

**AMERICAN LATE NIGHT TALK SHOWS AND THE BOURGEOISE
PUBLIC SPHERE:
EXAMINING FEMALE MARGINALIZATION IN *JIMMY KIMMEL LIVE*
AND *THE LATE SHOW WITH STEPHEN COLBERT***

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Abstract

The paper explores female marginalization in selected clips of two American talk shows 'The Late Show with Stephen Colbert' and 'Jimmy Kimmel Live' from 2021 and 2022, using Habermas's concept of the Bourgeoisie Public Sphere. Data was analyzed through Conversation Analysis and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis highlighting the underlying mechanisms that sustain gender disparities in talk show discourse. The comparison between the public sphere and the talk show underscored power imbalances in both forums often considered free and emancipatory spaces of debate and deliberation. It is argued that American talk shows resemble the bourgeoisie public sphere in their marginalization of women through the public/private conflation, non-inclusiveness and media control. The findings show famous Hollywood celebrities Michele Williams and Katy Perry being denigrated through stereotyping, under representation and media manipulation. The paper calls for gender equality in talk shows by raising awareness about the debilitating effects of undermining and misrepresenting female voices on broadcast media.

Keywords: talk shows; female marginalization; bourgeoisie public sphere; feminist critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

The paper posits that the talk show resembles the Habermasian public sphere in promoting gender disparities and power inequalities which inevitably lead to female marginalization. Historically, both Habermas's public sphere and the talk show originated on the principles of democracy and egalitarianism, offering unhindered opportunities for the common classes to interact, deliberate and contribute to public opinion. However, this became an unsustainable goal since both degenerated into class polarized, lucrative and media-controlled forums (Haarman, 2001, Seeliger & Sevignani, 2022; Stewart & Hartmann, 2020). The paper compares the talk show and the public sphere theory for the broader objective of exploring how women are marginalized in late night American talk shows through the marginalizing techniques inherent in Habermas' slanted public sphere: blurring of the public/private dichotomy, exclusionary practices and media control. More exclusively, the research addresses the following question:

- How do the American talk shows resemble the bourgeoisie public sphere in their structural and ideological practices thus contributing to female marginalization?

The paper begins with a historical perspective of the emergence and subsequent fall of the Habermasian public sphere followed by a review of literature on comparisons between the talk

show and the public sphere. Next, the paper will employ a three-tier analysis using the public sphere theory, conversation analysis and feminist critical discourse analysis for a rich insight into the marginalizing techniques inherent to both the public sphere and the talk show. Selected clips from two American talk shows will be used for the purpose followed by the discussion and findings.

1.1 The Rise and Fall of the Bourgeois Public Sphere

Jurgen Habermas's concept of the Bourgeois Public Sphere remains one of the most contested, complex, and controversial phenomena of modern social sciences. It has triggered debates and discussions over the possibility or impossibility of a classless, inclusive and democratic space for public expression and deliberation. The notion of the public sphere was initially derived from "post-enlightenment democracy, the centrality of a public capable of self-understanding and critique" (Mahony, 2021, p.486). Habermas originally conceived the public sphere as an egalitarian space which emerged through the 17th and 18th century (in Germany, France and Britain) with the advent of coffeehouses that "broke down class and status barriers, defied church and state monopolies on issues of concern, and established the ideal of inclusive public discussion in which all could participate" (Stewart & Hartman, 2020, p.172). However, the public sphere soon disintegrated into a re-feudalized public sphere which was class polarized, instrumentalized by state interests and "formally organized by media markets, mass culture, public opinion and technological forces" (Stewart & Hartmann, 2020, p.172). According to Fraser (1990), Habermas later confessed that 'the full utopian potential of the Bourgeois Public Sphere was never realized in practice' (p.59) since contradictory to popular opinion, the public sphere could not become an autonomous space for the private individuals to engage in rational discussions. The boundary between the public and private once fostering free expression, blurred deeply, corroding social consensus and genuine public debate. Habermas's idyllic public sphere transformed into an arena saturated by spectacle and consumerism. Benhabib (1997) calls the public sphere an 'embattled public sphere' which was a 'pale recollection' of what was once a public sphere of action, deliberation, and participation. Mah (2000) conceives the public sphere as the fusion of people into a 'single, unified being, a mass subject', no longer a 'public sphere' but a 'public' comprising conflicting social identities which renders the concept of a 'unified political subject' a 'phantasy' or 'a double fiction' (p. 168).

