or research questions, the format of semi-structured interviews works excellently. I employed a concise interview guide or communication plan to gently direct the interview protocol and obtained extensive responses from the participants. Rubin and Rubin (2005), Leech (2002), and Yin (2003) suggested questionnaire comprises several questions that are arranged in flexible order and produce rich descriptive and explanatory data. Keeping interview protocol in view, the inquiry topics, I questioned, straight corresponded to 5 research questions that directed this research. I labeled, "RQ1," "RQ2," "RQ3," "RQ4," or "RQ5," adjacent to each question to ensure all questions were aligned with the research questions. This question labeling allowed me to envision how every question is related to my study questions and ensured a balanced approach across all five questions. For instance, to investigate the 1st study question on how female PR experts interpret gender, the interview guide involved the following question with labeling RQ1: *How do female public relations practitioners in the Pakistani Public relations industry make meaning of gender in Pakistan?* (RQ1). Before starting this study, I managed to discuss the interview question protocol with one professor in PR practice to evaluate its clarity and completeness. The persons who guided me with the pretest proposed various amends for how the questions were phrased. In response to the suggestions of the correspondents, I revised the interview guide following the pretest to make the questions order

better and clarify the questions. The question guide used a mix of comprehensive and targeted queries to inspire discussion flow. Leech (2002) explained several forms of inquiries to incorporate into a guide. "Introductory questions," ask people to explain a daily routine in your work settings. "Model queries" will prompt people to provide instances of occasions as they utilize a specific method or confront a specific barrier, in particular. "Motivations" encourage participants to talk and elaborate. They are alike to "investigate" inquiries. They can use a flexible query like "Why?" finally, the interrogator needs to stay calm and pay attention to the participants making sure that the respondent got enough during to express her insights. Furthermore, in arranging questions for an interview, Fontana and Frey (2003) commended the scholar for taking comments carefully during the process of an interview, writing all the points, and examining interview minutes regularly (p. 79). I added different types of questions to my interview guide and took all important points during every interview. After conducting interviews. To interview the women public relations practitioners, I employed the following protocol:

Before the interview, I offered my introduction first, as an MPhil Media and Communication Studies student at National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, explained the purpose of my study to the participant, examined the privacy policy of knowledgeable permission with them, and addressed the concerns of the respondent if any. Second, I kept in mind several suggestions of Leech (2002) and Fontana and Frey (2003) about posing questions and taking notes while conducting in-person interviews with the participants. Third,

I expressed gratitude to the participants for giving an interview and described to re-contact them later in case of clarification of any questions, examine and inform them about the interview texts. I winded up the process of the interview by responding to the queries the respondent posed, ensuring the confidentiality measures, and appreciating them for their consent to be interviewed. Since some women public relations practitioners lived in Lahore, Multan, and Peshawar also, I conducted telephonic interviews with these interviewees. The process of the telephone interview reflected the same guidelines as in-person interview with exception that I conveyed a privacy agreement verbally on call and an unwritten confirmation was also received from the interviewee. Semi-structured interviews offer both prospects and challenges in data acquisition. Such inquiries present a wide range of content as compared to guided interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 74). Resemble normal and causal talk, the people had (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 64). Eventually, this

type of interview may allow the scholar to comprehend redesigned functions without participation, explain social and political contexts, complete historical gaps, provide a deeper comprehension of personal stories, and offer innovative viewpoints on established issues (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3).

Issues of informal interviews comprise excessive empathy of the researcher, bias, interaction, and discomfort of the participant. Yin (2003) warned that the scholar may be conscious of the bias of the interviews, interviewer recall problems, and difficulties of the participant in articulating responses during the process of the interviews (p. 92). Likewise, Rubin and Rubin (2005) described that having excessive empathy can be risky for the research. You may overlook the entire problem if you are involved emotionally with your subject, you might only pose supplementary questions that will positively represent your inquiries (p. 81). Denzin (1989, p. 116) observed that "gender-influenced information" outlines the interaction between researcher and participant (as referred by Fontana and Frey, 2003, p. 82). Questioning can be unforeseeable. Respondents might assert the interview, take control of the topic, dictate the interview velocity, suggest that the researcher asked incorrect questions, or sometimes demonstrate hostility or threats (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 12). Ultimately, respondents might feel uneasy disclosing what they believe that the information is sensitive during the interview process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 28). To control challenges related to exploratory interviews, I employed the techniques below: Following Yin (2003) and Denzin (1989), I assumed how assumptions and partialities about gender may influence my questioning. I comprehended that interview respondents may perceive differently from what I am aware of gender and power. During taking interview, I attempted to conceal my insight on gender and power and I coped with hiding my facial or physical expressions to the responses of my interviewees.

In addition, to avoid influencing the response of interviewees, I did not react in the form of smiling or head nodding to their certain statements. Some public relations practitioners find themselves in trouble to respond a question or delayed in thinking about an idea or concept. I remained silent and paused instead of providing an example response or further encouragement to handle the situation after realizing that my facial expressions or semantic behavior may influence the response of the respondents.

After a short period, I noted that some participants were responding regularly. In case, the practitioners showed any inability to respond after some time, then I would 1) reshape the question

in a different way or 2) shift to another question. I practiced this exercise of questioning only to ensure the respondents that they were not forced to rush, I listened attentively and valued their insights. I paid heed to Rubin and Rubin's (2005) cautions on interviewer compassion by using a methodological approach.

I was involved in compassion and paid attention to the responses of my respondents; nevertheless, my queries, investigations, or interpretations required different angles of a practitioner's insights. Often, I motivated participants to share their insights on how they assumed that others in the public relations profession may observe a problem, how others responded to specific actions they performed, or how they reflected on themselves in response to a specific action.

Concerning respondent communication and distress during interviews, I frequently confronted participants who sought satisfaction or assurance from the researcher by using the words "ok? or Right?" after responding to the questions. During these confronts, I would express that I learned how the public individuals in PR roles comprehended the profession and I did not find anything like a correct or incorrect answer. Ultimately, to tackle Corbin and Strauss' (2008) concerns about the uneasiness of the participants, I used reflexive practices, adjusted to unanticipated circumstances, and tried to develop a bond of reliance with research respondents. Several times, some of the participants asked me not to reveal the name of their office or even their job title.

Subsequently, I valued their requests. During the process of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, I also improved substantial understanding with the interviewees. Fontana and Frey (2003) described that since the main objective of questioning the participant is developing an understanding, therefore, the researcher is required to develop a connection with respondents in a bid to take their role and try to observe the situation from the viewpoint of the participants (p. 78). To establish relationships, Leech (2002) suggested that researcher should keep the participants comfortable.

Look professional and informative, but never intimidate the respondents. Subsequently, interviewees will share every piece of information and provide maximum data for research. Leech advised that the researcher should listen to the respondent thoroughly to encourage maximum conversation. Interviewers should demonstrate to hearing actively what the respondent has said.

However, one should not reinterpret what the participant just explained to avoid damaging rapport and intimidating the interviewee.

I asked my interview participants to meet them at a comfortable location they wanted, as I was trying to establish a good connection with them. In some cases, we met near the workplace of the respondent. This locality offered them an opportunity to speak openly without being overheard by anyone, etc.

I tried also building trust and compassion while interviewing them. Rubin and Rubin (2005) recommended that interviewers create confidence by recruiting a coworker or friend to provide a reference by discussing commonalities with respondents and encouraging them of confidential measures. I communicated with the interviewees and shared my professional background as a PR practitioner and now returned to pursue my MPhil in Mass Media to establish confidence before starting the interview.

In some stances, public relations practitioners and I had experienced similar professional capacities or performed similar work interests. According to the suggestion of Rubin and Rubin (2005) some public relations professionals I questioned, recommended me to other PR practitioners during the sampling phase and enrolled the participants who informed their fellows about my study project and of a student status at the university, conducting his dissertation research. They endorsed my identity as I had claimed it. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that scholars demonstrate sympathy by expressing passion for statements and feelings the participant shared during the interview (p. 81). To ascertain compassion, I posed inquiries that offered a deeper understanding and envisioned what interviewees had gone through, although these questions were somewhat not related to the basic topic to investigate (p. 81).

In some instances, I enacted sympathy when the women practitioners shared stories regarding gender and power problems they experienced at the workplace. Comparing my professional background together with my participants enabled me to pose investigative and additional queries leading me to analyze research data deeply. On different occasions, I contended to empathize with the responses of my interviewees.

Subsequently, I managed to pose probes and complementary questions in detail and examine how the participants understood a specific phenomenon. I was very careful to confirm the privacy of the discussion, dialogue transcripts, and contact information of my interviewees after I collected each interview/questionnaire. All the written notes, transcripts, and contact information

of the interviewees were kept in a confidential location at my residence. After conducting all the interviews, I engaged a full transcript approach, transcribing all the spoken words.

4.1.7 Procedures of Data Analysis

Wolcott (1994) proposed that data analysis involves the recognition and interpretation off emerging themes and patterns, in addition to understanding decisive features and interrelations through the methodical description. The rational approach may be engaged to assess reasons for the system's failure or what are the ideas to enhance its functionality. For my study, I analyzed and interpreted the data by using the technique of grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) founded the grounded theory method aimed at gaining explanations and theories directly from data to comprehend phenomena. It uses a systematic technique to study, analyze, and interpret data.

Grounded theory also deliberates the complicated connections, interfering circumstances, contributing factors, settings, and potential consequences that correspond with phenomena on a larger scale or broader sections (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory method engages an organized approach, and persistent results comparison across the whole procedure of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting. For instance, Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Denzin and Lincoln (2003) described unchanging equivalence of results needs to come in continually and not be kept late until the gathering of whole data. Otherwise, they proposed that at the initial stage of interviews, the scholar ought to initiate coding of transcripts, generate a coding record, formulate sets, and subsequently compare while continuing to hold further interviews process, and respondents' explanations.

Corbin and Strauss (2008), Strauss and Corbin (1990), and Glaser and Strauss (1967) named the examination method exploratory, core, and focused codings. Open-ended coding begins the data-gathering and analysis procedure. During the process of preliminary coding, I analyzed or categorized results into holistic phenomena. The data classifications occurred naturally as specific topic areas or keywords consistently appeared throughout the results. For instance, certain observations that appeared initially during the process of interview comprised male or female as gender, terming power as influence and knowledge.

I made categories of data by employing explanatory codes, theme codes, or analytical codes to classify developing manifestations. The objective of the initial coding method was to discover the themes originating from results. For instance, I used descriptive code to a

statement of women practitioners where they shared the idea that power is centered around influencing others. The code I used was "influence". After completing open coding, I started axial coding by analyzing results (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Following Miles and Huberman (1994) guidelines for axial coding, I related preliminary codes and explained data with certain relationships, causal situations, clarifications, and dominating settings aimed at making sense, guiding direction, and theorizing the connections among categorized and coded data. The procedure may incorporate a combination of several phenomena under a bigger subset. An instance of a repeating sequence I noticed, was when some females conveyed feeling "discussed" in gatherings and experienced the need to "be more assertive" or " combative".

I used a combative coding framework to explain how females feel themselves after being experienced unnoticed. In core coding, I initiated interpreting these attitudes by investigating whether there was a consecutive pattern to their occurrence. I conducted if-then tests on the behaviors, finding competing clarifications of these observations, and looking for any proof disproving or helping present phenomena, classifications, and groups.

A specific example encouraged me to explore competing descriptions and discover rebutting proof was when one woman practitioner from Punjab province explained how the women in the profession were dealt with in the central-eastern region was not the same as females were handled in the northwestern region of Pakistan. She explained women practitioners were treated differently than that male public relations colleagues in the rest of the country. I used the pattern code "geography impacts trend of prejudice" and talked with other practitioners located at different places to know how they made the meaning of gender.

Finally, I engaged in targeted coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated that this action refers to choosing the essential category, scientifically connecting it to additional categories, confirming those relationships, and involving and enhancing those classifications requiring more modification and improvement (p. 116).   This coding takes place in the later phases of the results analysis procedure when the scholar combines data patterns into a consistent, logical, and analytical description.

I, frequently, assessed the value of categories and data, ultimately, making decisions that contributed to attaining the inclusive incorporation and comprehensive development of categories essential for grounded theory (p. 121). Strauss and Corbin suggested a systematized trend to aid in

the process of focused coding guiding the investigator to organize the data to comprehend in a way that explains the orderly sequence from conditions (A) conditions leading to the phenomenon (B), then adding to context (C), followed by actions/contacts including strategies (D) that finally guide to consequences (E)(p. 124). To fully develop and ground the results, it was essential to settle subgroups, outlines, and links designated with related data, quotes, and moves to illustrate and represent theory.

For instance, how I structured my coding framework to enhance my understanding of the succession from "A cascades into B, followed by C, D, and E" as observed in data related to the "Alpha Female Syndrome." Sometimes, the participants in their transcripts talked about the characteristics or behavior of Queen Bee Syndrome but they never labeled it directly as such. For instance, I observed that perceptions, workplace situations, or individual actions that made the women practitioners see the workplace from a certain angle symbolized the Queen Bee Syndrome while confronting with data linking these related settings, I would comprehend these responses as indicative of Dominant Female Disorder and employ the "Female Boss Syndrome" interpretational code.

4.1.8 Ethical Deliberations

Throughout my whole research process till the finalizing report, I weighed the morals of my research study, I acted upon the guidelines founded by the 16th Board of Advanced Studies and Research (BASR) held on June 21, 2023, at the university. I got approval for my dissertation topic which guided me to ensure that the research participants were treated ethically and legally. Approval from the BASR guaranteed and documented that my study would cause the smallest amount of harm, if any, to participants.

