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CAREER CHOICE NARRATIVES: A SENTIMENT-DRIVEN DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF YOUNG WOMEN'S CAREER PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

Gender norms, parental expectations and societal perceptions have a strong influence on young women's career aspirations, which are frequently confined to stereotypical roles. Although these limitations have been investigated before, there has been little research that considers the role of sentiment in discourse as an effect and reinforcement of these influences, especially in the Kasur district. To fill this gap, the present study combines discourse analysis and sentiment analysis to examine societal and familial narratives' role in the career aspirations of underprivileged young women through language.

This study is carried out in the public sector colleges of Kasur, where female students are the primary participants and parents, siblings, peers and teachers are the secondary participants. Participants were given an open-ended questionnaire to express their views on different professions. The study used machine learning techniques to identify patterns of positive, negative, and neutral sentiment associated with various career options in manually annotated responses, using adapted Urdu sentiment analysis guidelines.

The study draws on appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) to link sentiment and discourse analysis, offering insights into the emotional attitudes expressed about women's career choices and the social discourses that underpin them. The research examines the relationship between sentiment and discourse in career choice, with implications for gender equality programs in society.

1.INTRODUCTION

In patriarchy, women's career development can be subject to specific linguistic and cultural constraints. For young women in small towns in Pakistan, having a "career" is often considered a man's job, and they are faced with discouraging stories from family, media and society. One of the most telling examples is a media quote that's loaded with prejudice: "Kambakhto! Ye jo tum ne career apney uper swar kr rakha he na...." ("You unfortunate women and your obsession with your careers"). These stories are examples of the way in which social discourse can be detrimental to women's goals. In fact, "for most young women, the status quo doesn't give them the freedom to make their own decisions". Women can aspire to work, but deep-rooted gender norms and "adhesive social norms", such as the notion that a woman's job is to be a homemaker, create obstacles to women's education and employment. In Pakistan, the participation rate of working-age women in the labour force is only about 25%, which is associated with rigid gender

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norms and limited family support for women in the workforce. There is less focus on girls' education and career planning than boys' due to cultural and religious expectations, particularly in more conservative or rural contexts.

Young women in small towns in Punjab (e.g. Kasur district) face similar challenges, but with added complexity: in some places, there is a lack of educational/career facilities, and in others there are traditional views that are reinforced by tight-knit communities, where narratives experienced by young women often bear double binds, such as "girls can't have it all", which suggests that a choice must be made between family life and a career (Caprino, 2014). For example, the use of derogatory terms such as "*tum ye nahé kar sakte*" (you cannot do this) or "*larkion ke parhai ka koe fāida nahé*" (girls' education is useless) is often heard discouraging girls' ambitions. On the other hand, in a recent pro-education campaign, a mother states that her daughter will make her own choices and "get stronger". The opposing narratives highlight the discursive struggle that is reflected in young women's self-concept and career aspirations.

The social science studies have proved that there are external and internal factors which limit the careers of Pakistani women. The prevailing "gendered attitudes" in society critically influence the acceptability of certain careers for women (Fazal, Naz, Khan, & Pedder, 2019). Traditional beliefs are persistent and impede theoretical gains in women's empowerment (Sarwat, 2014). In general, family duties and obedience are emphasised in all South Asian contexts and influence women's career decisions (Sue & Sue, 2003). Therefore, deontic modality is often used in advice, the language of permission and obligation (e.g., 'should/should not'), indicating what they can and cannot do, according to others. They also come across epistemic modals such as assertions about what is possible or acceptable (e.g., "girls cannot do"), which reflect and reinforce community norms. These linguistic signals are a powerful way of regulating women's ambitions.

Adolescents, specifically, frequently turn to advice from parents, siblings, teachers and peers in choosing a career and/or a course of study. This can make all the difference for socially-minded young women. However, Abbasi and Sarwat (2014) note that females are more "socially inspired" and therefore more susceptible to being influenced by others in their decision. Indeed, in other research settings (for example, North American women working in STEM professions), verbal encouragement or discouragement has been found to have a significant impact on women's self-efficacy and career persistence. Zeldin and Pajares (2000) have, for example, identified verbal persuasion and vicarious experiences as important sources of confidence to undertake non-traditional careers, which are often women's own success stories. This is a reminder that the language used when advising or socialising young women, whether subtle or explicit, has emotional impact and can encourage or discourage them from pursuing a particular career.

In this light, the current research explores career choice narratives of young women in small towns (District Kasur) in Punjab using a sentiment-driven discursive analysis. To explore the societal and familial accounts that shape women's views on their careers, we combine computational sentiment analysis with qualitative discourse analysis to analyse the language (e.g., words of praise, criticism, fear, or hope) used in the stories. The purpose is not just to identify whether the sentiment expressed is positive, negative, or neutral, but to delve into the nuances of the sentiment, as well as the appraisals of careers in terms of emotion, ethics, and social judgment. In doing so, we illuminate linguistic practices as expressions of preferences, expectations and biases, and how these preferences, expectations and biases, in turn, affect young women's cognitive processes when making career decisions. Finally, this research investigates the relationship between what is said (narratives and sentiments) and what is done (career decisions) and provides insight for interventions in education and policy to create more supportive narrative environments for women.

The overall aims of this research are:

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- To understand the distribution of sentiment polarity (positive, negative, neutral) in career choice narratives of young women and their influencers in Kasur district.
- To identify the attitudinal systems (affect, judgement, appreciation) in which career-related sentiments are expressed and evaluated using Appraisal Theory.
- To analyse the inter- and intra-narrative discursivity and its role in the construction of aspirational agency and professional identity of underprivileged young women.

2. Literature Review

This section will cover the theory of appraisal and evaluative language as well as the factors that influence the appraisal process.