The public sphere faced censure for being an 'exclusionary historical account' that "promotes a specific worldview and a historical and theoretical interpretation that is associated with masculinist ideology, class bias, and other inequalities" (McLaughlin, 2020, p.2). Rendall (1999) describes it as structured in 'excluding and changing ways' allowing selective entries like 'the skilled working man' or 'the educated single woman householder' (p.483). Feminists such as Fraser comment on how the core concepts of the public sphere such as citizenry are traditionally associated with men which means that consent and speech, participation in political debates and public opinion formation are capacities linked with masculinity 'in a male dominated, classical capitalism' and are privileges denied to women and deemed at odds with femineity (Fraser, 1989 as cited in Nassif, 2014). Lazar (2008) discusses gender imbalances in the public sphere by saying that sexism persists covertly in the public sphere through 'naturalized, deep-seated androcentric assumptions'(p.89). Lazar adds that women are made a part of the private sphere, which is traditionally associated with female activities like housekeeping, nursing and childbearing and is characterized as 'emotional,

personal and particular'. On the contrary, men are traditionally linked with the 'rational, impartial and universal' public sphere (p.102).

The mass media and the culture industry played their part in transforming the public sphere 'into a functionalist appendage of political reformism' giving way to class antagonism and commodification (Susen, 2011). The media shifted its role from that of facilitating 'rational discourse and debate' to that of 'shaping, constructing, and limiting public discourse' to the themes validated and approved by the media corporations (Kellner, 2014, p.6). Likewise, Susen (2023) reflects on the mass media's distorted quality of contribution in both forming and manipulating views, attitudes, behaviors and practices (p.853). Habermas later blamed party politics and the manipulation of the mass media for the 'refeudalization' of the public sphere 'where the rational-critical public is transformed into a mass, manipulated by persuasive authority' (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.19). Thus, the bourgeoisie public sphere despite its idealism could not endure the downward thrust of the aforementioned factors, collapsing into an elitist, class stratified and media driven domain of hierarchal discourse.

1.2 Talk shows and the Bourgeoisie Public Sphere

Talk shows have been frequently accused of serious deviations from their original conception as free public spaces of discourse. American talk shows such as *The Ricki Lake Show*, *Phil Donahue* and *Geraldo Rivera* have been critiqued for their increased commercialization and voyeurism and for prioritizing sensationalism over democratic and judicious discourse (Abt & Seesholtz, 1994 ; Shattuck, 2005). American talk shows have also been described as confrontational, discursive, institutionalized and gender biased (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994 ; Ilie, 2006 ; Wood , 2001). Popular shows like others Oprah Winfrey have faced criticism for promoting emotional, gendered and racist content (Squire, 1994). Yet others like Ricki Lake and Sally Jessy have been called transgressive and carnivalesque for promoting low life culture (Shattuck, 2005; Birmingham, 2010). Although previous comparisons between the bourgeoisie public sphere and the talk shows do not specifically focus on female marginalization, they draw attention to the non-inclusive, media controlled and elitist nature of talk shows. The famous American talk show *The Jerry Springer Show* has been criticized for scripted dialogues and spectacle driven discourse (Lunt & Stenner, 2005). Albanian day time talk shows have been called pseudo public spaces that are media controlled, dominated by political talk shows, and lacking in public involvement (Luku, 2013). Similarly, Indian political talk shows have been criticized for being 'faux public spheres' and 'brand augmenting platform(s)' which prioritize middle class interests , underrepresent certain sections of society and are conditioned by 'mainstream mores' (Khorana , 2014 ; Pongiyannan & Pugsley , 2016; Srikrishna , 2022). Likewise, past research also highlights the role of the media in undermining unbiased discourse. Saba and Anwar (2017) speculate on the role of social media in subverting the egalitarian principles of the Habermesian public sphere in Pakistani talk shows through undue institutional and political intervention. The paper posits that the late show hosts act as media representatives in marginalizing women. Existing literature emphasizes the talk show hosts' authoritative positions as referees and judges (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994) , as 'titans of talk and shapers of American popular culture' (Timberg, 2002), as correspondents, comics and combatants (Vraga et al. , 2012) and as 'brands' and 'leaders of the state of comedy' (Perez, 2020). Although talk shows have been

critiqued for diverse factors, their propensity to disempower women and other minority groups has not been approached as a social phenomenon in need of change or reformation. The current research addresses these gaps by exploring how talk shows, specifically American talk shows intersect with the Habermasian concept of the public sphere to marginalize women through stereotyping, exclusion and media control. It also highlights the need for more constructive depiction of women on broadcast media.

