



Gender Representation in Lebanese Media

Introduction

This research endeavors to provide a comprehensive examination of how Lebanese media constructs gender, with a focus on the interplay between language, cultural symbolism, and social power. By analyzing selected media texts including popular songs, films, and television shows this study will explore how masculinity and femininity are portrayed, how these portrayals align with or resist traditional gender norms, and what implications they hold for gender relations in contemporary Lebanese society. The findings aim to shed light on the ways media discourse contributes to both the reinforcement and contestation of gender stereotypes, offering insight into the ongoing cultural dialogue about identity, power, and equality in Lebanon.

Language plays a pivotal role in sustaining these gender norms within media content. The use of sentimental, commanding, or emotionally charged language in songs, scripts, and dialogues helps to naturalize and legitimize traditional gender roles. For example, lyrical narratives that celebrate male strength and female devotion embed these expectations deeply in the cultural psyche, limiting the space for alternative and more fluid expressions of gender identity. Through linguistic framing, media texts reproduce power relations and maintain social expectations regarding how men and women should behave, relate, and be valued.

While there are emerging examples in Lebanese media that seek to question or subvert these traditional gender roles, such attempts are often constrained by dominant cultural narratives and audience expectations. The media thus becomes a site of negotiation between the forces of tradition and the pressures of social change. This reflects broader societal struggles over gender equality, individual freedom, and the transformation of deeply rooted social norms.

Lebanese society grapples with a tension between tradition and modernity, where long-standing cultural norms often coexist with increasing calls for gender equality and social reform. This ambivalence is vividly expressed in media narratives, where gender roles are frequently depicted through the lens of entrenched stereotypes. Women, for instance, are commonly sexualized and portrayed in ways that emphasize their physical appearance, emotional sensitivity, and roles as caregivers or symbols of virtue. Such portrayals confine women within limited frameworks that emphasize vulnerability and dependence, reinforcing societal expectations that restrict women's agency and participation in public and professional spheres. These media images contribute to maintaining a cultural environment that undervalues women's diverse capabilities and identities.

Moreover, the portrayal of masculinity in Lebanese media is often characterized by ideals of strength, control, and authority. Men are depicted as protectors, leaders, and decision-makers, roles that emphasize power and resilience. This narrow representation pressures men to conform to rigid standards, discouraging emotional vulnerability and alternative expressions of masculinity. Such depictions not only reinforce patriarchal power structures but also limit men's ability to engage authentically with their emotions and relationships. The media's emphasis on dominance as a masculine ideal perpetuates gender inequalities by upholding a social order where men wield authority both in private and public life.



Importantly, these gendered media portrayals are not isolated from the broader socio-political context of Lebanon, where sectarian, religious, and cultural identities intersect with gender. The reinforcement of traditional gender roles through media reflects and reproduces existing power dynamics that extend beyond gender into class, religion, and ethnicity. In this way, the media serves as a mirror of societal values but also as a tool that shapes public perceptions and attitudes, influencing how gender roles are enacted and contested within communities.

So, this research recognizes the potential of media to serve as a catalyst for social change. Despite the dominance of conventional gender norms, emerging voices in Lebanese media, whether through alternative film narratives, music, or social media platforms, offer spaces for challenging and reshaping these roles. These counter-narratives highlight the complexities and contradictions of contemporary gender identities, fostering dialogue and awareness that may contribute to greater gender equity. Understanding this dynamic interplay between media representation and social transformation is crucial for appreciating the evolving nature of gender in Lebanon.

The influence of Lebanese media on gender perception cannot be underestimated, especially given the country's rich tradition of storytelling through television, music, and film. Media consumption shapes everyday understandings of gender roles by repeatedly exposing audiences to particular images and narratives. This constant exposure normalizes gender expectations, making them seem natural and unquestionable. For instance, the frequent depiction of women as caregivers and men as breadwinners not only reflects societal norms but also actively reinforces them, creating a cycle that is difficult to break. Through these patterns, media becomes a powerful agent of socialization, teaching individuals from a young age about the “appropriate” ways to express gender.

Furthermore, the intersection of globalization and local cultural practices adds complexity to the construction of gender in Lebanese media. While global media trends introduce new ideas about gender equality and diversity, these often clash with traditional Lebanese values rooted in religion, family, and community expectations. Lebanese media reflects this tension by simultaneously promoting modern ideals of empowerment and maintaining conservative gender norms. This duality reveals a society in transition, where gender roles are contested terrains shaped by competing forces of modernity and tradition.

The impact of such media portrayals is far-reaching, influencing not only individual identity formation but also social policies and public discourse on gender issues. When media reinforces stereotypes, it can hinder progress toward gender equality by limiting public support for reforms or perpetuating discrimination. Conversely, when media challenges stereotypes and presents diverse, nuanced portrayals of gender, it can broaden societal understanding and encourage more inclusive attitudes. Therefore, studying media representations of gender in Lebanon is essential to grasp the broader cultural and political dynamics affecting gender relations in the country.