Following the interview protocol during each interview of my informant, I elucidated that the University's BASR had accorded approval to my study and I will inform any possible damage that our talk may reasoning. For instance, a participant might face forms of harm that include the personal nature of intrusiveness of the process of discussion and the excess of sentiments that could happen from remembering specific experiences (Angrosino and Mays de Perez, 2003). I chose to stop interviewing the participant immediately and take the discussion in a new direction to relieve her of discomfort when I noted that the participant looked to experiencing uneasy debating a specific subject or she was unwilling to respond during the interview process.

My MPhil student status and my age might have reduced or equalized the power difference between myself and my participants. In addition to my quest for research, my age in the same group of respondents and my academic position supported me in communicating with the participants. As a result, this feature of my position might enhance and prolong the length of the responses of participants as they, being in practice, feel confident to support me as a researcher to study their diverse understandings of the public relations career. I revealed most of the details regarding my individuality, age, academic standing, and occupation, before conducting interviews, to be trustworthy to practitioners and inspire them to share maximum content in my research workflow.

I intended to explain a compassionate approach during the interview process by conveying to respondents that I was concerned regarding their experience as PR practitioners and I had been keen to listen to their accounts. Naples (2003) explained how scholars may promote an ethic of care equality between themselves and participants by adopting an ethic of care (p. 63). Finishing the interviews, I asked practitioners to be comfortable calling or e-mailing me in case they need clarification about the study.

4.2   Reflection and Evaluation of Researcher

4.2.1   Researcher Reflection

To evaluate the process of information gathering, coding and evaluation process, and patterns emergence, I integrated notes, assessments, and feedback. Memos refer to brief comments penned by the scientist that detail concepts, concepts, themes, or challenges considered important for their research work. Referring to the types of memos, Miles and Huberman (1994) described that briefs may be stopgap reports, dialogue briefs, descriptive notes, or simplification reports that comprise key ideas being discussed in the research, have a date, and linkage to specific settings in observational notes, prior case study reviews, or overviews.

Besides, briefs may be composed to clarify incomprehensible statements or situations, as different assumptions in reaction to different memos, to suggest a new coding paradigm, to incorporate field note addenda, while evaluating, lacks a distinct notion still is trying to determine one under the central idea or symbol that links different insights. I frequently penned memos to myself using the notebook or printed transcripts throughout the investigation, I took notes about what data was important for my research, I penned briefs regarding results I considered were most

supporting for my study, guides to locate proposed interpretations or clarify questions, or I determined whether an interview was successful or not. I involved "member checks" with the public relations practitioners of the research process when I was unsure about or sought more explanation on emergent themes or some parts of data generated after holding the interview. For this purpose, to engage member checks, I used WhatsApp or e-mail to contact interviewees to seek to review specific segments of the transcript or additional information about their experiences in the profession.

Usually, I managed member checks to ensure that my perceptions matched their story after compiling interviews, I observed that a few practitioners would complete a statement or an answer quoting, "I am unsure in case I described that topic properly" or "I am uncertain if that's my intention in a factual sense, though I believe that I cannot explain better than this at the moment."

After encountering a similar viewpoint similarly, I would frequently cut and paste a text of the relevant part of the interview into an email to ask the participants if they sensed that their responses showed the same as what they intended to state. The peer reviews responded positively and confirmed that the excerpts conveyed their intention to explain. Amidst the transcriptional and assessment process of the data, I used also derivations.

I added reports soon after scripting a specific part of the content that I sensed was substantial and suggestive of the developing patterns, or in a few instances linking that information to what other participants shared. My data emphasizing generating themes and connecting the replies of participants with others proved supportive, and supported me in generating expressive patterns and analytical codes. Being a qualitative scholar, I acknowledge that the investigative technique has a substantial impact on my personality and profession. To cope with this, I found support groups and maintained a journal to help me assess my responsibilities as an investigator more successfully. I offer comprehensive details of these exercises as under.

4.2.2 Evaluation

My age, delicate research topics, and research sites generate moving, challenging relations with participants of the interview. Mostly, the researcher cultivates links with individuals that extend well exceeding the scope of the study. Qualitative study may have a physical, cognitive, and emotional negative impact on the personality of the individual extraordinarily. Lee-Treweek

and Linkogle (2000) state that the analyst has to join established support networks to be aware of the research they conduct.

Consequently, to manage these sensitive issues, I attempted to find both assistance and productive feedback and analysis of my research from my study supervisor, workmates, and close friends. For example, I held a debate on power with my colleague that caused me to feel uncertain about how to understand the perception of results linked to power in my research. In a meeting, I shared my experiences and insights with my dissertation supervisor about power. This discussion assisted me in separating my fears or explanations of authority and my data on influence from the decoding of those in my professional circle. As an investigator, I persisted mindful that connections with participating professionals might negatively affect the reliability of results and have sentimental consequences for myself and the participants.

Wolcott (2002) guided the scholar to avoid being engaged with respondents to evaluate the rationality of data generated in a discussion with individuals.

He described the consequences of utilizing and data publication that might be tainted by emotional feelings like romance, relationships, or possibly annoyance aimed at participants. Thus, Ellis (1995) described that participants of the results might not be satisfied with or support the analysis or write-up of the researcher despite member checks. Researchers must be mindful of knowing when to establish a limit of participant validation and just publish what they consider reliable, reasonable, and accurate a researcher.

Ellis (1995) stated that researchers may never accurately be aware of the authenticity, conviction, and factual events, of their interviewees' experiences although they utilize explicit quotations and cultivate strong bonds with respondents. Specifically, I did not establish friendships with my respondents and maintained only professional relations with them during the study. I respected the trust in the interpersonal communication,

I established with participants and was involved in various follow-through Procedures: 1) I thanked every interviewee via e-mail acknowledging their participation 2) I shared a concise report of my research findings with the interview respondents for their review and keep on record. The report I shared with my participants was a record of the results' instances I employed for each pattern. The strategic description was devoid of my explanations of the results more than I had planned them under the scope of study queries, groupings, or patterns.

My interpretation is reflected in my final dissertation. Some of my participants requested to get the final report of my research work. When I present the completed report to publish in academic journals and practitioners for their perusal, I will offer myself responsibility for my study topics and the PR profession. Evaluation of study results will underline how practitioners mostly misunderstand concept of gender, leading to biased behaviors that continue repression within the profession. This study provides insights into the implications of exercise and proposes guidelines for prospective studies. The research document also unveils ways to connect women practitioners, undertake leading positions, and surrender to gender stereotypes to empower themselves.

4.2.3 Approach of Researcher: Reflexivity, Background

My professional experiences have meaningfully shaped my research regarding gender and power, especially examples of gender bias, and moral challenges I observed in carrying out my public relations assignments. These experiences impacted not only how I managed my research work but also how I examined the data and interpreted my study findings. Having worked with more than dozens of public organizations in different political settings in Pakistan, several diplomatic missions in Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates and continuing my profession as a PR practitioner, I encountered and coped with professional skills, maneuvers, and techniques as per my relevant organizational values, demands, and mark even my slight achievements at work settings.

During my previous roles, I observed types of bullying and gender-based prejudice my public relations women colleagues faced and I experienced Queen Bee Syndrome as well. Despite having experienced these challenges, they never consider exiting the public relations profession due to the unavailability of another job of their choice easily in the face of a heavily competing job market and overpopulated country. There is a need to find out why these manifestations target females in PR roles.

What underlying dynamics continued to be gender bias and sexual exploitation in profession. I positioned my research as a scholar with a specialization in gender in the profession when I started to set out my travel as a scholar to comprehend gender dynamics and power structures. The intended goal of my study was to investigate females' interpretation of being gendered and powered as practitioners. I sought, through my exploratory study, to explain the exposure of females to profession, instead of critiquing systems of persecution, testing a theory,

or inciting action. During the process of data analysis, I observed and pondered over my researcher biases and how they influenced my data evaluation and analysis.

Once more, I discussed with research topic supervisor how my achievements in the profession, my image, and my perceptions about power shape a distinctive perspective by which I could understand or influence my results. Notably, all over my research process and dissertation preparation, I found the progression of my prejudices and perception of dominance. Most of the study about power in the public relations profession concentrates on theory of power control and suppose the individuals who are in power will exercise authority enabling them to uphold dominance.

4.2.4 Validity

I organized and assessed my study concerning validity. Validity is referred maintaining quality or rigor to ensure research findings are credible and trustworthy in qualitative studies. Qualitative researchers questioned the outdated, more empirical perceptions of authenticity. My comprehension of validity as a unified, attestable "fact" changed to an awareness that numerous "facts" and analyses of occurrence may take place. Owing to the lens of this innovative perspective on validity, the study can be regarded reliable as is valid in case this is produced skillfully, able to withstand criticism and scrutiny in scholarly academic debate, and the professionals and scholars can benefit from it equally.

Lindlof (1995) described that conventionally, the central focus of the validity is the trustworthiness of results and if the study tool is exactly focusing focal point (p. 237). He explicated, nevertheless, the conventional measurable concept of credibility cannot be applied to qualitative studies. "A setting comprising of numerous, subjective interpretations never allows finding singular depiction like a standard for exact parameters. Since the questioner functions unconsciously as a contributor, it is unsure if the conventional approach ensures reliable conclusions" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 238). Likewise, Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2003) presented arguments opposing the conventional notion of authenticity as "veracity."

The authors stated idea that facts cannot be confirmed by meticulously examining the accounts of researchers and participants, is no more valid, understanding that variations in accounts may stem from elements such as class, ethnicity, gender, and other significant variables that cannot be mixed into a concord easily" (p. 110). This assertion supports my study, where I will investigate how females in PR practice understand the conceptions of gender roles and power relations.

I should keep in mind that the females communicate with, will frame an understanding of connotations and truths that are central points of their exact individual encounters and truths, instead of absolute reality regarding gender influence and and influence patterns.   Truths are shaped by individual biases and cultural perspectives on the concepts and continually experience revolutions and progression. Researchers mentioned numerous skills to increase the quality and accuracy of qualitative findings. Corbin and Strauss (2008) quoted procedures of Creswell's (1998) and Creswell and Miller's (2000) for accuracy enhancement.

Scholars suggested that researchers hold a long-term commitment to the field, use triangulation techniques for a better understanding of the research problem, integrate peer review techniques to ensure the quality of the work, use negative case analysis to improve the credibility of the research findings, explain the scholar's personal biases, engage in member checking, generate meaningful insights, utilize the in-depth explanation of the subject under study, and conduct external audits for validation and quality assurance of the study (Creswell, 1998, pp. 201-203, as mentioned in Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 299).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) also cited Chiovitti and Piran (2003) about credibility as qualitative research accuracy. To enhance the rigor of qualitative research, the participants should be engaged in the research process, the responses of the participants about a manifestation to conceptual assertions regarding the phenomenon should be compared, the scientist ought to explain his own opinion about the research phenomenon, list the criteria of the investigator for research, and identify a procedure to select the participants for scholarship.

These approaches enhance the process of research as they allow a scholar to assess oneself and develop one's study strategies, assess and refine information gathering, and analytical approaches, and maintain clarity on one's study methods during the process of research. Researchers proposed that a study can more exactly and authentically explain concord in case scholar engages contributors in research methodology. Potter (1996) cited Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), suggested examiner share the study information with respondents and enquire whether this research report matches their perceptions of what they believe and practice (as cited in Potter, 1996, p. 198). The exercises align with the respondent verification approaches. Lindlof (1995) explained that member-checking possibly be significant setting of explanatory authentication. Much, the scholar needs achieving, is an interpretation through the others' eyes, thus the findings of the other might be more important (p. 241).

I engaged my respondents in the study procedure and utilized data validation approach to verify my explanations of the results exactly represented findings and conclusions of the participants. Kvale (1995) described the authenticity notion of qualitative examination. He contended that validity is similar to information gained generally by constructing the concepts of skillfulness, expression, and activity. My techniques and ideas of validity to engage the participants in my topic studies are discussed below:

4.2.5 Skillfulness Validity

Kvale (1995) described that outstanding skillfulness of research, carefully planned study proposal, and scholar's reliability may enhance the rationality of qualitative study. The skillfulness of this scholarship engages regularly examining, enquiring, and hypothetically explaining the results (Kvale, 1995, p. 27). The thoughtfully planned study project can remain relevant over time and prove resistant to efforts to misrepresent it. Kvale (1995) explaining exceptional skill wrote that reliability is determined by viewing potential sources of invalidity and the information is considered more reliable if it has undergone rigorous testing and scrutiny (p. 26).

To enhance the technical quality of my dissertation studies, I adopted strategies to boost the trustworthiness and rigor of my interview approach, I applied methods to my research resulting in a carefully planned study. Following the suggestions of Kvale (1995, pp. 27-28), I based my research on theoretical paradigms that are related to power mechanisms and gender roles, making sure that my specific questions directly conform to the study questions; made my research thoughtful; frequently asked and reviewed interview findings and assessed it utilizing notes; seek to a rational elucidation of data through inductive methodology; gained confirmation of data by involving participants; and offered a comprehensive presentation of the report.

4.2.6 Expressive Validity

Kvale (1995) stated that participants' perspectives incorporate assessing the credibility of information assertions in discussion (p. 30). In simpler terms, when the study topic is supposed to be authenticated by other researchers and relevant individuals in the profession, it may attain communicative validity. To achieve transparency, researchers will examine the credibility of the studies, the way scholars construed one's results, and how they constructed one's reasoning. The

stronger understanding investigators, reviewers, and specialists reach about the study, the higher its communicative acceptability likely be.