2. Material and Methods

The study employs a multilayered research design to examine the portrayal and projection of women in talk shows and broadcast media at large. Selected YouTube clips from two American late shows from the years 2021-2022 were chosen as a sample and were coded into themes/categories using provisional and axial coding techniques. These themes were examined through Conversation Analysis and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis to draw comparisons between the structural aspects, the power dynamics, and the representation of women in the modern talk show and the transformed public sphere. The talk shows are as follows:

- *Jimmy Kimmel Live* featuring Katy Perry (2021)
- *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* featuring Michelle Williams (2022)

Since the research focuses on the linguistic and semiotic aspects of marginalization, CA was deemed appropriate for a nuanced and structured analysis of talk show exchanges. Secondly, broadcast talk and CA share “a distinctive perspective on the analyzability of talk: that is, the focus on the sequential organization of talk-in-interaction, in which analysis concentrates on turn-taking and associated structural phenomena” (Hutchby, 2004, p. 437). Likewise, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis was applied for a social, cultural, and political perspective of female marginalization in talk shows. FCDA is primarily concerned with “raising critical consciousness about the discursive dimensions of social problems involving discrimination, disadvantage, and dominance with the aim of contributing to broader emancipatory projects” (Lazar, 2018, p.372). FCDA was chosen for its compelling focus on social activism and for its ability to unveil all types of gendered asymmetries that privilege one social group over the other. According to Lazar (2014) the ‘theoretical interdisciplinarity’ of FCDA renders it capable of “undertaking analysis of discursive enactments of structural domination” and that of discursive strategies of “negotiation, resistance, solidarity, and social empowerment of disenfranchised women” (p.183). A feminist critical discourse analysis of the talk shows helped to unravel the ‘taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations’ (Lazar, 2007) in male dominated discourses. In other words, how gendered and non-gendered power imbalances are discursively produced, hegemonically sustained and subsequently resisted in different contexts and communities. The study’s triangulated approach using coding, CA and FCDA enabled a nuanced understanding of the power asymmetries and gender imbalances that pervade talk show discourse in overt and covert ways and how they contribute to the phenomenon under investigation.

3. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis is divided into three steps. In the first step, the data was coded for outlining predetermined themes in accordance with the research objectives. Table 1 shows a tabular representation of the coding process.

Table 1. Talk shows as a Bourgeoisie Public Sphere

Name of talk show	Speakers	Themes	Quotation/Time Stamp
The Late Show with Stephen Colbert	Stephen Colbert to Michelle Williams	Non inclusivity	“That’s one of the few great pleasures in life that you can’t buy. Getting a call from Steven Spielberg” (03:29)
	Michelle Williams to Stephen Colbert	Non inclusivity	“I feel, still feel like I’m having an out of body experience with it. Just like pinch, like, I’m in a movie with Steven Spielberg?” (03:40)
Jimmy Kimmel Live	Jimmy Kimmel to Katy Perry	Blurring of the public/private divide	“So having a baby during the COVID, was Orlando allowed in the room, in the delivery room with you?” (02:01)
	Katy Perry to Jimmy Kimmel	Blurring of the public/private divide	“I have got an incredible fiancé” (01.09) “So, he’s been amazing, incredible and we’re so in love and we’re so grateful” (01.28)
The Late Show with Stephen Colbert	Stephen Colbert to Michelle Williams	Media/Institutional control	“We, we have a clip here where Mitzi is presenting to her son, Sammy, in, in this case, a movie camera, you know, and, and in some ways it feels like passing on like benediction to go, you know, make some art” (05:20)
Jimmy Kimmel Live	Jimmy Kimmel to Katy Perry	Media/Institutional control	“That is Katy Perry, Lionel Richie, Luke Bryan and a guy in his underpants on <i>American Idol</i> ”(09:18)

The coded data was then examined through CA followed by FCDA for a more rigorous and nuanced analysis.

3.1 Conversation Analysis and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

This section comprises a two-tier analysis of two interview clips from *'Jimmy Kimmel Live'* and *'The Late Show with Stephen Colbert'* using CA and FCDA.

3.2 Talk Show: Jimmy Kimmel Live

Guest: Katy Perry

Year: 2021

Duration: 9 minutes and 58 seconds

3.3 Structure of the interview

This interview clip is divided into two main segments:

- The birth of Katy Perry's daughter during the pandemic
- Perry's performance in the 'Super Bowl' and 'American Idol'

3.4 Conversation Analysis

The conversation starts with Kimmel commenting on the length and color of her hair and how it changes each time he sees her. Perry takes this as a cue to talk about her personal life, linking her makeover with her motherly routine saying that she rarely gets a 'night off' but when she does, she 'leans all the way in'. Thus, an 'offer- acceptance' adjacency pair is formed with Perry volunteering a lot of information about herself and Kimmel building on it to elicit more responses and to give his own opinions. The discussion moves towards Perry's life as a mother, the birth of her daughter, her boyfriend Orlando Bloom and other topics related to parenting.

Jimmy Kimmel (00:40): Katy, you look fantastic. I never know what length your hair is gonna be, what color your hair is gonna be. It's just a surprise each time.

Katy Perry (00:47): Well, you know, I like to keep people on the edge of their seat. But also, you know, when mom has a night off, she leans all the way in.