Additionally, language within Lebanese media plays a critical role in constructing gender identities. The choice of words, metaphors, and emotional tone in dialogue and lyrics often carries implicit gender messages. Male characters or singers frequently use assertive, commanding language that projects dominance, while female characters are often associated with softer, emotive language that emphasizes submission or nurturing qualities. This linguistic differentiation perpetuates a binary understanding of gender, limiting both men and women to predefined roles that align with patriarchal values. The



subtleties of language in media texts thus work on both conscious and subconscious levels to shape gendered behavior and attitudes.

The impact of media representations extends beyond mere entertainment; they actively shape public perceptions and individual identities. In Lebanon, where media consumption is widespread and varied, the reinforcement of gender stereotypes through visual and linguistic means contributes to the normalization of unequal power dynamics. These narratives influence how people internalize gender roles from a young age, affecting personal aspirations, interpersonal relationships, and societal expectations. For example, the repetitive depiction of men as dominant and women as submissive in media can perpetuate cycles of inequality in both private and public spheres.

Moreover, the intersectionality of gender with other social categories such as class, religion, and ethnicity plays a crucial role in media portrayals. Lebanese media often frames gender roles within the context of sectarian and socio-economic divides, which complicates the construction of identity and power. Women from different religious or social backgrounds may be represented differently, with certain stereotypes reinforced more strongly in specific communities. This layered representation contributes to a fragmented understanding of gender, highlighting the need to analyze media texts with sensitivity to Lebanon's complex social fabric.

Technology and globalization have introduced new dynamics into Lebanese media, exposing audiences to international perspectives on gender while also provoking cultural tensions. Satellite channels, streaming platforms, and social media have expanded access to diverse gender narratives, encouraging some viewers to question traditional roles and advocate for change. However, these influences coexist with conservative forces that seek to preserve established norms. Lebanese media thus becomes a battleground where progressive and traditional values compete, reflecting the country's ongoing negotiation between modernization and cultural preservation.

In addition to the influence of media producers, audience reception plays a significant role in shaping the impact of gender portrayals. Lebanese viewers engage with media content actively, interpreting, accepting, or resisting the gender norms presented. These interactions reveal that media meanings are not fixed but subject to contestation and reinterpretation. Understanding how different segments of society respond to gendered media content can provide valuable insights into the potential for social change and the resilience of traditional gender ideologies.

Methodology

This study conducted a comprehensive analysis of 104 media content samples across various platforms. The content types included songs, TV series/movies, talk shows, advertisements, articles, and social media posts/videos, distributed across outlets such as YouTube, Netflix, Instagram, TikTok, and websites. The analysis combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches, with a primary focus on the Lebanese context while incorporating regionally recognized concepts relevant to Lebanon.

The research process consisted of three phases:



- **Identification and Mapping of Media Platforms:** Media platforms were selected based on criteria including audience size, reach, relevance to public debates on gender-based violence (GBV), language, and content frequency.
- **Monitoring and Analysis of Media Content:** Three researchers analyzed 104 content samples categorized as follows:
 - TV series/Movies: 9
 - Newspapers/Articles: 16
 - Popular Trends: 46
 - Commercial Advertisements: 15
 - Songs: 13
 - Talk Shows: 5
- **Data Analysis and Reporting:** Recurrent themes and patterns were extracted from the combined content. Thematic focus areas included gender and emotions, shifting narratives of resistance, activism, and feminist movements, beauty standards and female sexualization, male sexual stereotypes and power dynamics, and the representation of gender norms in media.

Analysis

- **Gender and emotions**

To comprehend the relationship between emotion and gender in Lebanon, it is essential to begin with an understanding of what emotion is. As the American Psychological Association ¹defines it, emotion is "a complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements, by which an individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event." That is, emotions are not singular reactions but multifaceted responses based on personal experience, bodily states, and social behavior. Although women and men both utilize and experience emotions in decision-making processes, sometimes even overriding rational reason, their expression is always filtered through gendered cultural expectations. These expectations are highly influenced in Lebanon by a patriarchal social structure in which masculinity is identified with restraint, control, and self-control, and femininity with expressiveness, sensitivity, and relational orientation. Masculinity, specifically, is constructed by norms promoting resilience, emotional stoicism, and risk-taking, and deterring vulnerability. One 2019 research work on the social construction of Arab masculinity by El Halabi, Founouni, and Arawi illustrates how cultural expectations on men enforces certain responsibilities that commonly lead to emotional repression. This is supported by current figures from Be Brave Beirut ²(2024), which show that 42% of Arab men suffer from symptoms of depression, yet are much less likely to seek help than women—a consequence directly resulting from the stigmatization of male vulnerability.

¹ <https://www.apa.org/topics/emotions>

- ² [Nearly Half of Arab Men Experience Depression Symptoms Amidst Cultural Pressures of Masculinity - Beirut Today](#)



Women, by contrast, are culturally perceived and portrayed as being more emotional, an expectation widespread in psychological literature (Fischer, 1993³; Fabes & Martin, 2011⁴). While women's expressiveness is socially expected, it is also policed—celebrated when it aligns with beauty, romance, or caregiving, but criticized when it challenges authority or disrupts established norms. Seale's ⁵(2002) analysis of health-related media shows a similar dynamic in global contexts: women's challenges are framed as struggles to manage emotion, while men's are framed as tests of character.