Eventually, Kvale (1995) described that the success of research findings here approaches an academic effort, where accuracy is established through dynamic dialogue involving reciprocal learning processes where precision and comprehension progress through discussion (p. 32). To enhance the accuracy and effectiveness of my study, I discussed my research topic with my supervisor to evaluate some of the findings and explanations of my notes. Additionally, I will submit my thesis to committee members and other experts for review and insights. I will include recommendations suggested by researchers in my dissertation research to strengthen my study's methodology, review my data analysis, and enhance my arguments's logical reasoning.

4.2.7 Activity

In case, both studies and their results are relevant to academic and skilled populations, they can attain practical validity. Kvale (1995) stated this validity employs applying research to guide action in enhancing our understanding of a phenomenon and stated that logical validity engages the ethical aspect, representing deeper information than reaching mere basic accord by discussion. Practical endorsement relies on findings and explanations, dedicating implementation of comprehensive understandings. Deeds are heavier than words (p. 33).

Kvale explained the concept of pragmatic validity by using an example of a concerted action study. Research, scholars, and participants can collectively produce insights into a social setting in collaborative action. They then use this understanding to inform new activities within the situation, letting them examine the validity of their information through its implementation (p. 34).

Finally, Kvale (1995) claims that study serves as a medium for shaping society (p. 35). Good-planned and outstanding scholarship produces findings as effective research. Kvale (1995) formulated this notion, recommending that the standard of skillfulness in research directs to results—for example, knowledge claims—that are innately forceful and substantial, similar to a convincing piece of art that conducts its endorsement within itself. Perfectly, the investigation processes are clear, findings obvious, and essentially substantial, factual, beautiful, and worthy. From this perspective, valid research would make your validity inquiries surplus" (p. 38).   By conducting comprehensive research, it can withstand scrutiny and censure. In case it demonstrates

real significance to academic and occupational associations, I expect it will be endorsed as self-evidently authentic.

4.2.8 Reliability and Generalizability

The quality of research can also be evaluated through reliability. It is the standard to test if a technique produces the same findings always (Babbie, 2001).   Corbin and Strauss (2008) assert a basic factor in verifying the standard of studies is the researchers' cognizance of how their prejudices and conclusions affect both data gathering and evaluation. Academics should analyze not only the influence the scholar has on the studies but also the reciprocal impact the analysis has on the investigator. Since results, biases, and viewpoints differ among researchers and create diverse explanations, investigations, and interpretations, contend that dependability is unsuitable for exploratory studies (Babbie, 2001, p. 299).

I tried my best to point out and overcome my biases and suppositions during my dissertation research. However, I came to the point that my perceptions of intersectionality between power and gender and my interpretation of results may differ from those of researchers who carried out a study like it. In consequence, I verify that dependability can be considered suitable for this research. Besides, generalizability engages if the answers of research are possibly useful for viewers. The primary purpose of this research and dissertation was to gain a comprehensive understanding of female's experiences in PR roles. The findings of this research may not be representative of the PR profession in Pakistan overall.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Results and Analysis

A questionnaire was placed with participants in two parts. The first set of questions was demographic and the second set was qualitative. The objective of this chapter is to argue the results related to the questionnaire, focusing on gender, power dynamics, and the nexus between them within the profession of public relations in Pakistan in public sector.

This part will scrutinize certain data associated with each of the research questions as below:

Q7. It is perceived that public relations is a male-dominated profession in Pakistan. What are your thoughts and perceptions about it?

Answers

1. Yes. But lots of young female entrants in the PR profession now.

2. No, it is not true. I understand that the Public Relations profession can be adopted by females in a similar manner as the males. I do not see any difficulty for females in adopting the Public Relations profession. In today's world when the use of social media has become widespread, almost all the fields/all walks of life that were previously considered as purely male-dominant professions have become open for females. I think that Public Relations suits females in the same way as it does for males.

3. Pakistan is a multicultural society with different norms. Cultural and social factors are the main tools that can measure the diversity of gender. As far as the capital of Pakistan is concerned, the gender dynamics in the PR profession are changing. For example, 30 public relations professionals are working with the different federal ministers out of them 11 are females this time. It means 37 percent of women PR professionals constitute the total PR practitioners from the Press Information Department (responsible for federal government publicity), an attached department of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

   The increase in the ratio of female PR professionals in the profession shows a paradigm shift in gender.

4.   Initially, yes it was a predominantly male conducive profession. However, things are changing now.

5.   In the past it was male-dominated but now the majority of women occupy the post of public relations in the Public and private sectors. NOW we can say that public relations is a female-dominated profession in Pakistan.

6.   Not now though it has been so. Now it's a ratio of 50/50 in my opinion.

7.   No, as a female serving for 17 years, I never felt this.

8.   In the urban areas females can also perform public relations-related jobs. However, in rural areas like FATA, it is a bit challenging for a female but not impossible.

9.   In my opinion, public relations is considered a male-dominated profession but efforts over the past few years to promote gender equality have negated this concept to an extent. Efforts are continued to break down this traditional concept and positive trends are being introduced to bring gender diversity in the profession.

10.   Public Relations is undoubtedly a male-dominated profession in Pakistan. The societal norms and culture support males in every profession, especially this PR department. Hence, the inclusion of females in every sector of society has helped to change this concept and is providing a better environment for women, even then it's a male-dominated profession.

11.   Traditionally, public relations is a male-dominated profession in Pakistan.

12.   Well, when we discuss in the context of Pakistan's society, men tended to dominate but now the scenario is fast changing as more and more women are entering into the civil service and other fields owing to the 10% women quota and otherwise their overall ability and competence. In the Ministry of Information, women outnumber men, so we can safely say as Information Group Officers are public relations Officers that public relations is not at all a male-dominated profession in Pakistan.

Q8. How does your gender affect you in your profession?

Answers

1.   On a positive note, female officers are active listeners, committed to work, and actively engaged to enhance media relations with Ministerial affairs leading to successful PR campaigns. On the flip side, female officers may encounter challenges related to bias, glass ceilings, and work-life balance.

2. When I first entered this profession, I was feeling shy but over time gradually I started acquainting myself with the working environment. Many colleagues in the office also helped me in getting used to the office environment. Therefore, the gender effect did not creep into my profession. I performed much better as a Public Relations Officer.

3. Being a woman, I have communication gaps with my public in certain cases due to behavior patterns demonstrated by male chauvinist society. For example, harassment, gender biases, late sitting in the office, traveling with male personalities, outdoor activities, etc. Being a wife and mother, I have some responsibilities. For example, taking care of the house and raising the children are the two main factors that hinder my professional responsibilities as a dynamic and effective public relations practitioner.

4. Being a female, I avoid after-office meetings with journalists. However, official meetings on office premises do not count.

5. We can say 25 percent it affects. Now 70% of society has accepted that women should do work and the atmosphere at the workplace should be enabling for her so that they may prove themselves an effective and leading part of society.

6. It affects at various levels. Most of the Federal Government offices are in Islamabad so the females belonging to other cities have to compromise on their career to save their family life. The salary and the facilities provided by the government do not support maintaining two houses or shifting the family even. Accommodation in Islamabad is very expensive compared to other cities.

7. In Pakistan at times, it is difficult to attend all events and occasions as a female but mostly I never felt any problem.

8. I don't think that the PR profession affects me due to my gender. Throughout these nine years, I had served in KP and Baluchistan very comfortably. Our interaction with the media in KP and Baluchistan was awesome. They respected me. I enjoyed the PR profession in KP and Baluchistan to the fullest.

9. Pakistan is culturally a male-dominating society. Hence, for women, it is always challenging to enter and advance certain fields. Like in the PR department, it is difficult to socialize with media personnel as compared to males. Social norms and commitment towards family in my opinion are a priority after office hours. These

norms and commitment toward family are of course not a hindrance for males to socialize even at late hours. So, there are ample chances for males to excel in PR departments.

10. Being a female, the responsibilities of families and their commitments are equally important. PR women cannot afford to sit in offices till late hours and manage the PR, whereas to excel in PR one should be more committed and dedicated toward this field. Secondly, at times, it is difficult to handle a media person who is gender biased.

11. Gender biases and stereotypes still exist in the field of public relations, and it's crucial to work hard, prove competence, and overcome any obstacles to succeed.

12. My gender didn't affect me in my profession.

Q9. Do you feel empowered or handicap being a woman practitioner? What is your opinion?

Answers

1. As a woman working in PR, I believe that empowerment and challenges coexist. On one hand, I feel empowered by the opportunities to shape narratives, build relationships, and drive impactful communication strategies. However, I also recognize the hurdles, such as gender bias and unequal representation despite, I have led the PRO office in key ministries.

2. I do not think there is a question of empowerment or handicap in performing your duties. For every position in the offices, there is a set of Terms of Reference (ToRs) and when you are recruited you have to follow that set of ToRs. In official working these ToRs make you either empowered or handicapped depending upon the tasks/activities assigned to you and also on the working environment in the offices.

3. Different factors including workplace culture, geographical location, and behavior of individuals play a role in making empowered or handicapped. Where's, in case of me, I have two different experiences. Number one, When I worked as a public relations practitioner in another organization, I experienced a handicap in terms of equal opportunities, and acceptance as a personality as a PR practitioner by the working environment of the hosting organization.

Number two, when I worked at my parent department, I experienced more power than the hosting organizations. However, as a whole, being a woman, I never felt empowered like my male counterpart.

4.   Not at all. I feel women are doing excellent jobs almost in all fields.

5.   It is 50% ratio. It depends on how an organization or department provides a decent and enabling working atmosphere to its females. Now a large number of females working in the public relations sector depend and organization to organizations how much it empowers or makes her handicapped, overall women are being empowered in the public relations sector.

6.   Handicapped. Keeping a balance between family and work life is more challenging for a woman as compared to men in our society. There are no childcare centers and no transportation.

7.   I always felt empowered as Pakistan luckily respects women. At times it is hard due to personal domestic priorities which can affect the work at times.

8.   I never felt handicapped being a woman practitioner. I think the one who wants to work can excel in any kind of environment.

9.   This is a feeling be empowerment. The participation of women in society leads to economic empowerment of women which can have a positive impact on families and community. Similarly, the role of women in policy-making helps a lot to settle different issues of women, and their permanent opportunities to play a constructive role in society.

10.   Definitely, being a woman practitioner gives a feeling of empowerment. Breaking the taboos that only males can handle this subject is quite satisfying. Setting the precedent for young women in this field their encouragement to excel gives a good feeling. Hence, it also contributes to good policy initiatives for women.

11.   As a female public relations officer, my gender can sometimes be an advantage in building relationships and trust with clients and stakeholders. Women are often perceived as more empathetic, communicative, and collaborative, which can help in managing crises, negotiating, and delivering effective communication strategies.

12.   I felt most of the time empowered by being a woman in my profession as women are respected and regarded in our society and I felt handicapped only once in my

professional life. It was after the motorway rape incident in 2020, I had to visit Rahim Yar Khan from Multan for the verification of newspapers and it was certain that I would come back late in the middle of the night. So, I was perturbed but even then I had the idea to have the escort from the police from every district across the way.

Q10. How do you feel empowered to be a public relations practitioner in your organization? In your opinion, what are the official aspects/prestige/responsibilities/actions (you may have or not) that make a PR practitioner powerful in an organization?

Answers

1. In my personal experience, I do enjoy full leadership roles and authority in some of my previous posts and desks. It helped me develop narrative and PR campaigns successfully for Ministries. However, empowerment in PR goes beyond job titles; it's about making a meaningful impact, building trust, and contributing to organizational success. By embracing these aspects and responsibilities, PR practitioners become powerful advocates for their organizations.

2. As mentioned above in reply to Question 9, actually it is the Terms of Reference (ToRs) that empowers you to perform different tasks. You cannot perform tasks that are not included in your ToRs. So just saying that I am not empowered because I cannot perform some specific tasks/activities that are not included in my ToRs is totally a false notion. As far as my ToRs are concerned I am fully empowered to perform all the tasks/activities that have been mentioned in it.

3. The empowerment of a female public relations practitioner is a concept that can be understood through the experiences she faces.

These experiences may vary from female to female keeping in view one's personality, opportunities, facilities, professional skills, working environment, etc.

Several factors that contributed to my empowerment include:

➢ The feminist aspect itself is a power. For example, an experienced male PR practitioner was not accepted in place of me at an organization by an authority, when I was transferred to another place at the beginning of my career as PRO although I had no special PR skills at that time.

- Office equipped with a chair, table, computer and in certain cases supporting staff and transport also.

- Professional skills. For example, I know how to craft messages for media, handle crisis PR situations and campaigns, and manage media to build an image of the organization or the personality I have been working for.

- Performance: Having a leadership role as a PR practitioner, I always achieved goals of publicity and properly propagated hidden objectives to shape public perception through consistently delivering successful campaigns of public relations enhancing my prestige within and outside of the organization.

- I always tried to establish strong relationships with officials within the organization and external officials in other related departments or media organizations.

- Nurturing new PR practitioners: I enhanced my prestige by guiding the newly inducted PROs and sharing my successful stories with them to influence them towards the profession of public relations.

- Digging out development content: I always tried my best to explore new content about any development, policy, or project taking place in the public interest of my organization and issue it to the media in the form of a press release.