The adjacency pair is further expanded with Kimmel questioning her about her motherly life, referring to it as 'mom-ness' and Perry responding that it was the best decision of her life.

Jimmy Kimmel (00:58): How, how is mom-ness going?

Katy Perry (00:59): It's the best decision I ever made in my entire life. [Applause]

Jimmy Kimmel (01:02): Was it a decision that you made?

Katy Perry (01:05): Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

Kimmel then initiates a topic shift, delving deeper into parenting, probing Perry about whether she gets to sleep or not (01:09). This question is eagerly taken up by Perry in the form of a revelatory speech (01:09- 01:24) about ‘family’, ‘support’, and how things are so easy because of her ‘incredible fiancé’, ‘who’s done this before’ because he has a ‘ten-year-old son’. Perry digresses in praising her fiancé and speaking about their bond ‘So he's been amazing, incredible, and we're so in love and we're so grateful’ (01:28). The adjacency pair that follows is that of invitation-refusal since Kimmel does not share Perry’s view that spouses or partners with older children from other marriages or relationships can be very supportive during periods of childbirth for their new spouses or partners. It also debunked the chivalrous image that Perry created of her boyfriend because it was not backed by Kimmel’s experiences with his own wife. He says that although his wife loves his older children ‘she doesn't believe that I know how to do anything’. On being refused support from Kimmel, Perry tries to save face by implying that COVID resulted in totally different experiences for people, either bringing them together or tearing them apart and therefore her post-birth experiences are so different from those of Kimmel. Moving on, Kimmel broaches the topic of childbirth during the pandemic.

Jimmy Kimmel (02:01): So, having a baby during the—speaking of COVID, was Orlando allowed in the room, in the delivery room with you?

The initial pause before ‘speaking of COVID’ and the direct reference to ‘Orlando’ are noticeable. Firstly, the pause highlights the misgivings related to giving birth during the pandemic and allowing visitors in the labor room. Secondly, in directly referring to Perry’s fiancé as ‘Orlando’ and in turn humanizing him, Kimmel demystifies the romantic illusion around the word ‘fiancé’.

The next topic is the naming of Katy Perry’s newborn daughter leading to other subtopics. Kimmel starts by introducing and commenting on her daughter’s name calling it a ‘flowered theme’.

Jimmy Kimmel (02:40): [Laughs] [Applause] Your daughter's name is Daisy, which is a very pretty name.

Katy Perry (02:48): Yes, Daisy Dove.

Jimmy Kimmel (02:49): Is Daisy, is her last name Bloom?

Katy Perry (02:50): Yes, Daisy Dove Bloom.

Jimmy Kimmel (02:51): A very flower themed, Daisy Bloom, yeah.

The discussion on naming gives Kimmel more opportunities for demeaning Perry as when he fumbles before asking if her daughter’s last name is ‘Bloom’ implying that she is born out of wedlock. It also gives him a chance to rebut Perry’s idyllic interpretation of her daughter’s name by saying that it reminds him of ‘duck’ and ‘soap’.

Katy Perry (02:53): Yeah! Daisy, to me, means pure, like, purity, and Dove means peace and Bloom kind of feels like it means joy. So, it’s very pure, peace and joy.

Jimmy Kimmel (03:05): See, to me, Daisy means duck and Dove means soap. [Laughter]

Kimmel attempts an expansion by bringing another celebrity, Taylor Swift, into the conversation. Kimmel speculates that she might not have embroidered it herself since she is recording eleven albums a year (03:53).

Jimmy Kimmel (03:53): How do you know for sure she did that herself?

Katy Perry (03:55): Uhm.

Jimmy Kimmel (03:55): Isn't she recording like 11 albums a year? How has that happened?

Kimmel thus disparages a special event in Perry's life by suggesting that Swift did not embroider the baby blanket herself. Kimmel goes on to imply that all of Perry's famous friends may have given her gifts that our 'Instagram-worthy'.

Jimmy Kimmel (04:04): Did your friends, especially your famous friends, did they feel like I have to get something for—it can't just be a regular thing. I have to get something particularly interesting, something maybe Instagram-worthy? [Chuckles] I don't know.

Katy Perry (04:18): I don't know. I mean, look, all you need is love and, you know, a roof over your head and—

Jimmy Kimmel (04:25): Diapers are good.

Katy Perry (04:25): Some milk— [Laughter]

However, despite Kimmel's tactics of unsettling Perry, she keeps the adjacency pair intact by acquiescing to each new shift made by him. In this instance, she joins Kimmel in joking about how happiness in life depends upon 'some milk' and 'diapers'.