In Lebanon, these dynamics are evident across multiple media platforms. Women in commercials are often shown freaking out over gaining weight, obsessing about home perfection, or using beauty products to secure male attention, reaffirming that emotional value lies in physical attractiveness and relationship maintenance. For example, perfume and cosmetics advertisements routinely depict women's emotional satisfaction as depending on male desire, and portray men as rational, confident problem-solvers even in domestic roles—such as the occasional cooking image where male kitchen activity is depicted as unusual.

In mainstream music, women are portrayed as emotionally demanding lovers or jealous girlfriends, and men are depicted as possessive but noble victims. It bandies clichéd lyrics like "bhibbek w bghar 3leik" ("I love you and get jealous of you") that romanticize male control and blame-shifting jealousy as love, while minimizing female jealousy as hysterical drama. Women are often placed in glamorous or domestic settings in music videos, visually reinforcing traditional roles, while men are seen in commanding positions or indifferent detachment.

Women are given central roles in TV dramas such as *Lil Mawt* and *Bil Dam* but are defined in terms of emotional vulnerability, revenge, or sacrificial motherhood, whereas men are violent, emotionally stoic, or morally conflicted—traits that are portrayed as signs of strength. Even where women drive the plot, their emotions are reactive to male actions, and their pain is individualized rather than located within structural injustices.

Lebanese political and news reporting still demonstrates this gendered inequality. Female politicians like Paula Yacoubian are often subjected to a media narrative that focuses on their appearance, emotional tone, or alleged provocations rather than policy positions, framing emotional expression as disruptive to political authority. Male politicians, in contrast, are portrayed as calm, calculated, and rational leaders, even in moments of anger or altercation.

In social media, particularly on TikTok and Instagram, women's feelings are typically commodified into humorous reels or beauty content. As an example, videos of women's "meltdowns" over gaining weight or relationships are utilized for comic relief, while the men in the same environment are composed, financially secure, and emotionally unavailable—qualities that are celebrated as

³ Fischer, A. H. (1993). Sex differences in emotionality: Fact or stereotype? *Feminism & Psychology*, 3, 303–318.

⁴ Fabes, R. A., & Martin, C. L. (1991). Gender and age stereotypes of emotionality. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17, 532-540.

• ⁵ Seale, C. F. (2002). Cancer heroics: a study of news reports with particular reference to gender. *Sociology*, 36, 107–26.



aspirational. The gendered emotional divide is also present in influencer culture, with women's emotional appeal being consumerist and aesthetic, and men's being authoritative and witty.

Talk shows amplify the tendency by making women's emotional expression a moral spectacle. Female guests who transgress social norms—such as those who discuss sex work or challenge modesty codes—are morally judged through the use of terms such as "عاهرة" (whore) or "ساقطة" (immoral), and male hosts and guests take on the role of moral authorities. For instance, conversations about women's clothing or relationships are liable to become arenas for disciplining female behavior, with little acknowledgment of structural inequality. A worthy counterexample is the on-air altercation between journalist Rima Karaki and a sexist guest, in which her emotional response in the moment was celebrated by women as empowering. Such cases are, however, held up as the exception, rather than as indicative of a shifting media norm.

Across these platforms, there is a recurring emotional binary: women are represented as emotional, but their emotions are excessive, performative, or burdensome; men are represented as emotionally in control, but their anger, jealousy, or pain is legitimized and even valorized. This pattern warps public knowledge of emotional behavior and sustains a cultural schema in which emotional authenticity is variably distributed, socially regulated, and tied to gendered power relations. In Lebanese media culture, emotion is not only a personal experience but also a gendered performance, shaping how individuals are valued, judged, and remembered in private and public life.

- **Shifting narratives: resistance, activism, and feminist movements**

The way women are portrayed in Lebanon has changed over time, moving from their marginal position in early print media to a much more contested but visible space in the digital sphere. This change is a reflection of larger social, political, and cultural changes in Lebanese society, where there is a continuous and intense struggle for narrative control over the conversation about gender and rights. Founded by trailblazers like Hind Nawfal and Labiba Hashim, early feminist print magazines like *Al-Fatat*, *Al-Arous*, *Majallat Al-Sayyidat wal-Banat*, and *Minerva* provided vital platforms for discussing women's suffrage, education, and gender equality in the late Ottoman and French Mandate eras. However, these publications stayed mostly on the periphery of mainstream media discourse, frequently being framed as elite or niche endeavors by dominant press narratives, with little exposure to the general public⁶.