4. It is a vague question. PRO is not "empowering or imprisoning" per se. It's an art and relates to interpersonal communication skills. And honestly, after an experience of almost 10 years in this domain, I don't perceive it has any connection with gender. Whoever knows how to tackle tricky situations amicably, anyone who can get along with the stupidest of them out there and keep their nerve while listening to pretty harsh/nonsensical arguments is a good PRO.

5. Trust, training, and an enabling environment are very important for professional growth. Overall, I feel empowered in my organization. As we are jumping into the digital era gradually. Knowledge and training of modern digital gadgets to establish strong human relations and to highlight achievements for society is very important.

6. I think society will take some more time to accept women in this field. Women are always threatened by expected harassment in public relations. Though the Harassment Act provides support in papers but the mindset has not changed yet. So women would bear bullying and harassment due to the taboo attached to filing a case on that ground.

Empowering a woman in the real sense would require changing the male mindset. Still a few more years to go.

7. Only trust in your competent authority can empower us.

8. Being a leader in performing publicity duties, my enthusiasm, strong determination, and coordination with lower staff.

9. Public relations is a highly valuable job in a country like Pakistan. If we have contact in any organization, it is convenient to have your work done easily. The first thing toward this PR job is to be committed. One should be committed to this job to get a good PR name. The second thing is responsibility is responsibility. The responsibility brings a good name to the organization as well as a PR person.

10. I have worked as a PR officer for 7 years in PID, M/o Information and Broadcasting where heading this home publicity / public relations responsibility was the most important task. Keeping contact with media persons of all leading TV channels/newspapers regarding publicity of VVIP including PM, presidents, and federal ministers gives the feeling of empowerment. The aspect that a PR person excels in is the commitment to the job. The responsibility to complete the task, and the dedication, if adopted by a PR person, will excel.

11. Media relations: Building positive relationships with journalists and securing favorable coverage for the organization. Stakeholder engagement: Managing relationships with key stakeholders, including customers, investors, and government agencies. Leadership and team management: Inspiring and guiding a team of PR professionals to deliver outstanding results.

Q11. What are the practices of your organization's top management to view you as an important officer and involve you in the decision-making process while taking important policy decisions?

Answers

1. I have worked with political ministers which gave me full liberty to make media strategy and implement it with my full zealous. However, my working experience in other federal organizations is quite the opposite of the former. There is no involvement of me in the decision-making process.

2. Yes, in the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA), Islamabad, the Deputy Director of Media Affairs and Public Relations Officer are considered important officers in all matters related to media, advertising, and other tasks related to public relations. We are fully involved in all the important policy decisions related to media, advertisements, and other public relations aspects.

3. My top management involves me in the decision-making process about media management, publicity, and PR campaigns only and not in other matters or the policies of the organization. It discusses with me also about the feedback of the media campaigns and counters the adverse content if any.

4. yes.

5. Yes, my organization values my suggestion/input in the decision-making process.

6. No not at all.

7. Yes.

8. When I was working in Peshawar head of my organization usually involved me in publicity matters and included my input in important policy decisions.

9. Undoubtedly, dedication and commitment are always appreciated by the seniors. Once, they get the desired dedication, they involve the officer in the decision-making process.

10. If the senior management is convinced of the officers' dedication and commitment to work, they include an officer in every important task. PR officers' feedback from media persons is enough for his press picture.

11. Vis-à-vis the hierarchical position of my post, due importance is accorded to my take on important matters by the senior management.

Q12. What kind of relationship exists between gender and power in your profession/organization? (Your feelings while performing your professional responsibilities/duties.)

Answers

1. In my current organization, the situation is quite worse. There is gender parity and the share of role distribution and empowerment is quite disgraceful. I often came across misogynist and sexist remarks even from top management which is discouraging.

2. The relationship between gender and power is a product of the job/tasks assigned to that position. It is not concerned with any female posted/assigned to any activity/task. It is the position/posting that empowers you either to perform certain tasks or refrain from doing so, while the gender aspect has very little to do with this.

3. About the relationship between gender and power, I face barriers in advancing to top-tier roles despite being a potentially qualified person may be due to gender bias, and disliked systematic institutional dynamics.

4. Not much. Because it is simple. No one has any control over it. If only women are available in the office. They're not left with much choice because they have to get work done. And because of this compulsion, everyone can see, that gender bias is mostly fabricated than being a real issue.

5. Overall the kind of relationship between genders in my organization is equal but sometimes it varies because of the nature of assignments in the public sector like total field jobs, and night shifts.

6. Female gender is vulnerable so power remains with men in most cases. Very rarely women are powerful.

7. 80 percent, I feel comfortable while performing responsibilities, however, there are very less events when we come across people with bad intentions.

8. Sometimes, I felt that I should go for desk jobs, but my high-ups always assigned me field jobs, at that juncture, I felt monotonous while always performing field jobs. Therefore, I tried for deputation to some other organization, where I became empowered again. My message is that if one is devoted to any kind of work, there are ways and means to accomplish it.

9. As already stated, efforts are going on to break the taboos about gender discrimination. Due to positive trends introduced to bring gender equality and diversity, females are enjoying power in every profession. Hence, in this department, the females are working in a comfortable environment and enjoying the powers of men. No reservation lies about males dominating the organization.

10. Press Information Department is an example where women's empowerment is shown. Where the Majority of officers are females who are performing their tasks diligently.

Most of the officers are performing duties and being head of this branch, no observation of any officer lies regarding disparity.

11.   Gender has less to do with power in my organization. It is more about how high you are on the organizational ladder as well as how professionally strong a person you are.

Q13. How does your gender affect your power in your organization?

Answers

1.   Female officers encountered challenges related to bias, glass ceilings, and work-life balance.

2.   Already replied in answer to the questions above, gender does not affect my power in the organization. The ToRs/tasks assigned do affect the power of an organization. When I was posted as Public Relations Officer, I had different sets of ToRs to perform, now I am posted as Deputy Director of Media Affairs, and this position has a different set of ToRs, so now I am performing my assignment according to the present position.

3.   During my service, I faced cultural, social, institutional, and racial behaviors that limited my access to power, which included traditional gender roles, family expectations, responsibilities, and harassment at the workplace.

For example, once I was assigned a responsibility as a public relations practitioner with a federal minister and a minister of state at the same ministry. Both ministers were of different provinces and races. During my duties, one of the ministers accused me of favoring racism for promoting the other minister of my race in the media in a letter addressed to my parent department and asked for legal action, which was denied. I think the suggested action denial in my favor was also my power as a female gender.

4.   It doesn't.

5.   To some extent, gender affects power like family background and social status.

6.   As described above.

7.   As women, we can be more responsible and dedicated towards our duties. Our organizations respect us.

8.   I am good at performing field duties therefore, my high-ups always assigned me PR duties due to which I became fed up with common duties. I like variety in work.. At one point in my career, my boss restricted me towards field duties due to which I opted for deputation to another organization. Now, I am performing a desk job and I am very

happy. Nothing becomes impossible for me while performing duties. There is a way or solution to every problem.

9. As above.

10. I have not gone through any issue/problem that could depict this. The overall environment is very good and gender is not affecting power in any way.

11. As explained above, gender has a secondary role in assuming or wielding power in my organization. We have had powerful female heads of the organization whose strategic decision-making was in no way less than that of their male counterparts.

Q14. Being a female PR practitioner what kind of professional treatment you experience from media persons (male and female both) while performing your media relations duties?

Answers

1. It is good in general. Media persons are forthcoming to female PRO and engaging with is quite easy.

2. As a female Public Relations practitioner, I have always been treated with respect and honour by the media persons both male and female. However, to tell you the truth, it entirely depends upon your behavior and how you treat someone else. I have always treated media people with honor and respect and they have reciprocated in the same way.

3. Media relations type of Public Relations is commonly practiced in Pakistan to forge a strong relationship with mass media organizations, especially in the private sector to get a good space. Journalists (reporters) are contacted through direct telephone calls and digital media for the coverage of the events or delivered with press releases. In response, they would also contact me as a source of validated content and a means of facilitation to seek public comment on other news stories.

During this exercise of these responsibilities and frequent interactions, the relations with male journalists, sometimes blur the distinction between individual personality attraction and professional activities leading to harassment.

I believe, being a woman public relations practitioner, I experience a good deal of reactions from male Journalism professionals due to my personality, behavior, and professional skills.

During my experience with the journalists, I found most of them non-professional as they would act as public information (press releases) carriers only rather than contributing any exclusive story to their organizations concerned although some of them always did better. Although, I felt comfortable with women journalists in terms of behavior, professionally it was not so easy to communicate with them. It is very difficult for me to define a journalist in Pakistan.

4. It's a mix. Women journalists think with a female officer they can relate their issues easily and get differential treatment as well. Males on the other hand sometimes think they can "flirt" their way through. However, overall it's a similar experience with both genders.

5. Overall female earns respect and owner but sometimes there is fear of harassment, scandal, blame games, and accusations of corruption.

6. We had controlled media in Pakistan from 1947 to 2002 and private and free media has not evolved. It had to be allowed as a need of the hour and media personnel have not gone through the required training, therefore they lack professionalism. They usually resort to blackmailing and other such tactics. Very few media personnel are professional in their attitude.

7. As my experience is concerned, the media is kind and respectful. Females are quite comfortable and males are also respectful but again at times very few male journalists do try to behave strangely but being female we keep a limit so things get better.

8. I experienced very cordial relations and professional treatment with media personnel.

9. A professional person either male or female is always respectful and cautious toward females. Secondly, it is important how you treat them. If you treat them professionally, positively, and with courtesy. they will give you the same respect. Overall, the ratio of media person behavior is up to the mark.

10. Being in Press Information Department as head of PR/HP department remained a very good experience. Keeping in a lesion with media personnel including beet reporters/ chief editors/editors/reporters of leading national and regional newspapers and similarly with producers/anchor persons of leading TV channels remained good. A professional person is always counters especially while dealing with females. It is important to deal with them respectfully and courteously to get respect.

11.   Receive respect, cooperation, and support from both male and female media persons.

Q15. What important challenges do women public relations practitioners face in Pakistan? Please provide your opinion.

1.   Like any other profession, Women in PR often face gender bias and stereotypes. They may be perceived as less competent or less authoritative than their male counterparts. However, addressing these challenges requires collective efforts from organizations, policymakers, and society. By fostering safe and work-friendly environments, we can empower women in PR and create a more inclusive profession.

2.   I think that as such women Public Relations practitioner faces the same challenges as the male. However, being female sometimes you feel shy to participate in some ceremonies/functions that are male-dominated. I understand that where such a situation exists, only male Public relations practitioners should be allowed to perform the tasks. Otherwise, as such there are no specific challenges that women public relations practitioners face.

3.   I have been experiencing a plethora of challenges related to my profession as a public relations practitioner in a conservative society due to my stereotyped image as my feminist power always vanished in the lust of a male-dominated environment at the workplace especially.

Following are some factors that added issues to my challenging responsibilities:

➢ Acceptance as PR practitioner:

I think most of the people or organizations I have been working for/with were unaware of the status and importance of the PR profession because I had to fight to get the basic facilities necessary for carrying out my responsibilities.

➢ Non-cooperation:

I noticed the nature or mood of the people at the workplace to let me know about the developments in publicity activities in certain cases or they may be unaware of the importance of that specific event or content.

➢ Recognition of the PR profession:

I have an experience to come across many people who don't have an idea about the real function of the PR profession and take it as normal official work.

➢ Half-cooked PR professionals:

In some cases, I have experienced dealing with half-cooked PR practitioners who may be from within the organization in addition to their responsibilities, I have been working with or a political worker of a minister of any political party. Such types of publicists even have no experience working within the system of the public sector. They mostly use social media just to publicize photos or some incomplete content.

  ➢ Online harassment:

Women PR practitioners are vulnerable to online harassment in the highly patriarchal society of Pakistan.

For example, I have found many people who have always been very punctual or regular to send me messages of good morning, good evening, on religious or social events, etc using emojis symbolizing unacceptable designs, which were never responded by me. In addition, songs, jokes, or other meaningful content.

  ➢ Gender discrimination:

I have been a victim of gender discrimination in the workplace. For example, limited career advancement opportunities and personal likes/dislikes.

Traditional role and work balance:

It has been very difficult for me to balance my traditional roles at home as a caregiver and homemaker and my official role as a PR practitioner or media manager.

4. Harassment and Ridicule from officers or other services, as they lack understanding of our job description.A few ministers are also reluctant to work with a female PRO, as they feel a female PRO cannot move with them to their constituency or stay for late work hours. They are right to some extent. But it varies from person to person.

5. Uncomfortable working environment., lack of training harassment at workplace, low income, market competition, fear of scandals, baby care facilitation is not available, timing issues in the public relations sectors, transportation issues.

6. The only thing that female PR officers have to face is the male mindset that has not changed yet.

7. In my opinion, PR responsibility and duties in the public sector are more secure than in any private sector. Big organizations and PR departments are good to work with in comfortable environments.

8. Officially, I faced the problem of conveyance when I became PRO to the governor, MS to the governor took my Jimmy Jeep, and handed that to another officer. I felt anxious in terms of facilities. I was not provided with an independent car like male officers but only a pick-and-drop facility was provided. Sometimes, I need to wait for a very long time to avail my official pic and drop facility, hence reaching home very late.

9. Though, the public relations profession is a challenging task and is more challenging for women as compared to men. The stories of threats and harassment are very common. Least encouragement from family to continue this profession. The PR aptitude is not accepted by the families, especially spouses. Least resources are another challenge for women in the PR field. Least training opportunities. Support from the organization.