Our discourse analysis is based on Appraisal Theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Martin & White, 2007). This framework explains attitude, feelings and evaluations conveyed by language. Martin and White list Attitude as one of the dimensions of appraisal, with three sub-categories in which speakers make evaluations: Affect, Judgment, Appreciation. Affect is the language of emotion, positive or negative emotions (e.g., happiness, desire, frustration, fear). Judgment: the assessment of people's conduct or character, typically in moral or social judgment (praise or condemn someone's conduct or traits, e.g., a profession is respectable or inappropriate). Appreciation is evaluating things, qualities, or outcomes (assessing entities as useful, difficult, valuable, etc.). Affect, judgment and appreciation combine to reflect our feelings and opinions, which is a linguistic expression of sentiment. Appraisal theory therefore offers an in-depth perspective on the encoding of sentiment beyond the dichotomy of positive and negative. In the case of a statement about nursing, for instance, it might be said to be "negative," but appraisal analysis would show whether the negativity is due to affect (e.g. fear of nursing), judgment (e.g. nursing being an inappropriate career for women) or appreciation (e.g. nursing not being worthy).

2.1 Sentiment Analysis in Linguistics

Sentiment analysis is traditionally a computational technique to categorise text as positive, negative, or neutral. Recent studies have shown that linguistics can play a significant role in sentiment analysis by considering the context and nuances (Taboada, 2016). Taboada (2016) offers a linguistic overview of sentiment analysis, noting that sentiment detection is not simply a matter of counting positive/negative words, but also concerns the knowledge of negation, intensity (e.g. very good vs. somewhat good), modality and discourse structure. Complex narratives may contain multiple emotions or judgments, such as a young woman saying, "I enjoy teaching; people make fun of it", which includes positive affect (enjoyment of teaching) and negative judgment (societal disrespect for teaching).

Linguistic sentiment analysis (also known as opinion mining) is then related to appraisal analysis. Subjectivity, stance, and evaluation are concepts which are similar to computational sentiment categories in discourse studies. Linking these approaches will enable researchers to not only categorise sentiment as positive or negative, but also its specific type (fear, moral disapproval, personal dislike, etc.). This study is based on such insights. We employ a large amount of narrative text and use NLP sentiment analysis to process this text, but we also add manual appraisal coding to get richer attitudinal patterns.

2.2 Narratives and Career Choice

Narratives are a potent tool for transmission of values in society and the creation of individual identities. Narrative theories (such as Career Construction Theory) propose that people tell stories about their career decisions based on life experiences and social signals (Savickas, 2012; Hartung & Santilli, 2018). Earlier studies in Pakistan and elsewhere have found a variety of factors that shape the choice of career by female students, a number of which are embedded in the narratives of pivotal social actors. Often, it is the top of the list: parental expectations or pressure (e.g., pushing a girl towards medicine because of social status)

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can have a strong influence on decisions. According to Ahmed et al. (2017), socio-economic status, family encouragement, and mass media all have a significant impact on the academic career choices of Pakistani students. Azmat and Sarwar (2013) also reported that childhood experiences and family influences have an impact on career aspirations for life. Cultural preferences can even be used to support some careers for extrinsic reasons; e.g., for many young women in Pakistan, the medical degree is chosen not from a desire to practice medicine, but because a medical degree is seen as better for marriage prospects. (Masood, 2019) The status symbol of a family having a doctor as "*meri bahu to doctor he*" (my daughter-in-law is a doctor) encourages girls to pursue medical careers. That study says that being a doctor doesn't necessarily mean they will become doctors, and there is a disconnect between the narrative of a career and its practice. In addition to the family, other people involved in the narrative network include teachers and peers. Girls are validated or discredited by the praise or discouragement of teachers, particularly those in traditional communities. Peers can provide information or norms that impact self-assessment and decisions (e.g., "science is too hard for girls" vs. "science is cool for girls"). The lack of formal career counselling contributes to the dependence on these informal narrative sources in small towns in Pakistan. Without much professional direction, narratives fill the void, good or bad. The situation is similar in other areas. For instance, in rural Zimbabwe, the aspirations of girls to become doctors were reported to be restricted by the community's expectations and beliefs about the role of women (Mutekwe et al., 2011), which were challenged through the deliberate creation of new narratives and role models. In the Middle East and North Africa, recent surveys show that an overwhelming majority of men (and many women) still believe that a woman's primary role is to be a wife and mother, not a professional. These beliefs manifest themselves in limiting narratives that hinder women's employment, which leads to low participation rates for women in the workforce in the region. Experts say that breaking down these cultural barriers will take "developing and disseminating unified messages that promote women in the workplace", as well as "rethinking and challenging assumptions by both men and women." The study is based on the idea that the feelings and narratives about young women's career paths can contribute to developing counter-narratives to be used as interventions by stakeholders.

2.3 Sentiment-Driven Discourse Studies

Our approach is somewhat novel because it is a combination of sentiment analysis and discourse analysis in the career narrative domain, which has a limited number of studies. There are parallels in educational narratives and media discourse research. Discourse-level understanding can be used to detect sarcasm, rhetorical contrasts, or a prolonged tone throughout a story, as mentioned by Taboada (2016). We build on this notion by considering each participant's career story (and the influencers' stories) as a discourse to be analysed for its sentiment trajectory and evaluative stance. Iqbal and Maldonado (2020) conducted a related study investigating the effect of linguistic force dynamics in narratives (how language can metaphorically exert force or pressure) on the career prospects of Pakistani women (Nawaz et al., 2022). They found that social actors, via their linguistic choices, become sources of either enablement or dissuasion for young women's career paths (Iqbal & Maldonado, 2020). It relates to the existing research and offers some theories: It is the emotional tone of the language (e.g., people will respect you if... or people will laugh at you if...) that propels a girl up or pulls her down from a field. This study continues to draw on such insights by explicitly categorising those phrasings into sentiment and appraisal categories, thereby shedding light on the emotional and attitudinal currents in career choice narratives.