Today, digital media platforms—including social networks, online news outlets, streaming services, advertising, and viral campaigns—have become the primary arenas where gender norms and women's rights are actively contested, reproduced, and reimagined. This shift to digital has both expanded visibility and intensified the struggle over narrative sovereignty. An analysis of 104 Lebanese media samples reveals persistent patterns of gender portrayal that reinforce patriarchal stereotypes: popular songs frequently show women as obsessive, emotionally dependent lovers, whose value hinges on romantic validation, while men are cast as dignified yet possessive sufferers whose jealousy is reframed as passion. Similarly, television series like “*Lil Mawt*” and “*Bil Dam*” script female characters as emotionally fragile or sacrificial, contrasting with male characters portrayed as tolerant,

⁶ library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/beirut/22069.pdf



aggressive, or morally tormented heroes, whose restraint is valorized as strength. Commercial advertising maintains these tropes by showing women in exaggerated emotional states related to beauty, weight, or domestic duties, while men appear as rational decision-makers and problem solvers. Talk shows often sensationalize women's traumas, reducing survivor testimonies to spectacle and moral judgment predominantly by male hosts, while men dominate expert panels discussing gender issues. On social media, women's emotional expressions are commodified into viral humor or self-deprecating memes, whereas men are presented as financially savvy, detached, and unaffected.

Feminist digital activists and organizations are increasingly stepping in to challenge and change ingrained narratives in this environment. For example, “Sharika Wa Laken⁷” intentionally avoids the sensationalist framing typical of mainstream media by utilizing intersectional frameworks, inclusive storytelling, and grassroots reporting to elevate survivors' voices while connecting personal experiences to larger systemic injustices. In the Lebanese context, the platform tackles delicate and frequently overlooked topics like sexual practices, taboos, and women's rights. This is especially true thanks to partnerships with sexologist Dr. Sandra Abdallah, who has become well-known for candidly addressing issues pertaining to women's sexual health, bodily autonomy, and personal needs. In Lebanon, where public discussions about sexuality frequently emphasize male viewpoints and experiences, such discourse is still uncommon and reflects larger societal trends of gendered access to information.

Likewise, “NO2TA Feminist Lab⁸” creates easily readable feminist content and trains journalists, filmmakers, and activists to incorporate rights-based framing into their work. By emphasizing women's agency, autonomy, and collective empowerment, these interventions directly challenge the mainstream media's reliance on clichés that are centered on beauty and romance. Beyond media creation, NO2TA's activism encompasses concrete, real-world projects like the Shift Forum, a regional assembly of Arab women content creators aimed at empowering women, promoting networking, and giving them a forum to share their experiences as a source of motivation and knowledge. In addition to challenging prevailing representations, NO2TA fosters a transnational community of women who actively rewrite cultural narratives by connecting content creation with lived experience.

Moreover, the coverage of gender-based political violence by the Maharat Foundation against Education Minister Rima Karami and Member of Parliament Najat Aoun reframes these incidents as systemic misogyny rather than isolated conflicts. While Karami's proposal for gender-inclusive student surveys was met with religiously framed moral panic, Aoun's environmental advocacy was derailed by sexist mockery, including the purposeful twisting of “متساقطات” into “ساقطات” to shame her. Both cases demonstrate how social media is used as a tool for both exposure and harassment, targeting women in politics with personal attacks and moral policing rather than policy debate. In addition to reporting, the Maharat Foundation and its partner Madanyat have long tracked trends in violence against women in politics (VAWP), revealing how institutional responses, political discussions, and online platforms

⁷ [Sharika Walaken – A feminist platform that shares stories, experiences, and knowledge with an intersectional lens](#)

⁸ [Home | NO2TA](#)



frequently condone or overlook this abuse⁹. The group highlights the need for long-term structural change by identifying these strategies and monitoring trends over time, moving the emphasis from individual scandals to the structural obstacles women encounter in leadership roles.

Additionally, digital feminist initiatives like ABAAD's "No Shame, No Blame" campaign¹⁰ in 2022 have played a pivotal role in redefining the public conversation surrounding sexual violence by fusing survivor testimonies with influencer involvement and social media advocacy to dispel stigma and hold offenders directly accountable.

Lastly, it is shown that by strategically occupying digital media platforms, these feminist initiatives not only resist misrepresentation but also contribute to building a lasting cultural archive that links gender justice with broader struggles for accountability, democracy, and social change in Lebanon. Their work expands beyond narrative control to actively confronting and dismantling different topics such as the systemic roots of gender-based violence and inequality. This dynamic illustrates how feminist activism in Lebanon navigates complex intersections of media, culture, and power.

● Beauty Standards and Female Sexualization

In Lebanese media and popular culture, the sexualization of women plays a significant role in shaping societal views on femininity. Advertisements like those for beauty and anti-aging products, such as the Inno Gialuron cream, often focus on women's appearance as their primary value. These ads frequently use persuasive language that plays on women's insecurities about aging, promoting an unrealistic ideal that equates youth with worth. This not only enforces narrow beauty standards but also treats the female body as a product, encouraging women to see themselves as products to be perfected.

In television dramas and films, women are often portrayed through a sexualized lens that reduces their identity to their physical traits. For example, in Lebanese plays like "Lil Mawt" and "Bil Dam", the camera work highlights women's faces and bodies with close-up shots, emphasizing their beauty or vulnerability. Their roles often revolve around emotional turmoil, relationships, or victimhood, rarely allowing them complex, independent identities. Costume design tends to reinforce these images by balancing traditional modesty with elements meant to appeal to the male gaze, such as form-fitting dresses or flirtatious body language.