The second segment is about Perry's professional life with the conversation revolving around 'Super Bowl' and 'American Idol'. Accordingly, Perry creates a sensation about her 'Super Bowl' performance just as she had hyped her post birth experience. She uses inflated language when speaking about it, comparing it to giving birth and describing it as a life and death experience. There are multiple instances where Perry makes use of repetition, interjections, filler words and similes, to express her excitement at being a part of the 'Super Bowl'. Examples can be found in clip 14 where there is a repetition of 'I saw', 'I've never', the use of interjections like 'whoa' 'boom' 'whew' and similes like 'death or life' and 'rocket launch'(07:19).

As before, Kimmel allows Perry self-glorification before sparking a controversy. In the preceding conversation, Kimmel reveals that celebrities usually spend huge sums of money on their half time 'Super Bowl' performances (06:48). He also asks Perry if she had to spend money on her performance to which she replies that the performers are given a budget "and sometimes your dreams are bigger than the budget" (06:51). Perry, however, continues with the glorification, calling the event 'amazing' and 'intense' (07:14). On the contrary, Kimmel persists in demystifying the 'Super Bowl' myth calling it 'crazy' (07:19). This is done through different strategies. First, he accuses 'Super Bowl' of being a highly commercial event since the performers must spend millions to cope with its grandeur. Second, he pokes fun at the types of feats that are performed at the 'Super Bowl'. He specially refers to Perry's performance where she rides over a giant automated lion and dances with dancers in shark costumes. He also makes fun of Perry's 'giant lion' suggesting that it was more suitable for the baby's room (07:59).

3.5 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

This interview begins with the female guest being directly positioned in the private sphere. The blurring of the public/private boundaries happens almost immediately with the introduction of the guest and the opening questions. It is important to add that talk shows exercise covert forms of sexism. Lazar (2014) emphasizes that in modern times sexism has taken ‘complex, covert, and indirect forms’ so that a seemingly egalitarian discourse may in fact be a discourse harboring gender asymmetry. Thus, Katy Perry is introduced to the audience as someone ‘who stood right beside the Lincoln Memorial’ and led her country into ‘the new administration’. Here, she is given the persona of a hero and an important political figure. Next, she is presented as a celebrity who will be premiering a new season of the famous singing show ‘American Idol’. However, soon she is imperceptibly placed in the private sphere of the stereotypical female with discussions on her hair and her newfound motherhood. The sudden shift from the public to the private and the way it is normalized by the host, the guest and the audience reaffirms the blurring of the public/private binary and the ensuing relegation of the female guest from a position of power to that of a typical domestic role. This is emphasized further by her willingness to establish her identity as a ‘mother’, a ‘fiancé’ and a ‘woman in love’. There are long discussions on Perry’s labor room and post birth experiences, her baby’s name, and the gifts that she received from friends. In the second segment of the interview, Kimmel engages Perry in a discussion on the ‘Super Bowl’. This is a very notable shift from the private to the public sphere because the ‘Super Bowl’ is a huge event and the most watched television broadcast worldwide. Thus, it is an outstanding example of the public sphere for its universal appeal and inclusivity. Therefore, the dual representation of Perry as a mother and as a ‘Super bowl’ performer is another example of the private impinging upon the public and vice versa. Thirdly, Perry’s intense performance in the ‘Super Bowl’ and her erotic postures in the ‘American Idol’ stand in sharp contrast to her motherly image. This blurring of boundaries is also observed in Perry’s speech which oscillates between the endearing style of a mother (05:01) and the professional style of a celebrity performer (08:06- 08:35) and at times there is a blend of both the former and the latter (07:19). Thus, we see Perry negotiating her identity for acceptance in both the public and private sphere. She exposes her personal side in soft and emotional language with talk about milk, diapers, love, home, and her child. On another extreme, Perry presents herself as an ambitious and energetic performer who was ‘doing my lion’ and the ‘fireman pole’ and whose costume split into half during the rehearsal (08:35) causing her to get ‘disrobed’ (09:07). According to Wright (2008) the public sphere declined for being increasingly privatized and because the quality of debate became neutered and trivialized with a fondness for the spectacular (p.34). The blurring of the private/public dichotomy in this interview clip occurs through the personality of the female guest who provides multiple opportunities for entertainment and speculation. She is made to switch roles and positions to provide interesting and sensational content for the show. Moreover, a multidimensional view of her personality is presented before the audience: as a mother, as Orlanda Bloom’s fiancé, as Taylor Swift’s friend, as a ‘Super Bowl’ performer and as an ‘American Idol’ host. The clip also illustrates non-inclusivity or the exclusion of the female guest from the rational critical sphere by limiting her to the world of glamor and entertainment. Exclusion is also ensured through silencing and rebuttals. The host often contradicts and ridicules Perry’s opinions and stops her short whenever she tries to elaborate on her viewpoint. For example, when she says that her fiancé was very supportive of the birth of their