Overall, this literature review illustrates the importance of an interdisciplinary perspective in exploring young women's career stories. Appraisal theory allows evaluative language to be analysed, sentiment analysis can be used to classify and quantify the attitudes, and previous research on career development places the social forces in context. Through the integration of these elements, we hope to offer a more

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nuanced understanding of the role of language (content and delivery) in the lives of women in disadvantaged contexts and how it influenced their life choices.

Table 1 Summary of Related Studies on Sentiment Analysis and Career Aspirations

Sr.	Year	Author(s)	Data Source	Method
1	2023	Tan & Singh	Interviews & social media, young women in rural India	Sentiment Analysis (NLP)
2	2023	Zhang & Wang	Social media platforms (cross-cultural)	Sentiment Analysis (NLP)
3	2022	Patel & Kumar	Twitter & Facebook posts of young women	Sentiment Analysis
4	2021	Lee & Lee	Social media, blogs & interviews	Sentiment Analysis
5	2020	Mahmood et al.	Roman Urdu text corpus	RCNN Deep Learning
6	2016	Taboada	Theoretical review	Survey & linguistic analysis

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Participants

The study employed a research design that included participants. This study used a qualitative-leaning mixed-methods approach, combining discourse analysis and computational sentiment analysis. The research was exploratory, focusing on a specific geographic and demographic context: young women (late adolescents) in small-town Punjab, Pakistan, at the juncture of making or envisioning career choices. The primary participants (Sample 1) consisted of 100 female college students aged 16-20 from five public sector degree colleges in Kasur district. These colleges are situated in various small towns of the district, reflecting the typical sociocultural context of semi-urban/rural towns in Punjab. The participants were primarily from middle- and lower-middle-class families, which is the underprivileged and less educated part of society that the study seeks to understand. The researchers used systematic random sampling to select students from the graduating classes (2017-2018 intake) from these institutions. A secondary sample (Sample 2) consisted of young women's influencers in addition to the young women. In the first data collection, each student pinpointed significant people in her educational or career thinking, usually her parents, siblings (usually older brothers), other relatives, close friends, or teachers. The research team then interviewed a subset of these influencers; a total of 70 interviews were conducted with parents, siblings, teachers and peers throughout the network of participants. This network-based sampling (similar to snowball sampling through nomination) was guided by Gimenez (2010) narrative network approach, which allowed us to get the interlocking perspectives of each student's career narrative. We built a "Career Choice Narratives" corpus of multi-perspective narratives by collecting data from the young women and their social circle.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using two main instruments that were developed in English and translated into Urdu for cultural and linguistic appropriateness:

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3.2.1 Open-Ended Narrative Questionnaire

First, primary participants were asked to complete a written questionnaire that asked for a narrative response regarding their career aspirations and how language and others' opinions influenced these aspirations. The questionnaire was modified from the existing career narrative and self-concept questionnaires (My Career Story, Hartung & Santilli, 2018; career choice factors, Packer, 2014; Sarwar & Azmat, 2013). The questionnaire was translated into Urdu and back-translated to ensure fidelity of the instrument which enabled the participants to express themselves comfortably. Students wrote their answers in Urdu, sometimes in the form of personal stories, or in the form of family sayings. This resulted in rich narrative texts of 2-3 short paragraphs per question per participant.

3.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The identified influencers (Sample 2) were interviewed again in Urdu. The interview guides were designed to elicit information that was specific to the role being conducted (parent, sibling, teacher, peer) and were essentially parallel to the student questionnaire, but from the perspective of the influencer (e.g., asking a parent: What career hopes do you have for your daughter? What have you told her about careers?). The interviews were conducted one by one, usually for 20-30 minutes, and recorded with the consent of the interviewee and transcribed verbatim in Urdu. The interview setting was informal to encourage honest sharing. In the course of these interviews, we gathered stories about a father's hopes for his daughter, a brother's thoughts on "appropriate" careers, or a teacher's recommendations to female students. These data provided a context for the primary participants' stories in a larger discursive ecology of career talk.

Informed consent (and for minors, assent with informed consent of parents) was obtained from all participants. Approval was obtained from the department. Names in transcripts were anonymised and role descriptors (e.g., Student A's mother) used in analysis. These stories are personal, and it was important to be culturally sensitive and allow participants to avoid answering any question they did not feel comfortable with.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis was conducted in two major steps: sentiment analysis and discourse analysis, and the steps were then interwoven.

3.3.1 Sentiment Analysis

Two aspects of the sentiment analysis of career choice narratives were targeted as defined by Esuli and Sebastiani (2006). It first identified whether the text was subjective (fact or opinion) about the topic. Second, it determined the polarity by annotating the given text/review as positive, negative or neutral concerning the subject matter. The interpretation based on the appraisal theory showed how career choice narratives were constructed, and how they evoked positive, negative or neutral appraisal.

The participants' "Answer Matrix" was created in Microsoft Excel to help organise the data. The voting scheme was adhered to for the purpose of tagging as positive, negative and neutral (Data Analytics). Second, the documents were tagged and annotated with the three classes mentioned above: positive, negative and neutral. The granularity of tagging was done at both the sentence and paragraph level. Third, the results were summarized we used tabular form and graphic representation techniques for comparative demonstration.