Music videos and popular songs contribute to this pattern as well. Melhem Zein's "Albi Dak" features imagery of women in delicate, often romanticized roles, emphasizing emotional dependency on men and physical allure. Bissan's "Hayhat" similarly portrays women as objects of desire, reinforcing the idea that a woman's value is closely linked to her looks and her role in romantic relationships. This narrative shapes public perceptions, especially among younger audiences, who may internalize these stereotypes as standards for their own behavior and self-image.

Beyond media, these portrayals affect real social attitudes and behaviors. The pressure on women to conform to specific beauty ideals can impact mental health, self-esteem, and social opportunities. By

⁹ [Violence Against Women in Politics: Lebanon's Alarming Trends Resurface | Maharat Foundation](#)

¹⁰ [#NoShameNoBlame – ABAAD](#)



emphasizing appearance over ability or character, these sexualized images limit women's representation to narrow roles and hinder progress toward gender equality.

• Male Sexual Stereotypes and Power Dynamics

In Lebanese media, male sexual stereotypes often emphasize strength, control, and dominance. This is evident in songs like "Ya Khayal" and "Nehna El Shoyoukh" by Roro Harb, which portray men as powerful, courageous, and authoritative figures.

"Nehna El Shoyoukh" - Asserting Dominance:

The title "Nehna El Shoyoukh" translates to "We Are the Chiefs," immediately establishing a theme of leadership and superiority. The lyrics celebrate men as natural-born leaders, using terms like "shoyoukh" (chiefs) to evoke authority and respect. The song's tone and rhythm reinforce a sense of pride and dominance, portraying men as fearless protectors of their families and communities. This portrayal aligns with traditional expectations of masculinity, where men are seen as decision-makers and guardians.

"Ya Khayal" - The Heroic Figure:

In "Ya Khayal," the male figure is romanticized as a heroic and unstoppable force. The song uses imagery of warriors and guardianship to associate masculinity with physical and emotional strength. The "phantom" or "shadow" suggests a strong yet unreachable presence emotionally reserved, yet deeply admired. His silence is not a sign of emotional absence, but of emotional strength. He doesn't need to express his feelings; his aura alone demands loyalty, love, and respect. This song reinforces the idea that the ideal man is emotionally stoic, mysterious, and unwavering a protector from afar rather than a partner in vulnerability.

Cultural Implications:

These songs reflect a wider cultural narrative: masculinity is tied not to tenderness or vulnerability but to resilience, leadership, and the ability to suppress emotion. Emotional expression is often limited to anger, pride, or loyalty, never softness or uncertainty. This portrayal can put pressure on men to live up to these expectations, discouraging emotional openness or deviation from the "alpha male" ideal.

By constantly repeating these themes in mainstream media, especially music, society continues to set narrow standards for what it means to be a "real man." These expectations can be emotionally suffocating, encouraging men to suppress vulnerability, avoid seeking help, and distance themselves from any behavior perceived as "soft". At the same time, they reinforce power imbalances in gender relations, where control and dominance are still seen as male responsibilities, or even rights.

Ultimately, songs like "Ya Khayal" and "Nehna El Shoyoukh" do more than entertain. They act as cultural texts that shape gender norms, romanticize authority, and perpetuate restrictive definitions of masculinity that deeply affect both men and women in Lebanese society.

In addition, In Tyler Perry's 2025 Netflix film *Straw* (reached no.1 on Netflix in Lebanon) the narrative centers on Janiyah Wilkinson, a single mother portrayed by Taraji P. Henson, who faces a series of



escalating hardships, including job loss, eviction, and the death of her daughter. Throughout the film, male characters are depicted in roles that emphasize strength, control, and authority. For instance, Detective Kay Raymond, played by Teyana Taylor, embodies a figure of law enforcement authority, working to resolve the hostage situation that Janiyah inadvertently initiates. Similarly, other male figures in the film, such as the off-duty officer who harasses Janiyah, represent institutional power and dominance. These portrayals reinforce traditional masculine stereotypes, where men are seen as protectors or enforcers, often emotionally reserved and in control.

This depiction aligns with a broader trend in media, where male characters are often portrayed as stoic and authoritative. For example, in the film *Extraction* (2020), the protagonist Tyler Rake, played by Chris Hemsworth, is a mercenary who undertakes a dangerous mission, showcasing physical strength and emotional restraint. Similarly, in *The King* (2019), Timothée Chalamet's character transitions from a hesitant prince to a decisive king, emphasizing control and dominance. These narratives contribute to the reinforcement of rigid gender norms, suggesting that masculinity is defined by strength and emotional suppression, while vulnerability is often depicted as a weakness.

By consistently portraying men in these roles, media narratives like *Straw* and others perpetuate stereotypes that can discourage emotional expression and open communication among men, reinforcing traditional and often limiting conceptions of masculinity. Male sexuality in these narratives is also closely tied to dominance over women. Women's roles are frequently submissive or dependent, suggesting that men have a right to control female behavior and choices. This power dynamic is often unchallenged in mainstream media, sustaining unequal relationships and limiting women's agency.