10. In a country like Pakistan, it seems that public relations job is designed for males. However, over time, the involvement of women in every field encouraged women to get involved in this field too. Despite many years of active participation, one cannot say this field is comfortable for women. This field despite many efforts to break taboos and make it comfortable for women is still in its evolutionary process. The threats and harassment at workplaces cannot be ignored. Though, to empower women laws are there to curb these elements of women harassment, here again, social norms become a hindrance to raising voices against this. To settle these challenges, laws need implementation.

11. Women are still underrepresented in senior PR positions, and there is a perception that males are more suitable for leading roles. Traditional cultural norms can make it challenging for females to maintain a balance between work and family assignments, which can lead to career setbacks or burnout. Women may also face restrictions on mobility and networking opportunities due to cultural expectations around modesty and propriety. Women working in PR may face harassment or threats due to their profession or the nature of their work (e.g., managing delicate matters or working on prominent campaigns). This can create safety concerns and limit their mobility and freedom to work independently or at nighttime events/venues/locations etc. Women in PR may lack access to mentors, role models, and support networks, which can make

it challenging to advance their careers and overcome obstacles. Women in PR may earn less than their male counterparts, even when they have similar experience and qualifications. This can limit their financial independence and career advancement opportunities. These challenges can create barriers for women in PR, but they can also be overcome through hard work, networking, and advocacy for gender equality and women's rights in the professional field.

Q16. How do you describe the conditions of the public relations profession in Pakistan with reference to women practitioners' decision to join the profession?

Answers

1. Pakistan's social fabric is deeply patriarchal, impacting women's career prospects across various fields, including public relations. Women willing to join public relations should focus on building their skills, networking, and advocating for their rights within the profession. Organizations and policymakers need to create an enabling environment that encourages women's participation and recognizes their contributions in shaping public perception and organizational reputation.

2. I think the women's conditions in PR field are better and I highly appreciate this decision that women have joined public relations as a profession. It would not only open new avenues for women's employment but will also allow them to express themselves and their ideas/opinions in different sectors/walks of life.

3. Public Relations in Pakistan is a growing profession and offers opportunities for women. As far as women are concerned, there is a need to understand the concept of chance or choice as we live in a patriarchal and conservative society with odd cultural norms. It is not easy to defy family guidelines and social dynamics.However, this profession is full of challenges like gender biases, and even "gender acceptance". Women are joining the profession by chance for economic empowerment as the overall availability of jobs in inflation-hit Pakistan is less than the number of job seekers. On the other hand, due to cultural compulsions and societal expectations, some women choose only selective professions compromising their career decisions and advancement within the field and the PR profession is not one of them. In the Pakistani political scenario, the PR profession is thankless and in certain cases is a powerless job without the provision of basic requirements to carry out the professional

functions.I suggest that women who intend to join this profession should reconsider their decision keeping in view the dynamics, requirements, functions, and shortcomings of the public relations profession.

4. Same as above. It's a good profession but it depends where the lady is going and what is her work environment.

5. If a woman wants to join public relations as a profession she must be good-tempered, patient in listening to others, well groomed, well dressed, well versed about current affairs, time management, and sharp-minded. But a decent and conducive atmosphere at the workplace matters a lot.

6. Described above.

7. If any woman has done media studies qualification, in my opinion PR profession is the most secure and respectable job.

8. When I opted to be PRO to the governor KP, seniors in my office discouraged me and tried to convince me not to join it but I paid no heed as I had always been supported by my family in terms of trust, work and following codes of conduct of my profession. My emphasis is again on determination if you have strong determination no one can become a hurdle in your way.

9. The public Relations profession in Pakistan is at its early stages and needs to mature. Pakistan culturally is a male-dominated society and males also have challenges in this field, hence it is more difficult for women. The insecurities and threats to women hinder them from excelling in the field. The continuous support from home and organizations can help female to make their place in the field.

10. Conditions of the public relations profession as already discussed are in an evolutionary process. Some constant efforts are required to make the conditions more comfortable for women. So they can perform their tasks more actively. Implementation of existing laws, a surety that women will be supported in case of issues will encourage women to be effective PR persons. Training can play an effective role in supporting women to do their work.

11. The public relations profession in Pakistan presents both opportunities and challenges for women practitioners when it comes to joining the field. On the one hand, the profession offers women the chance to use their communication skills to make a

positive impact on society by shaping public opinion through strategic messaging campaigns for various organizations across different sectors such as government agencies or private companies operating in Pakistan or abroad etc. On the other hand, women may face challenges such as gender bias, cultural norms, safety concerns, lack of support networks or pay disparities, as previously mentioned. Despite these challenges, women are increasingly joining the PR profession in Pakistan, driven by a desire to make a difference, pursue their passions, or advance their careers in an industry that is growing in importance in the country. The rise of digital media, social media, content marketing, influencer marketing etc., has also created new opportunities for women in PR to leverage their skills in these areas. Overall, the conditions of the PR profession in Pakistan present both opportunities and challenges for women practitioners.

5.2 Answers to Research Questions

R.Q. 1 How do female public relations practitioners in Pakistani Public relations industry make meaning of gender in Pakistan?

Various respondents offer a range of viewpoints on PR profession in Pakistan. Certain respondents believe that it is still traditionally male-dominated, while others view a paradigm shift in the profession as a noticeable number of women practitioners have entered the public relations field. The gender dynamics within the profession reflect a significant change towards gender diversity. A few believe that efforts are being made to bring about change in gender equity and challenge traditional roles of male dominance in the profession. They view evolution in the roles of gender from men's domination to the entering of women into the profession.

One of the participants acknowledged male dominance in the public relations profession and noted that females can adopt the profession in the same way as males. She stated, "I do not see any difficulty for women in adopting the profession. In today's world when social media use has become common, almost all the fields or all walks of life that were previously considered as purely male-dominant professions have become open for females. I think that public relations suits women in the same way as it does for males."

The presence and rise of female P.R. professionals in the public sector designates a positive trend toward gender equity in this field. This development underlines the value of constant struggles to help and empower females in the profession to get more extensive and unbiased workplaces.

Emphasizing equal opportunities for females, one other respondent disagreed with the male dominance and described, " Well, when we discuss in the context of Pakistan's society, men tended to dominate but now the scenario is fast changing as more and more women are entering into the profession and other fields owing to the 10 percent women quota and otherwise their overall ability and competence. In the Ministry of Information, women outnumber men, so we can safely say that the profession is not at all male-dominated in Pakistan".

The number of women public relations practitioners entering the profession is increasing not only in the public sector but also even in the private sector in Pakistan.

Recognizing past male dominance, one of the interviewees observed changing trends in the gender dynamics to join the profession and explained, "In the past it was male-dominated but now the majority of women occupy the post of public relations in the public and private sectors. Now, we can say that public relations are a female-dominated profession in the country".

The dynamics of the public relations profession are different at rural and urban levels in the province of KPK. The overall society of the province is conservative but the women face more challenges to work at rural levels.

Another respondent noted challenges for females in P.R roles in rural areas and narrated, "In the urban areas females can also perform public relations-related jobs. However, in rural areas like FATA, it is a bit challenging for a woman but not impossible".

To bring about gender equality, constant efforts are being made at the government level within the public relations profession leading to encouraging trends to join the profession and promote gender diversity.

A participant opined, "Public relations is considered a male-dominated profession but efforts over the past few years to promote gender equality have negated this concept to an extent. Efforts are continued to break down this traditional concept and positive trends are being introduced to bring gender diversity to the profession".

Like other professions, societal norms encourage men in public relations professions also. However, the efforts to include women in the profession gradually start to change the landscape.

One of the interview participants recognized societal norms favoring males but acknowledged that changing trends towards gender diversity are taking place and commented, "The societal norms and culture support males in every profession, especially the PR profession. Hence, the inclusion of females in every sector of society has helped to change this concept and is providing a better environment for women, even then it's a male-dominated profession".

The current state of women in PR practice in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting depicts a developing scenario that indicates a significant shift in number of women outnumbering male-dominant professional roles.

One of the respondents explained, "Pakistan is a multicultural society with different norms. Cultural and social factors are the main tools that can measure the diversity of gender. As far as the capital of Pakistan is concerned, the gender dynamics in the PR profession are changing. For example, 30 public relations professionals are working with the different federal ministers out of them 11 are females this time. It means 37 percent of women PR professionals constitute the total PR practitioners from the Press Information Department (responsible for federal government publicity), an attached department of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The increase in the ratio of females in profession shows a paradigm shift in gender leading to gender diversity".

The public relations practitioners expressed different perspectives on how gender can affect the performance of individuals positively or badly in the field. The interview participants noted that although they won appraisal for having active listening skills, commitment to their profession, and capacity to improve relations with internal and external publics at the same time several challenges like the glass ceiling factor, biases, and work-life balance issues could affect their gender in the profession.

Some respondents have shared experiences where their gender exerted a minimum influence on their performance as their colleagues helped them adapt to the workplace. A few participants have underlined communication gaps and difficulties emerging out of societal behaviors, responsibilities to take care of spouses and children, and after-office engagement limitations. Overall, the majority of the women acknowledged that the profession has affected their gender despite advancement in the field of public relations.

Women public relations practitioners may encounter challenges in balancing family commitments, handling gender biases, and socializing with media personnel in male-dominated environments. Dedication to the profession and the significant potential to counter gender biases may lead to thriving in the field in the wake of these challenges.

One of the interviewees noted, "Women public relations practitioners may face challenges related to gender bias and work-life balance when they actively engage in improving media relations for successful public relations campaigns".

Some of the females detailed their experiences of how their profession could not affect their gender, how their colleagues supported them in becoming accustomed to the environment of a new workplace at the beginning of their profession, and how they grew their personalities leading to improvement in the profession as public relations practitioners. However, psychological factors like shyness affect gender when exposed to a new workplace.

 One of the respondents informed about countering challenges involving introspection and adjusting to new situations over time to enhance performance stated, "When I first entered this profession, I was feeling shy but over time gradually I started acquainting myself with the working environment. Many colleagues in the office also helped me get used to the office environment. Therefore, the gender effect did not creep into my profession. I performed much better as a Public Relations Officer".

Communication gaps between women public relations practitioners and their publics may affect gender due to stereotyped challenges like late office hours, harassment, or gender biases. At the same time, being a wife or mother it is not always easy to maintain a balance between personal and professional responsibilities.

A female in the profession acknowledged, "Being a woman, I have communication gaps with my publics in certain cases due to behavior patterns demonstrated by male chauvinist society. For example, harassment, gender biases, late sitting in the office, traveling with male personalities, outdoor activities, etc. Being a wife and mother, I have some responsibilities. For example, taking care of the house and raising the children are the two main factors that hinder my professional responsibilities as a dynamic and effective public relations practitioner".

In certain cases, they had to draw professional boundaries due to cultural challenges and could not interact with the people within or outside of the organization properly despite some experiences of positive interactions with their male counterparts.

Another participant in the interview referring to her experiences of attending only selected professional events explained, "In Pakistan at times, it is difficult to attend all events and occasions as a female but mostly I never felt any problem".

Due to the concentration of government offices in Islamabad, locations also affect gender in many ways as various women from other parts of the country had to relocate to this new workplace to join the profession.

Highlighting the financial challenges of working females, one of the interviewees stated, "Gender affects at various levels. Most of the females belonging to other cities have to compromise on their careers to save their family life. The salary and the facilities provided by the government do not support maintaining two houses or shifting the family even. The accommodation in Islamabad is very expensive compared to other cities".

Despite the rise in the number of women public relations practitioners, stereotypical representation of females still exists in the profession due to gender biases. One of the participants suggested that only hard work and competency could help overcome the challenges in the profession and described, "Gender biases and stereotypes still exist in the field of public relations, and it's crucial to work hard, prove competence, and overcome any obstacles to succeed".

Responses collected from various female professionals with diverse demographic backgrounds and unique experiences in the public relations field pointed out a sophisticated

viewpoint on difficulties and empowerment the women confronted with during their careers. Whereas some individuals described feelings of empowerment originating from opportunities drawn from developments and implementation of strategies, other participants recognized barriers like gender biases and unfair representation in decision-making processes. Factors like societal norms, official assignments, and workplace environments influence feelings of being handicapped or empowered. Having differing experiences, most females feel powerful by dispelling stereotypes and playing significant contributory roles in their profession. Significance of encouraging workplace, policy measures, and societal values for females' roles emerges as basic themes in comprehending the intricacies of women practitioners' empowerment and challenges in the profession.

There is no set rule to define being empowered or handicapped because it depends on the working environment, position, performing potential, and opportunities. Women public relations practitioners experienced a mix of empowerment and challenges. One of the respondents expressing her experiences in the profession stated, "As a woman, I believe that empowerment and challenges coexist. I feel empowered by the opportunities to shape narratives, and build relationships while feeling handicapped by hurdles like gender biases and unequal representation". This response exhibits a balanced approach that identifies both the Pros and cons of being a female practitioner in public relations although she faces barriers in the profession in various government organizations. She highlights the significance of fixing these difficulties through understanding, awareness, and education by creating a comprehensive and empowering environment for female practitioners.

A Woman public relations practitioner can be powerful if rules, assignments, and working environments are in her favor otherwise handicapped. One of the interviewees described, "I do not think there is a question of empowerment or handicap in performing duties. It depends on position, a set of terms of reference, tasks or activities, and the working environment in the offices.