The reviews taken from the narrative corpus were divided into two broad categories, namely (i) importance of career for females and preference to be a housewife or a career woman and (ii) reviews about different professions. The reviews related to various careers were further categorised profession-wise. Six major careers were identified, the list included teaching, medical/doctor, nursing, police and

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army. However, a few people also spoke about banking, law, fashion designing, modelling/ media and computer-related jobs.

The guidelines for annotation of Urdu sentiment analysis were used. The guidelines were adapted from a variety of existing corpora on Urdu sentiment analysis.

Each review was annotated with tags and the polarity of each review was manually annotated by three annotators, including the researcher. Other annotators were from linguistic and NLP backgrounds. An inter-annotator agreement approach was utilised. Inter-annotator agreement was measured using the percentage agreement method. For automated analysis, the polarity of each review was determined by applying the tools of NLP. The automated analysis was carried out based on inter-annotator agreement and the machine learning approach (Bobicev & Sokolova, 2017, p. 97-102). A frequency distribution was computed, and the manual and automated annotations were compared.

Importantly, we went beyond the simple dichotomy of positive/negative/neutral in our sentiment categories. Inspired by appraisal theory and the data, segments were tagged with fine-grained sentiment categories like happiness/pride, hope/optimism, fear/anxiety, frustration, moral disapproval, admiration, etc., wherever possible. Two Urdu-proficient linguist coders did this manually by reading each narrative and marking the main sentiments/appraisals expressed. Disagreements were checked by a third coder for reliability. These labels are based on Appraisal subcategories (Affect and Judgment mainly). For example, when a student wrote: "I like the nursing profession because nurses help others; that is a great achievement", we noted positive affect (happiness/satisfaction) and positive appreciation of the value of the profession. When an influencer claimed that people “don't value teaching and make fun of it”, we marked the negative judgment (social esteem: lack of respect) and negative affect (frustration from being belittled).

3.3.2 Discourse Analysis (Qualitative)

In the second phase, we conducted a discursive analysis highlighting the ways in which these sentiments are incorporated into narratives and the discursive strategies they embody. All the original Urdu literature was analysed to ensure that no nuances were lost in the translation. In order to identify examples of evaluative language (Affect, Judgement, Appreciation) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) principles, we used Appraisal Theory as a guiding framework and also examined power dynamics, such as how the words of authority figures carry weight. We focused on intra-narrative and inter-narrative discursivity (how a single narrative could represent multiple voices or conflicting evaluations and how different speakers' narratives interacted with each other).

During this stage, there are a couple of analytical steps and considerations to make:

The following themes and rationales were identified and coded in the narratives: prestige of profession, financial stability, safety for women, service to society, family honour. These themes often came wrapped in sentiment (positive if seen as a benefit, negative if seen as lacking). For instance, “Doctor is a respected job because people show *izzat* (respect) to doctors” was classified as prestige = positive judgment. Themes were then correlated with socio-economic themes (such as prestige and social capital, financial concerns and class barriers).

The study of modality and transitivity of language was part of discourse analysis. A large number of narratives employed modal verbs or phrases such as can/cannot (ability/permission), should/must (obligation), difficult to (impossibility), etc., that expressed deontic modality (ability/permission) or epistemic modality (likelihood). For instance, “*Teaching ko log serious nahé letay*” (People do not take teaching seriously) is an epistemic statement about others’ attitudes, whereas “*Fauj mé jana mushkil he kyunke ghar se door rehna parta*” (Joining the army is difficult because one has to stay far from home) uses a modal adjective “difficult” expressing a deontic constraint (the obligation to stay home). Such use shows the underlying social norms and personal beliefs (what is possible or allowed for the girl).

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4.1 Results and Discussion

4.2 Sentiment Overview and Classification

Manual and automated analysis showed that young women's career stories were not just one-dimensional positive or negative, but rather a range of feelings. Overall, about 60% of the primary participants' narratives were positive regarding their career, meaning they felt careers were important, and they wanted to have a career; about 25% were ambivalent or mixed; and about 15% were negative, suggesting that a career might not be worth the trouble. These figures conceal the intricacies, though: many "positive" stories had some uncertainty or even negative elements, and some "negative" stories had positive elements.

Much more enlightening was the classification of sentiments by their appraisal. In the corpus we found several subtle distinctions in the types of evaluative language:

Positive Affect (Emotion)

Some young women expressed enthusiasm, joy or passion for some careers. For instance, one student said, "Teachers are builders of the nation; that is why I like this profession very much", which made her happy and satisfied with the profession of a teacher. Another commented, "I like nurses too, because they help others, that is a great success, peace and achievement." In this instance, the affective reaction to nursing was expressed in terms of peace and achievement. These types of statements were classified as positive affect (subtypes: happiness, pride, inspiration). Of the 100 student narratives, more than half (about 55 narratives) included at least one mention of positive feelings about a career or working. This suggests a considerable amount of aspiration and altruistic motivation (e.g., desire to help others, serve the country) among these young women despite the difficulties.

Negative Affect

Many of the stories included a sense of fear, anxiety, or frustration, particularly about career barriers. A shared sentiment was the issue of feasibility: e.g., "*Medical bohat mehnga aur mushkil he*" (Medical [education] is very expensive and difficult), in this case, the student's voice expressed frustration and discouragement about the difficulty of pursuing medicine, a negative affect due to perceived financial/academic strain. Insecurity about leaving home was another affective theme: "*Fauj mé jana mushkil, kyunke ghar se dūr rehna parta*" (It is hard to join the army because one has to stay away from home). That's a nervous statement about family connection and concerns about safety. Taking a broader look, roughly 30% of student narratives contained negative affective elements (apart from any direct quotes of others), suggesting that a large proportion of these young women experience internal fear or frustration about careers, as well as any external messages received.

