Media representation of women: A multimodal critical discourse analysis

Jelenić, Lucija

University of Zagreb

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of English

TEFL Section

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Student: Lucija Jelenić

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Anđel Starčević

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Studentica: Lucija Jelenić

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1. Introduction

There has always been a need to actively change the social climate around gender inequality that women experience on a daily basis – stereotypes, unrealistic portrayals, lack of opportunities and gender biases. With the exponential growth of technology, the media are and will remain an indispensable part of our daily source of information and entertainment. Even with its many flaws, media are an important factor in inciting public change about a number of themes, such as defining and affirming one's identity, gender role, etc. Is it possible to determine what came first – does media mirror society or otherwise?

Since the concept of media is broad and difficult to encompass in its entirety, most of the examples and analyses in this paper will relate to newspaper articles accessed on the internet. In brief, social media can be defined as "a form of mass media communications on the Internet (…) through which users share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content…" (Britannica). According to Kuhar (2005, 100), the development of mass media in the 20th century has undoubtedly contributed to the creation of universal beauty standards among people of different social classes and geographical areas and has ever since played an important role in spreading idealized images and information about how to achieve the ideal appearance. These ideal beauty standards have led to bad treatment of women – sexual objectification and lack of opportunities outside of domestic domains in comparison to men. Newspaper articles, commercials and advertising campaigns come out every second set to draw attention with a shocking and dramatic title or cover image. Not even entering or doing further research, the message is clear to anyone with access to the internet – a woman is an object, one that should be a symbol of physical beauty and desire, whose main purpose is one day becoming a wife and a mother bound to put her other dreams and ambitions to the side. Female bodies are objectified across different public domains such as sport events, politics and showbusiness. First, women are often judged on how they look, not on their achievements. For example, female athletes or politicians are less likely to be praised for their positive actions and success than their male counterparts. Second, women are strategically used as props in marketing or for clickbait purposes. A beautiful woman on the cover ensures better traffic and sales which lures men into consuming something, and tricks women into believing in unrealistic beauty standards. Sex is what appeals best to many men, and a lack of self-esteem is what is detrimental for women. If a female body is represented in most cases as a commodity product, it creates patterns of stereotypical thinking and behaving which are later hard

to transform fundamentally. Throughout history a lot of progress has been made in terms of women's rights, however, there remains a mismatch between the two genders which is still disappointingly strong for this century. This does not imply that women and men should become one and the same, but that these gender differences should be treated with the same level of respect and understanding.

The main aim of this study is to explore how women are portrayed in different areas of the media world through multimodal critical discourse analysis. The first part will focus on explaining the theoretical framework and the key terms necessary for understanding the research. Section 2 will cover different feminist theories' issues starting from gender performativity, social and gender norms, and the male-dominant world. In Section 3, we will explain multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) and define its fundamental notions – discourse, power, multimodality, as well as determine two modes of multimodal analysis – linguistic and visual mode – that will be used in the interpretation of data. The second part of the paper will explain the research. Methodology and research objectives will be mentioned in Section 4. Next, in Section 5 we will show the collected data and provide detailed interpretation using the multimodal critical discourse analysis. Finally, the study will hold a discussion as well as summarize and evaluate the main ideas.

I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2. Gendered language in the media: areas of feminist-related issues

It is important to highlight and explain the key terms relevant to feminist theories and most problematic areas to analyse how different media platforms perceive women and why they are portrayed the way they are. Taking into consideration that this thesis delves into the vast topic of representation of women in media, or better said their underrepresentation and/or reductionist representation, it heavily relies on the social status women held over time and still hold today in relation to men and their position in society.

Above all, we have to make a short introduction and explain the concept of representation. The term can simply be defined as "the way that someone or something is shown or described" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). According to Stuart Hall (2005, 6), there are two phenomena – *representation* – which may stand for including, supporting, or standing in for something, and

*re*presentation – which carries the meaning of depicting something which was already there, which already exists. As stated in the purpose of this study, the author mentions that working on meaning includes "measuring that gap between what one might think of as the true meaning of an event (or an object) and how it is presented in the media" (ibid., 6). Hall (ibid., 10) further explains that classification is merely one of the main tools people use to grasp meaning and make conceptual maps in order to organize the world. Still, can this become harmful if alternate categories and overlapping meanings are not allowed? Hall (ibid., 12) affirms that discourse is needed, i.e., the frameworks for interpreting meaning are necessary because it is a not a question of whether something exists, but how meaningful it is to an individual or to society. Society should avoid fixating on one meaning as this might make it difficult to overcome deeply ingrained stereotypes and promote diversity within the representation of new or marginalized ideas, events or groups of people, who, most likely, may have not been presented before or have been heavily prejudiced against (ibid., 19-20).

As stated by Jule (2018, 33), language holds a major impact on how women are treated and represented since each word or expression one uses brings value, rather than acting merely as a passive tool of communication. In this sense, gendered language relates to the way "language constructs attitudes towards gender roles and expectations" (ibid.), which is exploited in the power relations between the two genders and functions primarily to the disadvantage of women. The problem may be the constant subtle repetition of these characteristics which vividly separate males from females and lie deeply constructed within society. Once gender stereotypes are internalized, they become difficult to change, ultimately altering people's views and the ways they interact with others (Lubina & Brkić Klimpak, 2014, 214). Gill (2007, 7) highlights a relevant concern relating to the bond between "the media's images and cultural constructions" and "the patterns of inequality, domination and oppression", especially when taking into consideration how one can easily access such harmful input online.