One another respondent describes the concept of empowerment or challenges as a complicated relationship between factors like individual interactions, workplace environment, and geographical location in building experiences. Comprehending these dynamics may play a significant role in enhancing equality, inclusivity, and empowerment in professional cultures. She

stated, "Different factors including workplace culture, geographical location, and behavior of individuals play a role in making empowered or handicapped. I experienced a handicap in terms of equal opportunities, and acceptance as a personality as a PR practitioner by the working environment of the hosting organization".

Balancing priorities is another perception to define being empowered or handicapped. Although empowerment is crucial for working females. In certain cases, women public relations practitioners are left handicapped when they have to prioritize family or work-life issues following societal hopes and the non-availability of arrangements like childcare centers at the workplace and the provision of transportation. Many females feel empowered in controlling these difficulties with determination and resilience. Having shared unique experiences, a participant felt handicapped in terms of keeping a balance between family and work life and stated, " It is more challenging for a woman as compared to men in our society. There are no childcare centers and no transportation".

Study explores that females feel empowered in the profession when they are economically strong enough to exploit the social norms in their favor. A respondent noted, "The participation of women in society leads to economic empowerment of females which can have a positive impact on families and community".

Empowerment contributes to developing initiatives that may assist in promoting gender equality in the professional domains. The empowerment that stems from breaking taboos in the male-dominated society can lead to rewards that may be beneficial not only for women in the profession but also for future female professionals. One of the respondents acknowledged, "Being a woman, breaking the taboos that only males can handle gives a sense of empowerment. Setting the precedent for young women to join the field gives a good feeling. Hence, it also contributes to good policy initiatives for women".

Females in public relations roles can improve performance by focusing on crisis management and emotional intelligence abilities important for handling reputation issues actively and building the image of the organization. By improving strategic communication skills, they can contribute successfully to handling crises through their exceptional qualities of being emotionally intelligent, sensitive, and adaptable to professional challenges.

As a public relations practitioner, an interviewee acknowledged that being a female in this profession may be empowering due to unequivocal ingrained abilities linked to women. She viewed her gender as a force that improves capabilities of communication skills and collaboration in the field. She stated, "My gender can sometimes be an advantage in building relationships and trust with clients and stakeholders. Women are often perceived as more empathetic, communicative, and collaborative, which can help in managing crises, negotiating, and delivering effective communication strategies".

In a professional setting, a female can experience both empowered and handicapped. It is important to identify and overcome challenges and vulnerabilities that may arise, while also recognizing the powers and opportunities that appear with being a respectful member of the community. Women public relations practitioners have abilities to manage these complications with strong anticipatory initiatives suggests a laudable technique to harmonize empowerment and safety in professional pursuits.

Referring to the complex connection between empowerment and vulnerability in the lives of females in the profession, a participant acknowledged, "Societal norms empower women by giving them respect but I felt handicapped when I had to travel to Rahim Yar Khan from Multan for my professional assignment and I had to seek police escort for return at night after the motorway rape incident in 2020 outside Lahore".

R.Q.2 How do female public relations practitioners make meaning of power in Pakistan?

P.R. plays a significant role in empowering women. Female professionals influence public opinion significantly, build narratives, and activate the publics to promote gender equality. In addition, the PR industry offers a platform for females to assume roles in leading positions, motivating future-generation practitioners to address challenges and contribute to the common goals of tomorrow. Public relations field has developed to emphasize establishing mutually advantageous relationships between institutions and people.

This profession is now more open to the public and relational than before underlining the value of adjusting to innovative technologies, with content marketing and digital advertising in a significant role in crafting communication strategies. In the modern age of social media scenario,

P.R professionals can contribute significantly in maneuvering the evolution of communication techniques to engage with audiences effectively.

One of the public relations practitioners in the interview acknowledged that her profession is a complicated idea that goes beyond mere job titles and highlights significant influence, fostering trust and contributing to achieving the goals of the organization instead, she stated, "I can be powerful by advocating for my organization, embracing aspects of a meaningful impact, building trust, and contributing to organizational success and responsibilities".

Public relations practitioners function within the terms of reference that outline the scope of assignments a professional is empowered to complete. It explains that being unable to engage in certain responsibilities beyond the work guidelines does not indicate being handicapped. One of the participants described, "Adherence to rules strictly in performing duties in the profession makes me powerful and it does not mean that if I am unable to complete a specific assignment that is not listed in rules leaves me handicapped. The main impression is conceived that the rule of law provides me an authority to perform unequivocally".

Public relations industry in Pakistan has been growing for a long wherein females are outshined, with data displaying the increasing number of women still facing issues like sexual harassment and work-life balance to reach a leadership position.

Various factors like the provision of basic equipment at the workplace, the ability to foster new professionals, the development of links within and outside the organization, performance, success, and growth in the field may contribute to the empowerment of females in media relations.

Another respondent noted that empowerment is a combination of personal qualities, connections, and experiences and described, "I am empowered by multidimensional concepts such as computer, supporting staff, transportation, relationship with media, achieving publicity goals, strong connections with senior management, supervising new entrants in the profession, in addition, a feminist aspect itself multiplies my power".

Public relations is a complicated domain that is aligned with communication strategies influencing publics rather than being harshly about empowerment or limitations. In specific

conditions, the achievements in the profession are not gender dependent. To be empowered is to handle challenging situations skillfully, cultivate connections with hard people, and remain composed when involved in adverse settings irrespective of gender. An interviewee explained, "It is a vague question. It's an art and relates to interpersonal communication skills. It has nothing to do with gender. Whoever knows how to tackle tricky situations amicably, anyone who can get along with the stupidest of them out there and keep their nerve while listening to pretty harsh/nonsensical arguments is a good PR practitioner. Individuals' empowerment is influenced by training, trust, professional growth, and a supportive environment within an organization. As we are evolving into the digital age, expertise is required to get enough knowledge and embrace technology in building meaningful relationships, and highlighting successes can empower professionals personally too. A respondent said, "Trust, training, and an enabling environment are very important for professional growth that makes me feel empowered in my organization as we are gradually jumping into the digital era. Knowledge and training of modern digital gadgets to establish strong human relations and to highlight achievements are also the concepts of my empowerment". Public relations is the field wherein societal recognition of women's role is evident. Women are still reluctant to voice their concerns about intimidation at the workplace despite having backs of legal support like the Harassment Act because the social stigma, cultural dynamics, and their stereotyped image complicate the situation in reporting such incidents making them handicapped. Women's real empowerment entails rearranging the predominant male mentality. Whereas generating more inclusive and secure space for women in all fields, evolution may take time to bring a gradual change in the mindset of males and foster gender equality. Endorsing this statement, one of the interviewees acknowledged, "I think society will take some more time to accept women in this field. Women are always threatened by expected harassment in public relations. Though the Harassment Act provides support in papers only but the societal mindset has not changed yet. So women would bear bullying and harassment due to the taboo attached to filing a case on that ground. Empowering a woman in the real sense would require changing the male mindset. Still a few more years to go".

Prioritizing the worth of commitment and duties, public relations professionals can offer themselves as trustworthy PR practitioners, building constructive connections and achieving goals in the field. This highlights the vital role these abilities demonstrate in promoting a good image of

the organization and individual in the PR role, especially in the setting where public relations is attaining recognition and struggles are being made to improve its impact and professionalism. One of the participants acknowledged the importance of the profession in Pakistan and described, "The first thing toward PR job is to be committed to earning a good name in public relations. The second thing is a responsibility that brings a positive repute to the organization as well".

Power of public relations professionals lies in their potential to handle media interactions effectively, make robust relationships with key stakeholders, guide counter-communication crises, and fulfill official assignments that contribute to influencing public opinions, promoting repute, and yielding positive results for the organization.

Explaining the perception of power in the profession, another participant stated, "Building positive relationships with journalists and securing favorable coverage for the organization, managing relationships with key stakeholders, including customers, investors, and government agencies, and guiding a team of PR professionals to deliver outstanding results".

The experience of Public relations practitioners involved in the decision-making process about media-related policies and PR campaigns may be different across the organizations. The level of commitment and dedication influences the decision of the seniors to involve professionals in the PR role in significant assignments in response to appreciation and recognition of these qualities. In most cases, working with political governments and caretaker setups in Pakistan provided the freedom to create and execute media strategies passionately.

The majority of the interviewees have acknowledged their role in important policy decisions, a few mentioned that their participation was accepted only after they performed well and won the trust of the senior management. At the same time, few were not provided an opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process. Explaining her experience of how institutional cultures influence the extent of participation and value credited to individuals in decision-making processes in different settings, one of the women public relations practitioners described, "Working with political governments granted me full liberty in crafting and execution of media strategies while the experience with other federal organizations is quite the opposite of the former one".

Another participant mentioned that she has been actively involved in significant policy assignments of an organization related to media and explained, "Yes, in the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA), Islamabad, the Public Relations Officer is considered important in all matters about media, advertising, and other public relations aspects". Effective public relations and reputation management depend on getting proper feedback from the media operations and handling adverse media content successfully. Organizations can build their image and improve their performance by engaging in discussions about inputs from media campaigns. This proactive strategy assists in the rapid solution of issues and mitigation of possible reputational harm. Generally, integrating feedback analysis and effective management of negative content are important elements of an extensive PR approach with a focus on maintaining a positive public perception. An interview participant explained, "My top management always discussed with me the feedback of the media campaigns and techniques of handling the adverse content. It was also used to involve me in the decision-making process about media management, publicity, and PR campaigns only but not in other matters or the policies of the organization". In certain cases, a blend of several factors like perception about the role of an individual in the profession, communication gaps, organizational culture, and power dynamics influence the choice of seniors to involve public relations practitioners in decision-making policies. In one of the instances, explaining her experience of not being important for her organization one participant responded, "Not at all".

Communication skills and level of performance also rely on the feedback from media persons. For one respondent, a good "press picture" can enhance the importance of a public relations practitioner playing a role in the crucial decisions of an organization, explained, "PR officers' feedback from media persons is enough for her inclusive image. If the senior management is convinced of the officers' dedication and commitment to work, they include her in every important task".

Another respondent is of the view that the top management of some organizations accord importance to women public relations professionals at higher positions and involve them in crucial decisions for their contribution to bringing professional skills, diverse perspectives, and rich experiences to the table. Involving females in the policy-making process opens a door for the organization to utilize a wider range of talent, enhance gender diversity, and promote the

organization's capacity to handle multiple challenges successfully. She stated, "Vis-à-vis the hierarchical position of my post, due importance is accorded to my take on important matters by the senior management".

R.Q.3 What are the intersections of gender and power in public relations industry in Pakistan?

Public relations practitioners in their responses highlighted the diversity of the relationships between gender and power working in different organizations. These replies exhibited challenges related to gender equality and empowerment. They conveyed how derogatory comments even from top management affect office cultures and performance. Gender and power connections are primarily affected by the roles and responsibilities instead of the gender of an individual in the profession. The respondents noted that gender biases and organizational frameworks create barricades for women professionals to advance to top-tier roles. In certain cases, when women are higher in number in the office, gender bias is mostly taken as less important due to the inevitability of completing work actively. In general, the correlation between genders is supposed to be equal but the types of tasks cause variations like night shifts and field assignments. The participants observed that females' vulnerability normally leads to a condition where power is mainly concentrated in the control of men. The performance of specific assignments successfully is a source of satisfaction for women professionals despite some discomfort due to sporadic interactions with males having immoral intentions.

An interviewee stated that the choice between desk roles and field-based responsibilities can affect the level of empowerment, as empowerment prospects can stem from roles in different organizations. Initiatives are being taken to fix gender discrimination, resulting in positive developments in gender parity and diversity, fostering more convenient and empowering spaces for women. The Press Information Department is the best example of female empowerment and diligent leadership, highlighting a significant absence of observed inequality.

Ultimately, most public relations practitioners are of the view that hierarchical position and professional skills shape the power dynamics rather than gender in the organizational context,

while a few acknowledged that gender biases are the main challenges for women to become empowered.

Significant differences have been noted in connections between gender and power with examples of prejudice and derogatory remarks towards women by the seniors affecting experiences and prospects at the workplace in some organizations. Explaining the complicated dynamics of gender-related coercion in the public relations profession, one of the participants acknowledged, "In my current organization, the situation is quite worse. There is gender parity and the share of role distribution and empowerment is quite disgraceful. I often came across misogynist and sexist remarks even from top management".

Assignments may shape the extent of relations between gender and power in the working environment instead of the gender of individuals. Responsibilities linked to a specific role can influence the empowerment of a professional to fulfill those tasks rather than gender. An interviewee observed that it is a position in a profession that impacts the level of empowerment rather than gender and stated, "The relationship between gender and power is a product of the job assigned to a position. It has nothing to do with any female in the role to perform certain tasks or refrain from doing so, while the gender aspect has very little impact".

More impartial situations can be created for women that permit potential individuals rather than gender to progress to top roles. However, for a respondent, institutional cultures and gender biases influence the promotion of capable female professionals to higher positions. She stated, " I face barriers in advancing to top-tier roles despite being a potentially qualified person may be due to gender bias, and disliked systematic institutional dynamics".

In certain cases, it may be perceived that gender biases can be reduced automatically by enhancing the ratio of females in any organization. The meanings of gender prejudices reflect differently when women outnumber males in workplaces. The issue of female-dominated workplace cultures is generally misunderstood due to the perception gap phenomenon. A public relations practitioner observed that gender biases are not important in situations where females are more than men and acknowledged, "She does not see much relationship in gender and power because no one has any control over it. If only women are available in the office, They're not left

with much choice because they have to get work done. And because of this compulsion, everyone can see, that gender bias is mostly fabricated than being a real issue".