Social Esteem/Sanction (Positive Judgment)

Narrative judgments may also have been based on the values of society related to professions. One of the common positive evaluations was in terms of respectability. One student, for example, said, "I like doctors' jobs because people respect it" and explicitly linked her job preference to the respect it has. Likewise, one said, "My family doesn't mind teaching; people like it." This implies that teaching is considered a good profession for women. These types of statements were classified as positive social esteem; they rate a profession as good in the eyes of society or morally good. Such decisions were frequently made by those who were influential, such as fathers who would approve medicine or "*shareef peshay*" (decent professions) for girls, or teachers who would approve some professions as "noble." The narratives that received the most positive judgment were those of teaching and medicine, which are also in line with the cultural norms in Pakistan which consider female teachers and doctors commendable, and conveniently, the

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careers that also involve service and care. About 45% of the stories contained some type of positive assessment of a profession, either by the student or as attributed to another influential.

Negative Judgment

Conversely, there were numerous negative social statements made about certain professions. Nursing was one area that was definitely stigmatised in some narratives: e.g., "*Bhai kehta nursing achi nahé, log pasand nahé kartey*" (My brother says nursing is not good, people do not like it). This is an example of social stigma attached to nursing; although it's a helping profession, some people think it is not respectful (in Pakistan, this can be because of cultural prejudices towards the nature of the work and interacting with male patients). Other negative judgment words: *Doctory ka shoba achha nahé, tarah tarah ke admi atay-jatay hasptalon mein* (The medical profession is not good; all sorts of men visit hospitals). In this instance, the judgment is that it is unethical for a woman to work in a co-educational or mixed-gender setting (such as a hospital), which is a conservative view on morality and good behaviour. We categorised these under negative social sanction or moral judgment. Nearly 40% of the student narratives told in class discussed some aspect of a negative evaluation of a career by others (family and/or community). The careers most widely derided in the data were nursing and the military (armed forces) and, bizarrely, in a handful of instances, engineering or even executive careers, usually derided as "unsuitable for girls.

Mixed/Neutral Appraisals

Many stories were mixed, having both positive and negative aspects, and sometimes multiple voices. A student, for example, may personally enjoy a field of study (positive affect), but her parents may believe it is inappropriate (negative judgment), which leaves her feeling torn. Some neutral or factual positions were also identified and were coded when a narrative was descriptive but did not include a judgment (e.g., "My father was a teacher and advised me to become a teacher"; a statement of influence without sentiment). When students reported on advice or trends, these neutral tones often occurred when they did not include their emotions. Approximately 20% of the narratives were considered largely neutral or informational, but typically such narratives did have some form of sentiment implied (e.g., there was not an overt sentiment, but the lack of sentiment could imply a lack of enthusiasm or resignation).

For example, in the case of one participant, a woman who wanted to be a doctor (positive affect: aspiration), it is a "prestigious, respected job" (positive judgment) that "helps humanity" (positive appreciation for its service aspect). She, however, described how the cost of medical education is very high, and the profession is difficult (negative appreciation: focus on negative aspects), and that "different kinds of men will be around you" (negative judgment: moral concern. She expressed feeling discouraged and confused (negative affect: insecurity). She is now thinking about becoming a teacher, as "no one in the family objects to teaching" (reported neutral/positive judgment, which means social approval). This one story covers most of the categories: positive affect and judgment with one career, negative judgment and affect from an influencer, and a final decision based on what is socially acceptable. It illustrates the power of fine-grained sentiment analysis to expose the internal struggle and the deciding influence of communal stories.

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Table 2 Appraisal Theory: ATTITUDE Sub-systems Applied to Career Discourse

Sub-system	Category	Manifestation in Career Discourse	Example Lexico-grammatical Markers
Affect	Happiness/Satisfaction	Expressing pleasure or fulfilment in a profession	*pasand* (like), *khushi* (happiness), *bohat achi lagti* (I really like)
	Frustration/Anxiety	Expressing disappointment at blocked aspirations	*dukh* (sadness), *pata nahe* (I don't know), *mushkil* (difficult)
Judgement	Social Esteem	Evaluating social desirability of a profession	*izzat* (respect), *qadar* (value), *log pasand krtey* (people like it)
	Social Sanction	Moral approval/prohibition of professional choice	*kabhi nahe* (never), *sakht khilaf* (strongly against)
Appreciation	Valuation/Reaction	Evaluating worth or effectiveness of a career	*faida* (benefit), *mehfooz* (secure), *ahem* (important)

The influencers generally brought forth different types of sentiments:

Fathers: Provided judgmental stories, positive or negative, such as "I will be proud if you become a doctor" or "It's not appropriate for our girls to work in that field". A number of fathers spoke of the practical or moral aspects, such as the importance of stability (appreciation of security) or jobs which involve mixed gender environments (judgment/social sanction). Their words were important; students often expressed their aspirations in relation to the approval of their fathers.

Mothers: When spoken of, they were supportive, encouraging the daughters to study and be independent, and cautious, concerned about social acceptance and safety. One student said her mother told her that teaching is good for girls: it is respected, offers holidays, and provides positive judgment and pragmatic appreciation (flexibility in a teaching job for future family life).

An interesting theme was the role of elder brothers as "gatekeepers" of "suitability." Brothers' opinions revealed many negative attitudes toward some professions, particularly nursing and any career involving public contact. In a few instances, a brother simply prohibited a sister from following a profession: he told her that she "cannot go into sports professionally because '*log kia kahenge*' (what will people say). A few students gave credit to brothers for positive influence, such as encouragement from a brother to go on to higher education overseas, which was uncommon and usually only in more educated families.