In music, male characters are commonly shown as active pursuers in romantic and sexual relationships, while women are cast as passive or reactive. Just like, “Ya Khayal” centers on male desire and longing, with the man as the initiator of romance and control. This reinforces traditional gender roles that expect men to be dominant and women to be compliant or nurturing.

These male stereotypes pressure men to conform to narrow ideals of masculinity that can be harmful, both emotionally and socially. They promote a culture where masculinity is measured by control and emotional suppression, contributing to issues like toxic masculinity and unhealthy relationship dynamics.

Together, these gendered portrayals in Lebanese media contribute to a cycle where both men and women are confined to limited, stereotypical roles: women as objects of beauty and men as figures of power. Challenging these portrayals is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

● Media and Gender Norms

a. Representation Patterns: Visibility and Marginalization

The media in Lebanon plays a significant role in shaping how gender is understood and performed in society. Women, despite their frequent visibility, are often represented in stereotypical ways that marginalize their voices and limit their roles. For example, in popular Lebanese trends like *Life coach samiha*, all her content is about acting like a queen in the relationship, men are always taking women rights... female characters are central yet often portrayed through a lens of victimhood or emotional



weakness. Their stories revolve around themes of revenge or suffering, which reinforces a narrative that women are primarily emotional beings defined by their relationships with men or their pain.

The framing of women in these shows frequently uses close-up shots that emphasize their vulnerability, while men dominate the scenes where action and decision-making take place. This visual hierarchy suggests that men are the natural leaders and doers, while women are passive and reactive. Such patterns mirror broader societal norms, where men's opinions and actions are prioritized over women's voices.

Even in media that attempt to challenge these norms, there remains a subtle power imbalance. Women's empowerment is often portrayed in relation to their romantic or professional lives, but their independence outside these spheres is less emphasized. This nuanced marginalization keeps traditional gender roles intact, even when progress is apparent.

On the other hand, men are mostly shown in positions of control and authority, reinforcing masculine ideals of power and strength. Their visibility in leadership roles in news media and talk shows reflects and supports the status quo of gender hierarchies in Lebanese society.

b. Language, Framing, and Stereotypes

The language used in media texts contributes heavily to sustaining or challenging gender norms. In political discussions, such as the coverage of Paula Yacoubian's conflict with Salim Aoun, during the parliamentary session on January 9, 2025, MP Salim Aoun directed a series of pointed remarks at MP Paula Yacoubian. In response to Yacoubian's accusations that certain MPs were obstructing the presidential election process, Aoun interrupted her, stating:

"This is out of order. Paula, you covered for a kidnapped prime minister, and now you're lecturing about virtue".

He further escalated the exchange by labeling her "the biggest liar on the political scene" and accusing her of lacking both "honor and morality".

This incident underscored the heightened tensions within Lebanon's political landscape, particularly surrounding the candidacy of Army Commander Joseph Aoun for the presidency. The language highlights the threat an outspoken woman poses to the male-dominated political arena. Here, the media frames her as an exception that challenges the patriarchal structure, drawing attention to the barriers women face in public life.

In contrast, news coverage about refugee camps or social tensions often avoids direct gender analysis but nonetheless uses language that perpetuates stereotypes about weakness and instability, particularly regarding marginalized groups. This omission reinforces traditional gender roles by failing to recognize women's distinct experiences in these contexts.

Advertising and commercial media, such as the promotion of beauty products, utilize persuasive language aimed at women's insecurities about aging and appearance. Terms like "youthful," "radiant," and "flawless" create ideals that women are pressured to meet, emphasizing their value through looks.



Men, meanwhile, are framed with language emphasizing authority, honor, and strength. Talk shows and political debates often highlight men's opinions and positions, using formal or assertive language that bolsters the masculine image of leadership.

“Jomhoriyyit Albi” by Mohamad Iskandar uses deeply patriotic and emotionally charged language to describe romantic love, but beneath the sentiment lies a clear reinforcement of traditional gender roles. The woman is described as the “republic of his heart,” placing her in a symbolic position of value, but also ownership. The man becomes the protector, ruler, and emotional narrator, while the woman remains silent, idealized, and emotionally dependent.

The lyrics often use language like the woman has no opinion in other songs by Iskandar, which aligns with his pattern of using music to reassert masculine authority and the idea that a woman's ideal place is within the man's emotional or domestic world, not beyond it.

In “Jomhoriyyit Albi” phrases such as:

“Sheghlik albi w atefti” means your job is only my feelings,

“bikaffe enik raiisit jomhoriyyit albi” it's enough that you're the president of my heart,

tie emotional intimacy to themes of pride, loyalty, and male guardianship.

This metaphorical linking of love to the state places the woman in a position of being cherished but ruled, where the man's strength and leadership are emphasized, while the woman's role is tied to emotional support and passive admiration.