daughter because he had had the experience of two older kids and Kimmel downplays her opinion by bringing in his own experiences which are in total contrast to Perry's. The second example is when Perry is silenced into agreeing with Kimmel that 'Daisy means duck and Dove means soap' instead of her own opinion about Daisy meaning 'purity' and Dove meaning 'peace'. In the third example, Perry's opinion that 'all you need is love' and 'a roof over your head' is debunked by Kimmel's satirical remark that 'diapers are good'. Later during the long discussion about Katy Perry's 'Super Bowl' appearance, Kimmel indirectly criticizes the opulent half-time performances knowing that it was a great moment for Perry and perhaps one of her greatest achievements. The criticism transforms into derision with Kimmel poking fun at Perry's stage props, costumes, and dancers. The final segment focuses on Perry's appearance on the new season of 'American Idol'. She is reintroduced for this purpose in the following way:

Jimmy Kimmel (00:00): Last month, our first guest stood right beside the Lincoln Memorial and sang us into a new administration on Sunday night. She will be sitting next to Lionel Richie and Luke Bryan on a new season of *American Idol*. It premieres at eight o'clock here on ABC. (00:15) Please welcome Katy Perry. [Applause] (00:30) Welcome, welcome.

The introduction instead of focusing on Katy Perry emphasizes other events, people and forums such as the 'Lincoln Memorial', the 'new administration', 'Lionel Richie' and 'Luke Bryan'. There are two other famous references: 'American Idol' and 'ABC', media platforms affiliated with powerful white men. Similarly, 'Lincoln Memorial' and the 'new administration' refer to American presidents who are symbols of power and male leadership. Here, non-inclusivity refers to how the female guest is introduced indirectly through patriarchal affiliations and male-controlled bodies for validation and access to the elite public sphere.

This interview clip provides compelling evidence of media control mainly by the host who through topic selection, framing and other marginalizing techniques is able to restrict the female guest's access to the critical rational sphere. This is further highlighted through the choice of visuals which are neatly timed and are shown for manipulative purposes such as denigrating special moments, challenging the truth of a claim and misrepresenting a situation. The first image is that of a baby blanket supposedly embroidered by Taylor Swift as a baby gift to Katy Perry. The clip is skillfully placed to challenge the claim that Swift had embroidered the blanket herself and to imply that she may be lying. The second visual shows a scene from Perry's 'Super Bowl' performance showing her standing on a giant lion. The third visual is a small video clip showing Perry as a judge in the new season of the 'American Idol', challenging an under dressed male model to a catwalk challenge. The clip is strategically chosen to sexualize Katy Perry since it shows her and the model in erotic postures. Ironically, all three visuals show the female guest in different positions of disadvantage.

3.6 Talk show: The Late Show with Stephen Colbert

Guest: Michelle Williams

Year: 2022

Duration: 6 minutes and 23 seconds

3.7 Structure of the interview

The interview clip is broadly divided into two main segments with the discussion focusing on the following two topics:

- The birth of Michelle Williams's two children during the pandemic
- Her latest Steven Spielberg movie 'The Fablemans'

3.8 Conversation Analysis

The interview begins with Colbert pointing out that Williams has been away from the public eye 'since or before the pandemic April 2019' (00:49). There is a stressful repetition of 'I haven't seen you' (00:45) in a single conversational turn followed by the suggestion that Williams's absence from the spotlight was due to consecutive childbirth. Although there is no overt criticism, there are undertones of disapproval and mockery as Colbert raises two fingers to emphasize that 'two' kids were born in 'one' pandemic. He also pretends to miscount, pausing on 'one' and then 'two' for more emphasis "Yeah, one, two, exactly".

Stephen Colbert (01:08): You also have another project. You've had two children, both during the pandemic.

Michelle Williams (01:13): Two kids in one pandemic.

Stephen Colbert (01:14): Yeah, one, two, exactly. That is efficient. Good for you. [Laughter]

He even suggests that having a baby during COVID may have helped maintain social distancing. Moreover, the repeated references to 'babies during COVID' and the constant questioning trivializes the whole experience. It draws some funny comments from Michelle Williams as when she says, 'you drop a baby in.' (2:40).

Colbert then moves on to the second topic: Michelle Williams's new Steven Spielberg movie '*The Fablemans*'. Throughout this segment, the focus is kept on Spielberg and the experience of working in a movie directed by him. Furthermore, the host ensures that the conversation is restricted to publicizing Spielberg's childhood, his personality, and his achievements. Williams's talk is also carefully regulated to revolve around Spielberg, and she becomes an instrument for promoting and revering the Spielberg experience.