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Teachers: Teachers were typically mentioned as positive influences. The positive effect (inspiring confidence) and positive judgment (the teacher expressing a belief in the student's capability) were reported by many students as examples of positive comments. For instance, one student reported that her college teacher would address her as "*engineer sahiba*" (engineer my dear) to encourage her to become an engineer. This type of story is basically a positive projection, and it had an impact on the student's self-concept. But a few passed discouraging remarks, typically as it related to their previous education (e.g., she should take arts rather than science), that made her doubt herself, that she had a negative judgment that some absorbed and changed their course).

Peers/Friends: These were of less direct importance in terms of content of the direct narrative, but some students reported that they tended to follow the group norm or friends' choices when choosing the content of their direct narrative (particularly at the high school level). Peer influence was more implicit, such as a student selecting pre-medical in college, not because it was a sentiment, but because "all my friends did." However, sometimes peers reinforced dominant attitudes (e.g., a few students referring to their friend circle and saying "math is too hard for girls", a stereotype mentioned by peers).

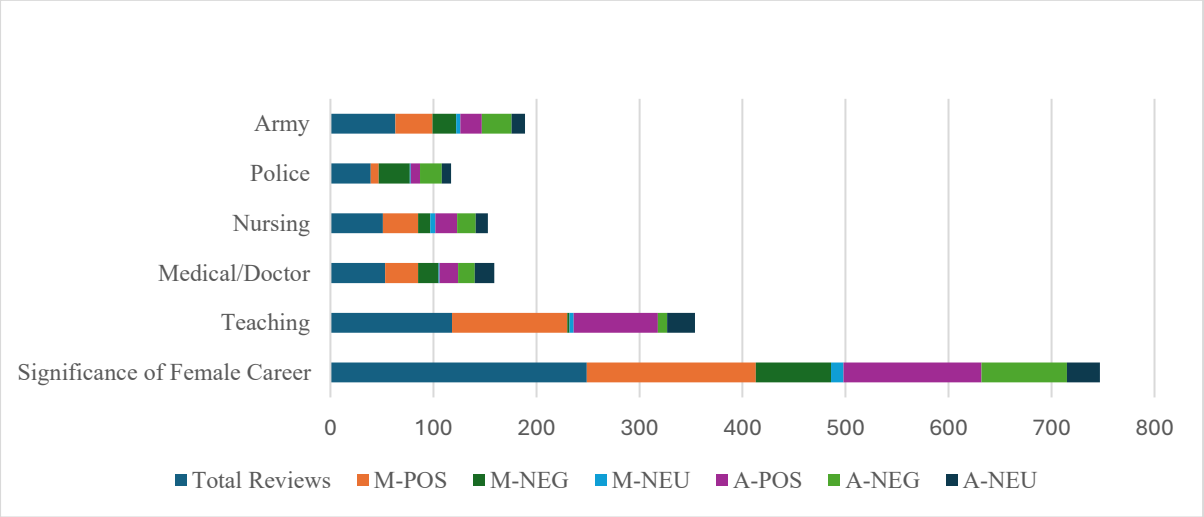

Figure 1 Frequency Distribution of Sentiments across Professional Categories (Manual vs. Automated Annotation)

These influence patterns were found related to narratives' content: many negative judgements of careers were related to male family members' perspectives, and many positive encouragements were related to mothers and teachers. This doesn't mean that there was a clear gender division (we had fathers who were supportive of daughters, and some mothers who were concerned about norms), but it does indicate that there is a cultural division where senior males tend to feel guardians of propriety and female mentors tend to be emotionally supportive.

4.3 Discursive Strategies and Narratives

The qualitative analysis of the discourse identified some strategies and structures that were used in the narration of these careers:

Narrative of Sacrifice vs. Self-fulfilment: Several young women presented their career as a sacrifice/com compromise to please family. A student, for instance, decided to study law, but stated, "I wanted to study law, but my father didn't like it, so I chose teaching so my parents would be comfortable." In this instance,

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the story is about duty and appeasement, with the positive feeling (her respect for her parents' wishes) taking precedence over her own interest. Other stories focused on self-fulfilment, in which the student was adamant that she had to pursue her passion despite opposition. These usually included a tale of triumph over discouragement, such as, "I said to everyone I want to be an artist, everyone laughed and said it's your dream." Oftentimes, these narratives used contrastive discourse markers, such as "even though... I will...", which showed a conscious counter-position to the prevailing sentiment. The sentiment tone of sacrifice narratives was frequently wistful or resigned (sadness, negative affect), while self-fulfilment narratives were defiantly optimistic (positive affect with a rebellious tone).

Many students incorporated the voice of their influencers in their writing or interview, a technique that brought the voice of the outside person into the text. This frequently took the form of reported speech (e.g., 'Nursing is not good, people do not like it' or 'You should become an engineer', my teacher told me"). The narrators differentiated between the influencer's voice and their own by quoting. We noted that, sometimes, when a quote was negative, the students responded with a rebuttal or with a statement about how the quote made them feel. For example, one stated, "My friend told me, 'Girls' education is not needed. I said to her that she was right, but I'm going to show them that". The discursive effect of this quoting is to create a dialogic narrative, in other words, to demonstrate the interaction of narratives. It enabled us to identify the sources of sentiments in the text clearly.

Modality and Hedging: The language of possibility and permission (modals) was very common, as mentioned. It was interesting to note that some students used modals to hedge their aspirations, implying uncertainty. For example: "I might go for engineering if my family allows it", where the epistemic modal of uncertainty (might) is combined with the deontic conditional (if allowed). These sentences are very succinct in capturing the contingent nature of their ambitions. The more confident narratives, on the other hand, were represented by definite modal constructions: "I will be a doctor. There's no reason why I can't." Whether or not students had supportive narratives around them was correlated with their presence or absence of hedging. People with one or more strong encouragers in their lives (such as a teacher or parent who encourages them to go further) were more likely to use assertive language in their plans (high self-efficacy in discourse), while those who had naysayers in their lives were more likely to use maybe and if in their plans. This implies that the attitudes they were imbibed affected not only the content but the language in which they expressed themselves.