The song, while affectionate, contributes to the discourse that ideal masculinity is protective and commanding, and ideal femininity is obedient, nurturing, and selfless, reinforcing rigid gender binaries through poetic and patriotic language.

Beauty, Sexualization of Women

Definition of Core Concepts

Beauty: A socio-cultural construct, sometimes defined through a narrow lens as a preference for paler skin, Eurocentric femininity, and being slim. In Lebanon, advertising studies reveal an overwhelmingly “white ideal” featuring women with fine features and flawless fair skin, salon-styled hair, and full makeup.

Objectification: *Objectification* is the phenomenon by which persons— especially women are treated and valued mainly based on their physical appearance and sexual appeal, rather than as based on their whole identity characterized by emotions, intellect, autonomy or agency. This is highly embedded within the frame of social norms, interpersonal interactions and media platforms that prioritize the female body as a site of value, visibility, and control. Within this, objectification is not simply a conceptual or



individual occurrence, but a **systemic and cultural pattern** reinforced by **mass media and advertising**, where women are frequently portrayed as passive, fragmented (e.g., only legs, breasts, or lips), and positioned for visual consumption. Also, by the **social norms**, where women are compensated, paid and favored for allying with these standards of beauty and punished socially and economically when they deviate from these norms. Moreover, **Digital and social media** are a major part of this systematic and cultural pattern where likes, filters, and engagement algorithms favor self-presentation that conforms to sexualized ideals. Such process transforms into a **social mechanism of control**, upholding gender hierarchies by limiting women to their perceived aesthetic worth in public and private areas. It operates not only through how others view women but also through **self-objectification**—when individuals internalize the external gaze and begin to monitor, judge, and discipline their own bodies in accordance with societal expectations (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In Lebanon and many MENA countries, these dynamics are shaped by both **globalized beauty standards** and **local patriarchal traditions**, leading to a context in which objectification is normalized, glamorized, and even framed as empowerment—particularly through consumer culture, influencer branding, and aesthetic labor.

The analysis of the items chosen from the mass media from different media platforms in Lebanon shows that in Lebanon—mirroring broader MENA dynamics—the relationship of beauty, objectification, and sexualization discloses extremely engrained gendered power dynamics. Beauty, as endorsed in advertising, is narrow and racialized, often favoring light skin, slim bodies, and Eurocentric features, which reinforces globalized standards at the expense of local diversity. These symbols repeatedly objectify women limiting them to physical forms, silent props, or accessories—where autonomy and subjectivity are concealed. Due to consistent reinforcement, women adopt the perspective of being constantly watched or judged by a male audience learning to monitor and evaluate their bodies against imposed ideals, intensifying internalized pressure and mental strain, body shame, and diminished mental well-being. In public settings like beauty salons, such pressures cross with ideologies of class and femininity, as women adopt beauty as social capital among normative expectations. Altogether, these methods not only root patriarchal standards but also alters women's self-perception and digital agency, requiring vigilant critical media literacy and transformative feminist engagement to challenge and dismantle them.

● Masculinity and Power for Men

Concepts and working definitions

Masculinity (social-scientific): Masculinity is a group of **norms and practices** that are **socially constructed about** how to be a man and how a man should be enforced and monitored through families, mass media, cohorts, organizations, and law. In most contexts there is a **hierarchy of masculinities**: one that is culturally dominant form which is often called **hegemonic masculinity that represents** that an ideal man is someone who is rational, self-controlled, provider, heterosexual, and authoritative, subordinating other masculinities and women. The point of the concept is not that most men fully embody it, but that its **cultural authority** organizes power and gender relations.

Power (for men) in gender orders:



Power refers to structural **advantages given to men** and to **everyday opportunities and strength offered to men** to be able to shape outcomes in families, workplaces, politics, and cultural life. In Lebanon and much of the MENA region, power is reinforced by **patriarchal systems** which are authority fixed to males and give them the right to **honor and shame** women's bodies as vessels of family honor; men as protectors and disciplinarians, and **institutional norms** that channel leadership, inheritance, and decision-making to men.

Regional/Lebanese dynamics

Large-scale evidence from the **IMAGES MENA** study (UN Women/Promundo) shows how many men in **Lebanon** and the neighboring countries approve and recommend traditional gender roles (male guardianship, breadwinning, women's domesticity), alongside notable pockets of support for gender equality—revealing a **contested** system of male dominance. This coexistence of change and downsizing helps explain why public discourse features both normalization of male authority and observable dissent and negative push back when women step into power.

Lebanese media research further documents how **advertising and news cultures** reproduce a **heteronormative, patriarchal masculinity**, casting men as decision-makers and arbiters while feminized bodies function as decor, proof of status, or moral territory to police. These representations stabilize male authority as common sense and aesthetic ideal.

Patterns of Masculinity and Power in the Dataset

Analysis of the items chosen from the Lebanese mass media demonstrates clear and cross-platform patterns that align closely with the existing scholarly literature on gender representation in Lebanon and the MENA region. Across television dramas, advertisements, news coverage, talk shows, music reels, and lifestyle content, men are consistently positioned as the primary holders of authority, while women are framed in ways that affirm male dominance and reinforce patriarchal norms.