Stephen Colbert (03:29): You've also got a new movie called *The Fablemans* directed by Steven Spielberg. That's one of the few great pleasures in life that you can't buy. Getting a call from Steven Spielberg—

Michelle Williams (03:38): [Chuckles]

Stephen Colbert (03:38): —to say, "Do you want to be in my movie?"

Michelle Williams (03:40): I feel, still feel like I'm having an out-of-body experience with it. Just like pinch, like, I'm in a movie with Steven Spielberg? [Laughter] [Shakes head] No.

Colbert's opening statement serves a double purpose. It introduces Michelle Williams's new movie while keeping the focus on Steven Spielberg. So, while Colbert seems to be celebrating Williams, it is a celebration of Spielberg. Williams is also immediately drawn in as she calls it 'an-out-of-body experience'. Colbert elicits more responses from her all meant towards publicizing Spielberg's new movie. Williams speaks vivaciously about Spielberg's mother, delivering long

sentences to create an aura of Spielberg's 'extraordinary childhood', his super 8 movies and his 'larger than life' mother. Her lexical choices are noticeable as there is an abundant use of adjectives. Moreover, she uses emotive language to translate her own experience of playing the role. Spielberg's childhood photos are described as 'beautiful' and 'evocative'. His mother as a 'larger-than-life person' with an 'incredible laugh' and a 'touchstone' and 'guide track' for Michelle Williams. Here, Colbert is seen cueing Williams to talk about Mitzi as an 'aspiring artist'. This initiates another sequence which projects Mitzi as an inspirational mother who had turned her children's life into a 'work of art' (05:08).

Michelle Williams (4:50): She had this incredible laugh that was sort of like a, kind of like my touchstone for the part, the thing I would just listen to sort of before every take was just this guide track of her laughing over the years. Yeah. [Smiles]

Stephen Colbert (05:05): And she was an artist in her own right. She, she was an aspiring artist.

Michelle Williams (05:08): She was a, she was a really accomplished pianist and she put that down to raise four children, but she made their childhoods into work of art. Like, her entire life was really kind of a work of art, and she really passed that on to her kids.

The conversation turns into a documentary of Spielberg's childhood and his extraordinary mother when a movie clip is played showing Mitzi present her son with his first camera. This clip helps to reinforce the previously constructed narrative about Spielberg's inspiring mother and his wonderful childhood. Colbert furthers the narrative by using phrases like 'passing on the benediction' turning the whole event into a spiritual experience (05:20).

3.9 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

This conversation analysis revealed systematic forms of female marginalization highlighting the aforementioned factors: the blurring of the public/private divide, non-inclusivity, and media/institutional control. Lazar (2014) uses the term 'gender ideology' to describe such methodical and imperceptible forms of marginalization. She describes gender ideology as being hegemonic 'in that it often does not appear as dominance at all but is consensual and acceptable to most in a community'. Thus, dominance is proliferated discursively "in the ways ideological assumptions are constantly re-enacted and circulated through discourse as commonsensical and natural" (p.186). Hence, the negative repercussions of the public/private blurring directly affect the female guest who is rigidly placed in the private sphere and who considers it her social responsibility to enact the gendered role of a mother. Thus, Williams's idolization of Mitzi's character is a reenactment of the normalized assumptions of hegemonic discourses that prioritize a woman's identity as a mother. The public/private divide is being violated with the stereotypical portrayal of Michelle Williams as a nursing mother. She is thus placed within the private sphere of motherhood as opposed to her professional identity as a famous movie star. The interview begins with the host engaging the female guest in a discussion on childbirth during the pandemic. The conversation is prolonged to include other topics such as parenting in quarantine, the challenges of rearing kids of different age groups and the dynamics of a three children family. All three topics build an impression of domesticity about the guest who is a famous Hollywood celebrity. The host also makes satirical references to the birth of her two children in the pandemic, calling it a 'project'

and even implying that it was ‘efficient’ and ‘extraordinary’ and must have been done out of a ‘nesting instinct’. There are also references to pandemic related terms like ‘isolation’ and ‘quarantine’ and remarks such as ‘babies during the COVID’ implying the oddity of planning children when the world was in the grips of disease and death. There are many references to the ‘third child’ as being the extra one. At one point, the host refers to his guest’s third baby as merely ‘number three’. He also recounts his own experience of not bothering to take his third son to the zoo because “Oh, damn, he’s the third one” (2:15). The talk show podium is thus converted into a private sphere where personal issues are being discussed on a public platform. The guest, Michelle Williams, is not involved in any type of critical or rational discussions but is restricted to her role as a mother. She is also presented with a baby garment at the end of the segment as an affirmation of her motherly status. The blending of the public/private division is also demonstrated through the rapid shift away from the topic of childbearing to that of the guest’s new movie. The transition from the role of a mother to that of a famous Hollywood actress also contributes to the blurring of the public/private binary. It destabilizes the guest’s identity since she is made to mediate between her public and private identity for acceptance in the dominant discourse. She is also disempowered through non inclusivity and under representation. As shown earlier, the talk in the second segment is strategically structured towards the fulfillment of certain goals. The most important being to give coverage of the new Steven Spielberg movie ‘The Fablemans’ and to highlight the phenomenal director’s life, his exceptional childhood and his ‘larger than life’ mother. Furthermore, Williams is skillfully engaged in eulogizing the Spielberg family to the extent where her own personality is diminished to make way for ‘Mitzi’, Spielberg’s onscreen mother. From the very beginning, Williams is made to feel privileged for landing a role in a Spielberg movie. Ironically, she is never appreciated for her acting skills in the movie rather it is the woman whom she impersonates who is being admired all along.