Certain cultural scripts, familiar sayings or proverbial ideas were also observed in several narratives, indicating a common discourse in the community: Cultural Narrative Scripts. One such script was the idea '*aurat ka asli kam ghar sambhalna*' (a woman's real work is to manage the house), which was said by some influencers. One was the "have it all" dichotomy: students spoke of the challenge of balancing work and family life, echoing Caprino (2014) in his own words that women "can't have it all". On a brighter side, some students learned that education is a means of empowerment from media or NGO campaigns such as the Lifebuoy shampoo ad campaign slogan, "*mazboot banegi, meri beti parhegi!*" "My daughter will grow strong, she will learn!" In speaking about their desire to pursue a career, we saw two students repeat that phrase, but differently: they were saying that they wanted a career because it was part of a bigger story of girl empowerment. These common stories suggest that there are public discourses that are entering into private stories. These frequently demonstrated a highly positive sentiment when students repeated empowerment stories (pride, hope) and a negative or resigned sentiment when students repeated traditional stories (frustration, resignation).

In a nutshell, the findings show that young women's career stories in this context are a complex mix of positive aspirations and negative social pressures, emotional experiences and moral judgments. The sentiment-based analysis enabled us to measure and illustrate the distribution of various types of sentiments (joy, fear, respect, disapproval) in the narratives. Discursive analysis, in turn, revealed how

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those sentiments function in storytelling, sometimes propelling a girl forward, other times holding her back.

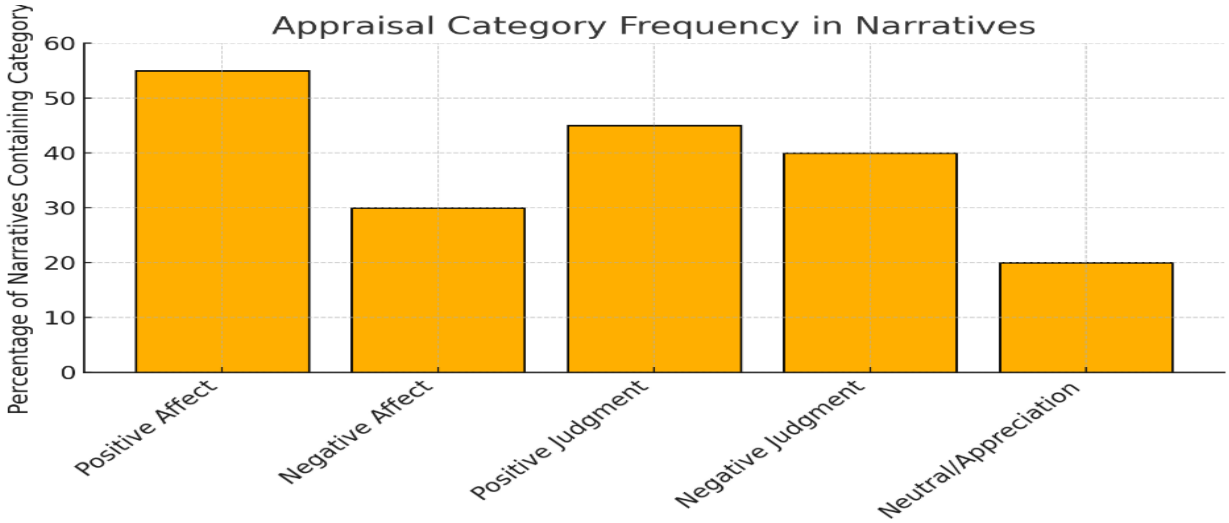

Figure 2

Most importantly, the data reveal that language is important: being told that a girl is "incapable" can make her feel uncertain, and being told that a girl is "brilliant" can make her feel confident; being told that a job is "honourable" can make her want to know more, and being told that a job is "shameful" can shut it down. The next section discusses these findings in light of social and linguistic theory, and considers their implications for broader socio-economic outcomes and interventions.

The results reveal the strong influence of evaluative language on young women's career paths. The choice of a career (and which career) for a woman is rarely a single decision taken by a single woman in Pakistan's patriarchal social fabric, as in other conservative contexts. It, instead, is the result of a continuous dialogue of narratives between the woman and her environment. In our analysis, this dialogue is not simply about what influencers say, but how they say it (the sentiments, the modality, the framing) that makes a difference.

First, on the linguistic appraisal side, our results further support the notion that evaluative language (appraisal) has an ideological impact. A father who tells his son that people will respect him if he becomes a doctor is not just trying to say something positive; he's associating a career with a social value. Positive appraisals can empower women, but they also encourage women to choose socially approved careers (doctor, teacher) over other careers that may be of interest to them but not socially approved. The latter, on the other hand, are negative appraisals such as "people will laugh if you do this or that" ... "not for girls" that act as discursive gatekeeping. They set psychological obstacles which are not always physical; in fact, the words themselves sow doubt or aversion. This is consistent with Appraisal Theory's claim that evaluative language can engage listeners with certain values or stances (Martin & White, 2007). Here, influencers aligned the young women either towards valuing a career or devaluing it. The repeated exposure to such appraisals over time is likely to lead to internalised attitudes. If she hears that a field is "shameful" or "too hard for girls" repeatedly, she may come to believe that she didn't really want it; this can restrict her ambition.