Most of the females in the PR role prefer to work at a desk but a change in duties can affect the balance between the genders in an organization. One of the woman participants mentioned, "Overall the kind of relationship between genders in my organization is equal but sometimes it varies because of the nature of assignments in the public sector like total field jobs, and night shifts".

Bad encounters with men having bad purposes do not influence the gender of certain women and they feel relaxed while fulfilling their assignments. Although the power dynamics often lie in the hands of men leaving the females vulnerable in some cases, an interviewee acknowledged, "I feel comfortable while performing responsibilities, however, there are very less events when we come across people with bad intentions". Another woman professional is of the view that the female gender is vulnerable so power remains with men in most cases and stated, "Very rarely women are powerful".

Monotony in responsibilities and working environments makes some individuals less empowered because the type of tasks significantly contributes to influencing the females' feelings of empowerment and they try to shift to other organizations having a different workplace culture for autonomy. Maintenance of a balance between the autonomy-monotony factors generally affects the empowerment of the professionals. One of the respondents noted, "I felt monotonous while always performing field jobs assigned by the top management. Therefore, I shifted to another organization, where I became empowered again".

Women in public relations roles believe that efforts to break discriminatory practices and enhance gender parity play a crucial role in defining workplace cultures for the empowerment of female professionals.

A public relations practitioner observed a shift toward a more favorable work atmosphere for females has influenced men's dominance and described, "Efforts are going on to break the taboos about gender discrimination. Due to positive trends introduced to bring gender equality and

diversity, females are enjoying power in every profession. No reservation lies about males dominating the organization".

Participants of the interview have responded that gender and power are diligently connected to organizational working settings, influencing woman public relations practitioners through different techniques subject to gender. Females often confront challenges such as family backgrounds, traditional roles, work-life balance, glass ceiling factors, bias, and social status that can restrict their access to power within an organization. Some respondents are of the view that the responsibilities assigned to them influence power dynamics significantly instead of their gender. A few participants reported that cultural norms, social values, institutional environments, and racial factors can impact the power patterns with experiences of stereotyped gender tasks, expectations of family, and unfavorable workplace cultures also contribute to limiting the power of females. However, in addition to these challenges, few women observed that their commitment to their duties and responsibilities in their roles is honored by their organizations making them empowered.

Overall, although gender can affect the connection between professionals and an organization, there are some positions where women play influential roles and make crucial decisions as men, advocating the effect of gender on power dynamics may be different in several organizational structures.

Women in public relations roles encounter various challenges that can manifest in different types like gender bias influencing authority structure within an organization. One of the interviewees described, "Female officers encountered challenges related to bias, glass ceilings, and work-life balance". Describing the impact of gender and power in an organization, Another respondent noted that only roles predominantly influence power instead of gender and explained, "Tasks assigned do affect the power of an organization only. I experienced an authority when my position was elevated".

The complicated relationship among harassment, sociocultural, institutionalized, racial, and traditional responsibilities can influence women public relations professionals' gender. One of the interview respondents mentioned her experience of being accused of favoring racism at a

workplace and a suggested action against her was denied later showing the presence of systematic racism in professional settings. Likewise, the rejection of action against her can be considered a reflection of the bigger power role at play. She acknowledged, "Being a woman professional encountering a situation of racial strain and indulging in power battles, I feel empowered in the sense where gender-related traditional roles and opportunities could have restricted my functions in an organization". She explained, "During my duties at a ministry, one of the ministers accused me of favoring racism for promoting the other minister of my race in the media in a letter addressed to my parent department and asked for legal action, which was denied. I think the suggested action denial in my favor was also my power as a female gender".

Commitment and dedication can contribute significantly to the power of female professionals by displaying their abilities to handle challenges, work skills, and accomplish responsibilities leading towards increasing their reputation, respect, and trust within organizational settings. This intersection of all these values provides a feeling of empowerment. Another interviewee describes patterns of power as, "As women, we can be more responsible and dedicated towards our duties. In response, Our organizations respect us".

Participants acknowledged that the course of individuals' profession highlights the importance of recognizing personal inclinations, accepting diversity in assignments, and adapting to fresh opportunities to attain satisfaction and accomplishment in professional struggles. Expressing experience of women's feelings of monotony and becoming sick of common tasks, a practitioner described, "My seniors always assigned me fieldwork due to my dedication to responsibilities but I became fed up with monotonous duties. At one point, I opted for deputation to another organization for diversity". She suggested that there is a way or solution to every problem".

Interview participants noted that an inclusive and unbiased culture can be encouraged within an organization by embracing a strategy that recognizes a variety of skills and abilities of a person regardless of gender that may affect the experience of female practitioners, it may not automatically affect their power. They can have the potential to exercise impact, frame strategic selections, and display active professional roles, underscoring that cannot impact meeting target goals at leadership rank.

Explaining the women's effective contributions to the profession and challenging gender stereotypes images, a respondent described, Gender has a secondary position in assuming power as there are powerful female heads in her organization playing a role as of their male counterparts".

R.Q.4 What challenges the women public relations practitioners face in Pakistan?

Synchronism of P.R. and journalism professions enhances their impact, generating vital communication opportunities in both fields and promoting mutual benefits within professional dynamics. Most female public relations professionals have mentioned good relationships with both male and female journalists. They underscore the value of mutual respect, courtesy, and professionalism to retain a balanced interaction with media persons. However, there are apprehensions about the issue of "sex lookism" among media men. This term raises a perception of bias toward "apparent attraction" especially linked to gender.

In most instances, interactions are cordial and stimulating; though there are certain cases when behavior perceptions become doubtful, creating a possibility of harassment worries during interpersonal communication with male journalists while dealing with female journalists is fairly contented. Some woman practitioners have shown concerns about how male journalists are attracted to appearance instead of focusing on their professional skills. These worries focus on prospective challenges that influence females in the PR industry wherein their competency and proficiency can be overshadowed by shallow judgments through their eyes. It highlights the constant necessity for a professional approach and unbiased treatment in interactions between both professions to create a favorable and equitable space in media settings. Highlighting the influence of conduct on professional interactions in the public relations industry, a respondent noted that by holding values of professionalism, respect, and courtesy, a respectful reciprocal relationship can cultivate a conducive working culture and stated, "It entirely depends upon behavior. I have always treated media people with honor and they have reciprocated in the same way".

An interviewee observed that media relations form of public relations is being exercised in Pakistan to build a good image of an organization, especially through private media outlets. A woman practitioner in a public relations role involves directly with media persons to share publicity content through phone calls and digital media. She experienced different reactions from

male journalists creating a blurred line between professional and personal perceptions leading to unwelcome sexual advances. In addition, female journalists demonstrate a different posture of communication conduct, and added, "Although, I felt comfortable with women journalists in terms of behavior. However, professionally it was not so easy to communicate with them".

She is of the view, "I experience a good deal of reactions from male Journalism professionals due to my personality, behavior, and professional skills. I found most of them non-professional as they would act as public information (press releases) carriers only rather than contributing any exclusive story to their organizations concerned although some of them always did better. It is very difficult for me to define the profile of a journalist in Pakistan".

Another respondent noted that the overall experience of interaction with media persons remains consistent regardless of gender and described, "Males on the other hand sometimes think they can "flirt" their way through. There is also a feeling of fear of harassment, scandal, blame games, and accusations of corruption." Another woman in a leading public relations role highlighted the notable issue of journalists regarding training gaps and unethical practices and stated, "We had controlled media in Pakistan from 1947 to 2002, and media, especially of the private sector, has not evolved. Media personnel have not gone through the required training, therefore they lack professionalism. They usually resort to blackmailing and other such tactics. Very few media personnel are professional in their attitude".

A participant found the media persons generally good towards her. However, she experienced a few occasions where male journalists demonstrated odd conduct. Being a female practitioner she drew a line to tackle unfavorable situations thereby fostering improvements in interpersonal dynamics. The majority of female public relations professionals acknowledged encountering a variety of obstacles generated by societal norms, stereotyped images, and gender bias that encompass gender discrimination, restricted professional growth opportunities, imperfect training, unfavorable workplace culture, low wages, concern about scandals, online harassment, endeavors to balance traditional responsibilities with professional roles, suitable office arrangements, and transportation issues. The participants mentioned their struggles to gain recognition and respect and faced challenges like mockery, lack of backing, and restricted access to resources. They explain, "Dominant male mentality and absence of family support further

complicate the gender-related challenges at the workplace". Describing the cultural barricades, the presence of gender discrimination, the slow systematic growth of the profession, and struggles for feminist empowerment, the respondents suggested, "There is a need to overcome these challenges through collective efforts for the promotion of gender equality by providing helpful networks and creating inclusive workplace cultures to enhance the scope of the PR profession in Pakistan". An interviewee noted that women-related gender bias may lead to a lesser competence and authority of women in public relations practice when compared to male counterparts in the same situations. She explained, "However, addressing these challenges requires collective efforts from organizations, policymakers, and society. By ensuring safe and work-friendly environments, we can empower females and create a more inclusive profession". A respondent observed that both men and women professionals may experience comparable issues. Still, gender dynamics may affect certain experiences of individuals. A unique male mindset often discourages women from participating in desired events creating a perception that male practitioners are more suited for certain assignments, and added, "Gender may not be restricted to factors of proficiencies and prospects exist in the public relations field as competencies are the primary guarantors of success". She suggested the suitability of men for the PR profession in certain cases like, "I feel shy to participate in some ceremonies which are male-dominated. I understand that where such a situation exists, only males should be allowed to perform the tasks".

In another case, one responding woman is a practicing public relations practitioner in a conservative social order wherein she encounters several challenges due to her gender image being put in the shade by a male-controlled workplace culture. The key issue, she faces, is recognition of her position and importance as a PR professional in an environment mostly ignorant of the position and importance of the profession. Further, her colleagues' unawareness about their roles adds to difficulties using the term "half-cooked" professionals who are not trained properly and use only nominal social media for the dissemination of unfinished publicity content. Like many other participants, expressing her overall experience with the multiple challenges specifically focusing on harassment and lack of awareness about the PR roles, she has been confronting, explained, "I think most of the people or organizations I have been working for/with were unaware of the status and importance of the PR profession because I had to fight to get the basic facilities necessary for carrying out my responsibilities. I came across many people who don't have an idea

about the real function of the PR profession and take it as normal official work. As much as I have mostly been vulnerable to online harassment. For instance, I have found many people who have always been very "punctual or regular" to send me messages of good morning, good evening, songs, jokes, or other meaningful content on religious or social events, etc., using emoji's symbolizing unacceptable designs".

Another interviewee has mentioned that some ministers are reluctant to work with women public relations professionals due to their inability to accompany them to their constituency or stay for late work assignments. Endorsing this perception, she described, "They are right to some extent but it varies from person to person as females have to struggle to balance their family and professional responsibilities".

Detailing the integration of females in male-dominated institutions such as public relations in Pakistan can encounter challenges because of masculine cultures and structures of organizational settings, a woman practitioner stated, "The only thing that female PR officers have to face is the male mindset that has not changed yet".

One-woman PR practitioner perceived that the public sector institutions are more secure than the private ones due to appealing benefits and job security arising from enough long-run funding and definite roles in the profession. Additionally, big organizations in any sector can offer more opportunities for employment and environments of established structures contributing to the sense of security. She opined, "PR responsibilities and duties in the public sector are more secure than in any private sector. Big organizations and PR departments are good to work with in comfortable environments".

One of the participants observed how the lack of basic facilities influences efficiency in the PR profession. In one instance, explaining the reflection of a big gender disparity after the non-provision of an equal transport facility as was for her male counterpart, she described, "Officially, I faced conveyance problem when I working with a governor of a province and my independent car was handed over to another officer leaving me anxious. Only a pick and drop facility was provided forcing me to wait for long hours to reach my working destinations and home". In Pakistan, it may have been a reality historically that the public relations field has been constructed

for male dominance but the growing involvement of females in the profession indicates that the earlier trend of men's exclusivity in PR roles is no longer relevant.

One of the respondents emphasizing the issue of gender and demographic growth explained, "It seems that public relations job is designed for males. However, over time, the involvement of women in every field encouraged women to get involved in this field too. Despite many efforts to break taboos and make it comfortable for women is still in its evolutionary process".

R.Q.5 How do female public relations practitioners describe conditions of the profession in Pakistan?

The views of participants reflected that the perspectives for women to join public relations as a profession are in an evolutionary process. Although the number of female workforce is increasing, higher roles are still dominated by male professionals influencing gender parity. Despite challenges like gender bias, safety fears, societal norms, and the absence of support networks, the feminist trend motivated by a wish to bring a significant shift, follow their goals, or enhance career opportunities is on the rise in the PR industry of Pakistan.

The respondents observed that women in public relations roles can leverage their communication capabilities to have a positive influence in molding public perception by implementing strategic publicity campaigns for several institutions spanning a diverse range of sectors. Thematic analysis revealed that the interviewees suggested that women who are in the PR industry may emphasize enhancing their skills, cultivating beneficial relationships with the publics, and struggling to support their rights within the working settings. They argued organizational platforms and policymakers should establish an encouraging working culture that may ensure females' involvement and recognition of their contributions to mold public opinions and the standing of the organization. Highlighting women's prevailing issues in the profession, one of the interviewees explained, "Pakistan's social fabric is deeply patriarchal, impacting females' career prospects across various fields, including public relations. There is a need to fight for the rights, professional struggles, importance of empowerment, status recognition, fostering

encouraging structures, and significance of role in promoting the image of the organization in the society".