Thus, non-inclusivity refers to the marginalization of the female guest through stereotyping, relegation and talk management. Consequently, she constantly negotiates her talk and identity for admittance in the public sphere and for maintaining its vitality or in other words to boost the popularity of the talk show. This is in accordance with Lazar’s view that modern power is discursive and pervasive and is “embedded and dispersed throughout networks of relations, is self-regulating, and produces subjects” (Lazar, 2014, p. 188). Here, Michelle Williams is seen self-regulating to fulfill the requirements of remaining within the elite public sphere through compliance with the conversational norms set by the male host. Another form of marginalization is underrepresentation through media and institutional control. According to Fairclough (1999), power relations exist even in media discourse as “producers exercise power over consumers in that they have sole producing rights and can therefore determine what is included and excluded, how events are represented and even the subject positions of their audiences” (p.50). This can be seen in the unequal power relations between the host and the guest, the former having complete command over the content, flow, and the sequence of events while the latter remains a passive facilitator. As suggested by Timberg (2002), talk show hosts are entrepreneurs, entertainers, owners, managing editors as well as catalysts that shape talk-show forms (p.6). The second form of control is exercised through media aesthetics such as the integration of movie clips for adding visual effects and for giving context to discussions. In this case, media control is employed through the positioning and selection of the video clip. It is cleverly timed to support Michelle Williams’

eulogy of Steven Spielberg's mother and the aura of the Spielberg family. It also helped to shift the focus away from Williams the actress to Mitzi the character.

The study aligns with previous studies in illustrating noninclusivity (Khorana, 2014 ; McLaughlin, 2020) , the blurring of public/private divide (Mah, 2000 ; Livingstone & Lunt, 1994) and media and institutional control (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994 ; Saba & Anwar, 2017) in talk shows. The selected talk shows demonstrate non-inclusivity through under representation and diminution of the female guests. In the first example , Stephen Colbert keeps the conversation adeptly focused on Steven Spielberg's life, achievements, and the promotion of his movies at the expense of Michelle Williams who remains a publicity agent for the acclaimed director. In the second example, non-inclusivity occurs through the exclusion of Katy Perry from the rational critical sphere and her projection as an erotic and sensational woman.

The blurring of the public/private divide is done systematically by simultaneously situating the female guests in the public and private domains . They are constantly called upon to negotiate their identities to assimilate in the primary discourse and are portrayed both as glamorous actresses as well as wives and mothers. Finally, media and institutional control in the selected shows is exercised through the host and media conventions restricting a free and fair representation of women inevitably leading to the dissemination of dominant ideologies and the shaping of public opinion in a manner that perpetuates female marginalization.

4 Conclusion

The talk show and the bourgeoisie public sphere were compared to highlight the sociohistorical underpinnings of female marginalization in broadcast forums. In examining '*Jimmy Kimmel Live*' and '*The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*' through Habermas's public sphere theory , the paper emphasized the prevalence of gender biased content in media forums that have long been considered free and egalitarian. Using Conversation Analysis and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, the paper was able to give a deep insight into the phenomenon of female marginalization in talk shows, its various manifestations and its impact upon the media representation of women. The findings reveal that while talk shows claim to be open spaces for public discourse they frequently reinforce gender disparities and traditional power structures through dissemination of hegemonic views and gender biases thus challenging the normative assumptions of inclusivity in the media. It is further revealed that the talk show is inherently a male dominated genre specially the late shows which are undisputably owned by commanding and charismatic hosts who are brands in themselves. This allows them massive freedom to exploit their female guests through various overt and covert techniques. The study thus calls for more equality and sensitivity with regards to female representation on broadcast media possible through an intensive overhauling of late show format, more representation of women, and a rigid dismissal of gender biased content . The study is significant for its multidimensional approach and its contribution to the fields of discourse, communication and gender studies. Finally, the study contributes to understanding how American talk shows act as both mirrors and agents of societal beliefs with major implications for a feminist critique of media and the role of the public sphere in addressing gender inequities.

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