Guardianship and disciplinary power

For example, in the television series *Bil Dam* (Episode 26, “Honor Killing”), the male figures impose the concept of family honor through the regulation and penalization of women when their behaviors deviate from the patriarchal established normed. This reinforced the ideology of the honor and shame culture where men gain moral status by controlling female sexuality and mobility. These depictions normalize the authority of men to be the judges of what is right and what is wrong and inserts an instruction for patriarchal dominance into the popular culture (Melki et al., 2023).

Domestic competence versus symbolic authority.

Also, The Beirut Beer Instagram advertisement (“Pasta msh maakarona”) places the woman in a home-based labor role while confirming the men capability and identity in his social and professional domains. However, the women abilities are openly doubted and mocked, mirroring the traditional separation of spheres in which women fill service roles and men take evaluative or decision-making positions. This mirrors findings that Lebanese advertising often privileges male agency and positions men as authoritative decision-makers (Melki et al., 2023; LAU IMRT, 2023).



Male authority in public institutions and gendered sanctioning

A news media reports on a legislative confrontation that shows a woman in the political sector compelled to justify both her policy positions and her gendered codes of respectability, while male anger is justified until it reaches a point of disruption and instability. This reflects institutional controlling of access, where norms of “appropriate” femininity are used to discipline women’s political power in male-dominated areas reflecting broader patterns documented in studies of Lebanese political and workplace cultures (Tlaiss, 2019; El Rahi, 2023).

Moral guardianship over women as property.

In a talk-show discussion on child marriage, the girl at the center of the issue is rendered voiceless while male family members debate her fate. This dramatizes a “property logic” rooted in patriarchal kinship structures, in which male kin decide and female kin serve as vessels of family honor and economic value. Such depictions are consistent with Suad Joseph’s work on patriarchal connectivity in Lebanon (Joseph, 2001).

Lifestyle reels and status masculinity.

In the Instagram reel “When food is life,” a woman’s body is used as a visual status symbol—an aesthetic asset that enhances male-coded consumption. Here masculinity is not expressed through violence but through aspiration, class positioning, and the possession of feminized beauty. Research on Lebanese advertising shows that such aestheticization of male power is often presented as natural and aspirational (Melki et al., 2023).

Taken together, these examples reveal a recurring representational logic: men appear as evaluators, guardians, adjudicators, and entitled consumers, while women and girls are framed as symbolic resources—whether for honor, social status, or visual allure—or as subjects whose actions must be regulated. This is consistent with the concept of **hegemonic masculinity**, which organizes consent around men’s perceived right to decide and control, whether through coercive means (e.g., honor enforcement) or through more seductive forms of dominance (e.g., lifestyle branding and status displays)

Conclusion

This research highlights how the Lebanese media keeps on repeating the deep-rooted gender stereotypes while also providing spaces for controversy and change. Women are often depicted in narrow frames of beauty, emotionality, or victimhood across the TV, music channels, advertisements, news, and social media, while men are portrayed as the rational leaders, providers protectors, decision-makers and power holders. These constructions sustain patriarchal norms that shape how gender is perceived in household, social and professional life. At the same time, gender justice movements, feminist campaigns, digital activism, and community-based media demonstrate that these representations and portrayals are not permanent and subject to change. They strongly oppose and call into question the dominant portrayals,



and make the women's voices and presence visible, and deliver new ways of understanding gender structures that are more inclusive and just.

The findings of our research emphasize that mass media is not an objective mirror of society but a significant cultural influence that maintains, negotiates, and at times redefines gender standards. In the Lebanese context, where male-dominated customs and traditions remain strong, the challenge over representation is highly relevant. Through a critical analyzation of the media content, this research highlights how stereotypes sustain their influence but also how resistance emerges via innovative activism and counter-narratives.

Ultimately, the research urges and presses for improved accountability in the media and calls for promotion of gender-sensitive practices in media creation. Advocating for inclusivity and authentic portrayals of both women and men is not merely crucial to cultural change as well as furthering justice in the society. Further research and investigations should remain engaged in monitoring and shifting narratives, while media efforts that support women and open space for equality, dignity, and agency in the Lebanese and wider Arab media landscape.

References

El-Rahi, L. (2023). *Gendered representations in Lebanese advertisements: Flawless white femininity, heteronormative patriarchal masculinity, and the erasure of local diversity* [Master's thesis, Lebanese American University]. LAU Libraries. <https://soas.lau.edu.lb/files/Gendered%20Media%20Final.pdf>

Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997). *Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks*. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21(2), 173–206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00108.x>

Gill, R. (2007). *Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility*. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 147–166.

Kraidy, M. M. (2010). *Reality television and Arab politics: Contention in public life*. Cambridge University Press.

Moradi, B., & Huang, Y.-P. (2008). *Objectification theory and psychology of women: A decade of advances and future directions*. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 32(4), 377–398.

Wilkins, A. C. (2012). *Becoming Black women: Intimate stories and intersectional identities*. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 75(2), 173–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272512440106>

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or EACEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