A respondent acknowledged that the choice of females to enter public relations is considered a valuable step enabling them to communicate their opinions and contribute substantially to the field. Viewing women's rising presence in the profession as a positive development, She described, "I highly appreciate this decision that women have joined public relations as a career. It would not only open new avenues for women's employment but will also allow them to express themselves and their ideas in different sectors of life".

Another participant pointed out that in the Pakistani socio-political scenario, the public relations profession is mostly characterized by a lack of influence and appreciation, as well as limited resources, and enough assistance to fulfill professional assignments effectively. Women mostly join the profession because of economic constraints in the face of limited job options across various sectors influencing their decisions about chance or choice. She acknowledges, " Females are not free to select professions of their choice". She adds, "Women need to keep in mind the complications, challenges, dynamics, and limitations when they consider entering into the PR field". She stated, "Due to cultural compulsions and societal expectations, some women choose only selective professions compromising their career decisions and advancement within the field and the PR profession is not one of them".

Sharing the experience of the importance of certain traits and personal qualities in terms of behavior in the working environment, a participant underscored that females pursuing the public relations profession should cultivate a positive approach, exhibit attentive listening skills, prioritize personal looking, follow attire standards suited for working cultures, remain up-to-date with current developments, and excelling in time management techniques and demonstrate the ability to think analytically for adaptation in several circumstances. However, she highlighted the vital contribution of an encouraging work setting for professional achievements. She says, "Both personal competencies and good working conditions contribute the crucial role in the success of the field". She further explained, "A woman in a public relations role must be good-tempered, patient in listening to others, well groomed, well dressed, well versed about current affairs, time

management, and sharp-minded. But a decent and conducive atmosphere at the workplace matters a lot".

In responding to the questionnaire, a participant perceived that the public relations field can provide a secure, respectable, and rewarding career foundation to females pursuing education in the mass media. Because the media study program enhances the capability of individuals to understand the diverse range of analytical and communication strategies comprehensively providing opportunities to excel in the PR profession. Explaining her perception of the deep-rooted role in building the image of an organization, She stated, "If any woman has done media studies qualification, in my opinion, the PR profession is the most secure and respectable job".

For another interviewee, "determination power" is crucial to achieving one's goals despite challenges. Quoting an instance, she stated how she remained consistent with the support of her family in working with a governor of a province in Pakistan as a public relations practitioner despite resistance from her collogues. Stating her commitment to the profession to pursue goals, She explained, "When I opted to be public relations officer to KPK governor, seniors in my office tried to convince me not to join but I paid no heed as I had always been supported by my family in terms of trust, work and following codes of conduct of my profession. My emphasis is again on determination if you have strong determination no one can become a hurdle in your way".

In the framework of female public relations roles, a woman respondent highlighted the importance of constant struggles to foster a positive environment that supports their dynamic involvement and success in the field. She noted that confidence and efficacy can be enhanced in the field by implementing existing laws to ensure safety, imparting training to empower, and their effectiveness. She explained, "Conditions of the profession are in an evolutionary process making continuous efforts to create a supporting space for women. So they can perform their tasks more actively. Application of supporting laws can guarantee safety to encourage the females to be effective PR persons". One of the participants mentioned the multifaceted challenges influencing gender equality and the availability of employment options, she emphasized, "Women PR practitioners can benefit from the variety of emerging digital media, influencer marketing, content marketing, and social media by demonstrating their professional potential and create more new opportunities in the field".

CHAPTER 6

6.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1.1 Conclusion

This exploratory study was aimed at investigating the experiences of women to define their perceptions about the meanings of gender and power dynamics, and the nexus of gender roles and power relations within the realm of PR. The research was restricted to females in the profession to amplify their unique perspectives on gender and power, showcasing and examining the varied modes in which women practitioners navigate the challenges of study involving these two critical factors. The results of the research enhance our comprehension of gender and power control theories within the field of PR shedding light on systematic issues that mainly influence the feminist approach strengthening gender models and cultivating divisions. The research might be the first one in Pakistan that investigated the connection between gender and power and explored power dynamics within the context of public relations from a gender perspective. Investigations reveal that gender and power dynamics have a substantial impact on the perception of females in public relations roles about the meaning-making of the profession and continued studies are essential to investigate the perception of gender dynamics, might patterns, and empowerment approaches and the nexus among these factors in the PR industry. The provision of mentorship and education are the basic factors to empower females in the profession enabling them to access inclusive leadership, career advancements, and attain work-life balance. It is important to educate them about problems related to gender and gender bias. In essence, the dissertation aims to highlight the thoughtful and crucial meaning-making and female public relations professionals' experiences in the field. A profound insight can be gained into gender and power dynamics by investigating their accomplishments, experiences, and challenges in the industry.

The researcher examined the perspectives of female PR practitioners working within public sector organizations. Typically, they release information to media through the use of traditional approaches and standardized format of the press releases, approved by the higher authorities of respective organizations. However, despite being trained from public sector academies, they mostly lack exposure to modern professional skills and PR techniques.

To build their capacity and professional skills, there is requirement of collaboration of the public sector PR setups with the corporate for professional training in corporate social responsibility initiatives, digital media literacy, and proficiency in utilizing digital media to promote public sector organizational agendas.

Although, the media departments of various universities in Pakistan offer courses in public relations, the educational institutions should offer tailored hands-on training and courses to bridge the skill gap and empower women PR practitioners in public sector organizations on the pattern of private sector that offers bigger exposure and opportunities to the public relations practitioners.

6.1.2 Recommendations

Media relations form of public relations is being exercised in Pakistan to build a good image of an organization. The research on public relations practices has explored the domination of one-way communication models rather than two-way symmetrical approaches in the public sector in Pakistan due to several factors such as insufficient financial resources allocated, limited research infrastructure, lack of recognition of formal research significance in defining PR plans, controlled authority in policy-making and budget allocation for PR programs, and inadequate opportunities for education in the professional field.

Here are numerous suggestions for reinforcing the public relations sector within the public sphere. The following proposals seek to improve communication effectiveness and boost trust: -

➢ Two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models of public relations can be employed to shape public attitudes and tackle controversial issues having social implications for the public. Due to their research emphasis, both models are regarded as the best fit for fulfilling symmetrical communication purposes. They both watch an organization's environment, assess its operations, and measure the efficacy of communication initiatives.

➢ Public relations professionals in Pakistan can meaningfully improve their skills, information, and knowledge in public relations by combining hands-on training, practical workshops, media advocacy, productive relationship building, certification programs, academic degrees, and specialized courses in the digital PR field. This

inclusive approach to formal education and training can empower public sector practitioners to thrive.

➢ There is a need to ensure that public-sector PR organizations own enough capital and autonomy to effectively perform professional responsibilities instead of reflecting the impression of "craft public relations" employing decades-old one-way models such as press agentry and public information models that are deficient in having adequate feedback mechanisms.

➢ Public sector public relations practitioners should be involved in dialogue and work closely with private PR professionals to share best practices, engage in mutual learning, raise professional skills, and drive the evolution and growth in the field. Subsequently, the exchange of knowledge and experience can be advantageous for the whole professional ecosystem in the PR industry.

➢ There is a need to recruit candidates with a background in public relations or at least media studies in the public sector of Pakistan. Although PR practitioners are typically selected through a formal process to improve the image of the government, a significant number lack a professional academic foundation or related PR experience. Instead, they undergo post-appointment training that emphasizes administrative posture rather than a professional approach, which is evident in their mindset and attitudes. Furthermore, challenges like a lack of suitable seating arrangements, office-related necessities, and transport means need to be addressed by providing them with all facilities to perform efficiently.

The public sector in Pakistan can improve its public relations practices, enhance communication strategies, and cultivate greater confidence and trust among the public it serves by implementing the aforementioned suggestions.

6.1.3 Limitations

Although the study yielded in-depth insights into the feminist perspective on gender and power in public relations in Pakistani settings, this qualitative study had its own limitations including the sampling technique adopted and result generalization. Since it was an exploratory study, it adopted purposive sampling that lacks generalizability of results, acknowledges possible researcher bias, faces difficulty in results replication and diversity, and is dependent on the

researcher's expertise. Since the researcher intended to explore the feminist perspective on gender and power in public relations from the Pakistani perspective, purposive sampling was the best suited to get the results. The researcher's bias was countered through reflexivity, the process of acknowledging and addressing individual bias through positionality and iterative reflection. Furthermore, the researcher's expertise and PR professional contributed to developing comprehensive questionnaires, engaging in discussion, and interpreting results.

The researcher acknowledges that the process of selecting sampling, collecting, analyzing, and presentation of data can face constraints. Moreover, I recognize my professional background and my comprehensive perspective on the profession can influence the way I conduct research. Here, I outline numerous constraints of this research. Sampling constraints restricted the focus of the study. In the course of my data-gathering process, I had insufficient funding or timeline to travel out of Islamabad and Rawalpindi areas.

I tried to employ a diversity of purposive sampling techniques for the suitable recruitment of experts in PR generally ranging in age, geography, experience, and expertise. However, I considered it pertinent to interview in person to collect the richest data instead of telephone, which limited my geographic access. Hesitancy or inability may be a limitation for my dissertation research as when I contacted fifteen women public relations practitioners via phone in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Lahore, and Multan respectively to conduct interviews. All of them gave consent to be recorded for interviews but later four women showed hesitance or inability while one withdrew after answering about half of the questions. Ultimately, I could not obtain as diverse data as I intended for my dissertation sample. Interview settings were also another limitation of the research.

Most of the time, I met the respondents at their offices. During these interviews, I sensed that the interview locations made the interviewees hesitant to express themselves freely or censor their discussions. As a result, possibility of providing detailed or completely unhindered responses cannot be set aside by the individuals at their offices. Interviews I held on the phone were shorter. I was unable to observe or judge participants' emotional expressions or responses of body language to my questions. Contrary to this, I observed that telephonic interviews were not same as in person:

I did not have enough time for pre and post-interview conversations to construct a summary.

Nevertheless, as respondents did not communicate with me in person, the possibility cannot be ignored that they might have sensed less constraint to answer resulting in good or bad impacts. That is why data gained through telephone can be limited. As a researcher, my age, student status, background, biases, and perspectives regarding the public relations profession might have influenced data-gathering and evaluation process. As my age and student status varied from certain of the respondents, I noticed occasionally, I accepted what respondents responded superficially and was ambiguous in their replies.

I attempted to avoid asking social taboo-related questions affecting gender that could have resulted in feelings of unease for respondents or myself. Consequently, I skipped various chances to pose probing and consequential inquiries or views that might have fixed these issues directly in public relations profession. Likewise, I acknowledge examples that I failed to identify when my respondents were complicit in or keenly contributing to gender or influence-linked phenomena maintaining discrimination or oppression against female professionals in public relations.

I never, often, challenged their capabilities, replies, and perceptions public relations, gender, and power throughout the process of interview conducting and data assessments. Considering the fact to remove this restriction for study in the future, I have an idea to integrate investigations and subsequent questions in interviews to test interviewees and their perception of substitute descriptions of phenomena under discussion. Similarly, amid the process of data examination, I will seek substitutes for phenomena descriptions, confound study results by exhibiting conflicting perspectives or patterns, and persistently strive to realize the influence of my own (mis) interpretations and prejudices on my studies. Finally, I expected that a descriptive qualitative study like this one might represent the exceptional understanding of females in public relations roles, develop PR theories of gender roles and power dynamics, and encourage a wide-ranging, strengthened profession.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment letter-cum-questionnaire

The researcher is a student of MPhil Media and Communication Studies at The Department of Media and Communication Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad. This questionnaire is designed to collect data for my dissertation titled **"Exploring Gender and Power in Public Relations in Pakistan: A Feminist Perspective".** The collected information/data will be used for Thesis/ Dissertation purposes only and will never/not be used for any other purpose. The researcher will never share this data with any person or institution as well. The anonymity/ secrecy of the interviewee will also be strictly observed.

If you have any queries regarding this research project, please contact me at 00923335124057 or email me at mediacares@gmail.com

Questions 1-6

The first set of questions is demographic. The interviewee may skip any question if does not want to disclose any information.

1. What is your name (Optional)?
2. Your organization/Institution name
3. Your position/ Job position/ portfolio
4. Your Age (in years only)
5. Qualification
6. How long have you been working in the Public Relations profession? (Your Professional Experience in public relations) In Years only.

The following set of questions is qualitative. You are kindly asked to express your understanding/opinion/observation/experience in an elaborated way. You may use an extra sheet if the given space is not appropriate.

Questions 7-15

7. It is perceived that public relations is a male-dominated profession in Pakistan. What are your thoughts and perceptions about it?

8. How does your gender affect you in your profession?

9. Do you feel empowered or handicap being a women practitioner? What is your opinion?

10. How do you feel empowered to be a public relations practitioner in your organization? In your opinion, what are the official aspects/prestige/responsibilities/actions (you may have or not) that make a PR practitioner powerful in an organization?

11. What are the practices of your organization's top management to view you as an important officer and involve you in the decision-making process while making important policy decisions?

12. What kind of relationship exists between gender and power in your profession/organization? (Your feelings while performing your professional responsibilities/duties.)

13. How does your gender affect your power in your organization?

Being a female PR practitioner what kind of professional treatment do you experience from media persons (male and female both) while performing your media relations duties?

14. What important challenges do women public relations practitioners face in Pakistan? Please provide your opinion.

15. How do you describe the conditions of the public relations profession in Pakistan with reference to women practitioners' decision to join the profession?

Thank you for giving your precious time for this research.