The affective dimension of our study, particularly with fine-grained categories, indicates the importance of considering the affective aspect of career guidance. While interests, skills and economic considerations are frequently mentioned as factors in career development, our findings highlight the role of emotions

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and feelings. For example, a fear of being unsafe or frightened (such as going too far from home) was common to make them reluctant to take up some opportunities. These are not inconsequential emotional responses, but are rooted in a profound socio-cultural conditioning (e.g., "A good girl stays close to family"). A one-way approach of providing information, such as informing girls about the various careers, may not be effective without addressing and resolving these feelings. This may include the assurance of safe spaces to minimise fears and maximise hopes and to be heard.

Another factor to be discussed is the methodological contribution of the combination of sentiment analysis and discourse analysis. Our success with this approach indicates that computational tools can be used to augment, not supplant, qualitative research, if used sensitively and appropriately in a culturally responsive manner. In this way, Urdu narratives were translated, and sentiment analysis was used to get a bird's-eye view of the sentiment trends. Next, discourse analysis zoomed in to give depth. We faced one difficulty while developing the sentiment classification system is that the existing NLP tools for Urdu sentiment are not strong enough. This reinforces the fact that sentiment technology can be helpful, but is not a substitute for human interpretation, particularly for more nuanced and context-specific data. As such tools are improved (and perhaps trained on this very data set of Urdu career narratives), future researchers might be able to take advantage of automated categorisation of the appraisal categories (there is some emerging work on using machine learning to classify text into appraisals such as affect, judgement, etc.). We do this by giving a labelled example of what it might look like to do, and by identifying some of the kinds of language cues to consider.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study examined the impact of social and family narratives on the career aspirations of young women in small towns of Punjab, Pakistan, with the help of language. Combining two approaches, sentiment analysis and discourse analysis, revealed a complex landscape of narratives in which positive and negative sentiment (i.e., judgments, emotions, cultural values) can serve as stepping stones or stumbling blocks on women's journeys to their desired careers. The study provides theoretical and practical implications at the intersection of language, gender and education.

Finally, the powerful stories and judgemental talk about young women can have a major impact on their career prospects. Encouraging narratives (ones filled with hope, praise, and possibility) tend to expand a girl's vision of what might be possible, while discouraging narratives (ones filled with fear, disapproval, or ideas of something being wrong) can narrow a girl's vision of what might be possible or her confidence. The findings are part of a growing body of work that found that career decision-making is not a solely cognitive process, but a socio-linguistic phenomenon. The analysis of reported experiences of young women in relation to occupations provides insight into the social construction of gender roles and the subtle influences that encourage or impede gender equality in the world of work.

Policy Implications: Recommendations for policy and programs based on findings of this study can be made to enhance gender equity in education and the workforce. It emphasises the need for community-level interventions first. The government and NGOs should seriously think about campaigns which might change the narrative about women's work in society. More campaigns could highlight the achievements of women from rural areas in a variety of professions to give girls an alternative narrative to follow, similar to the Lifebuoy campaign that gave a positive message to girls' education. This should be in addition to women, and include men and community leaders, as suggested by the Brookings Institute to break cultural barriers with “unified messages.”

Second, it is the need of the hour to improve the career counselling mechanism in the education system, particularly in rural and small towns schools/colleges. Counsellors and teachers need to be trained to recognize the narrative environment of their students. For instance, if a girl has a science talent but isn't inclined to pursue it because of family reservations, counsellors can communicate with parents, perhaps

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changing the perspective and highlighting the benefits and mitigating concerns. Parent workshops may be part of school/college events; for example, "Women in the Workforce: Myths and Realities" sessions may be held to discuss common fears with facts and success stories. Many parents may not be against careers in general but worried about social acceptance, which can be reduced by normalising women's careers through community dialogue.

Third, at the policy level, initiatives to increase female enrolment in college or vocational education in smaller districts must be accompanied by measures to tackle the practical barriers mentioned in the narratives, such as safety of transportation, hostel facilities for girls, scholarships or financial assistance, and job creation in the local area. If a girl says "I can't go far for a job/education", it is likely a fact. Policymakers need to understand that infrastructure that makes it easier to transport safely, provides campus accommodation, and allows for distance learning can provide some fodder for the kinds of negative narratives like "how can you work far from home?". That is, addressing material issues can, in turn, alter the discourse, making some objections illegitimate.

Educational Reform: The results indicate the need for incorporating gender sensitive communication training in teacher education. Third, the most influential and in general, positive (but not uniformly) were teachers in our study. Schools/colleges can be places of positive narrative formation by educating teachers about using positive language and avoiding stereotyping.

5.1 Future Research

This study suggests a number of possible areas for further research. An immediate extension would be to perform sentiment analysis and construct narratives in other parts of Pakistan and compare cultural narratives. Another avenue is to track longitudinally how narratives and sentiments change, for instance, following some of these participants over time to see if and how they break through the narratives that once constrained them, or if they perpetuate them in the next stage of life (Nawaz et al., 2021).

Linguistically and AI-wise, our research data can be utilised for the development of more accurate Urdu Sentiment Analysis (SA) tools, which could be fine-tuned to the Urdu Appraisal discourse. We believe that interdisciplinary work can be used to further develop NLP for low-resource languages such as Urdu based on the principles of appraisal theory.

In closing, this study provided a platform for young women in small-town Punjab to voice their experiences and feelings regarding career choices; voices that are often marginalised (Qureshi, 2021). These career choice stories, heard both from a psychological and discursive perspective, offer not only academic insight, but a compassionate insight into the young women's struggles and aspirations. As we have seen, their stories are not only their own, but they are also a reflection of society's values and a lens that can offer a glimpse into what lies ahead. To create a more gender-balanced education and employment system, it is crucial to challenge and ultimately change these narratives; to shift from a story of 'not being able' and 'not knowing' to one of 'being able' and 'being sure'.

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