Focusing our topic of (mis)representation to women in media, it is necessary to briefly explain different areas of feminist issues in the following sections, which we will later demonstrate with various real social media sources.

2.1 Gender performativity

Gender performativity is a term introduced by philosopher Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* published in 1990. It shifted the perspective of what we think gender is – from being an innate fixed quality to being socially constructed and performative. First, gender needs to be differentiated from sex. Back in 1953, Simone de Beauvoir made an extensive attempt to define the term "woman". De Beauvoir (2011, 26) asks a rhetorical question: "So not every female human being is necessarily a woman; she must take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity. Is femininity secreted by the ovaries?" The author states how society defines a woman according to her reproductive organs, as "a womb, an ovary" (ibid., 45). The author examines this from a biological viewpoint since sex categories exist for the reproductive purposes during which the two sexes cooperate, although sometimes males in nature play no crucial role (ibid., 48). Nonetheless, when looking at the human species, it is not possible to imagine an individual without having a consciousness that is unique to their own being, regardless of their sex category. De Beauvoir (ibid., 49) makes an argument:

> "One of the essential features of man's destiny is that the movement of his temporal life creates behind and ahead of him the infinity of the past and the future: the perpetuation of the species appears thus as the correlative of individual limitation, so the phenomenon of reproduction can be considered as ontologically grounded."

Having stated that, she criticizes the idea that women are defined solely by their reproductive nature of bearing a child and becoming a mother because of this human limitation – mortality – since gender should be an acquired identity that is manifested through social interactions and appears within one's culture (ibid.). Butler (1999, 15) further states that gender "is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body." This implies that people see gender as an internal feature or features which one can continually express through gestures, speech, clothing, etc., something one feels and not something one is born with (ibid.). Acting outside of what is socially acceptable for a woman or a man means that binary gender roles require change and rethinking. This view challenges the fixed view of the dual opposition between men and women and allows recognition of other genders and categories.

Since the focus of this study are women, we will cover how their intellectual, spiritual, emotional characteristics, achievements and capabilities are often overlooked as opposed to men's actions and behaviour. Media tend to only highlight women for their physical appearance, either

by praising them for sustaining idealistic beauty standards or criticising them for not keeping up, which may in return lead to low self-esteem, low self-worth, mental health issues and sometimes the use of bodily modification procedures (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). The role and instances of sexual objectification will be further discussed to try and determine how media portrays women.

2.2 Social and gender norms

The position of women in society today is greatly owed to the way mass media continue portraying them. In 1978 Gaye Tuchman, an American sociologist, wrote about the term *symbolic annihilation* in her work *The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media*. Tuchman (2000, 150) notes that women seem to mostly be represented in stereotypical female roles such as a mother and a housewife outside of the business world, or rather, if a woman has a job, a maid and similar "pink-collar" work positions which are denied any future career prospects and formal education. This means that women are often not encouraged to undergo formal education and do not initiate applying for higher-paying executive jobs, but in return tend to be praised solely for their looks and reproductive purposes (Blumenfeld, 2017). Men, on the other hand, are encouraged to pursue high-paying and executive jobs and are seen as successful in many public domains such as sports, politics, business, etc. (ibid.).

We should also briefly touch upon equality and equity, two terms related in meaning but not interchangeable. According to the Milken Institute School of Public Health (2020), equality provides everyone with the same tools or opportunities. In addition to that, equity aims to distribute these exact resources proportionate to individual circumstances to ensure an equal chance at the desired outcome. (ibid.). In the realm of media, women are not only denied equal opportunities to be diversely and accurately represented, but also face systemic stereotypes and gender norms which hinder women from prospering (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Not factoring in these limitations, women appear to face inequity since media rarely take into account their discriminated status in society (ibid.).

One might hypothesize that language holds many opportunities to address women more inappropriately and inadequately than men, which means that the language itself influences how society speaks and acts due to the fact it allows these double-standard terms of gender. Likewise,

Blumenfeld (2017) observes that language choice indicates how individuals shape their perception of the world, and the manner in which gender is discussed often points to sexist attitudes. The author further argues that stereotypes, relying on oversimplified and biased judgements and attitudes, are rooted in sexist acts which are profitable for men, but constrain women (ibid.). Blumenfeld provides some adjectives such as "pushy", "emotional", "stubborn" and "bitchy" which are used to describe women and bring negative connotations, while men are called respectively "assertive", "enthusiastic", "passionate" and confident" for similar behaviour traits which are perceived positively (ibid.). Next, a woman may often be perceived as a man – called "too masculine" – if she is successful and is assigned a role which is typically a male working position (ibid.).

Such patterns of behaviour keep feeding the society these dangerous mental representations of women. Tuchman (2000, 150) remarks that "consistent repetition of such themes can be expected to encourage the maintenance of women's subordinate position in society", and consequently worsen women's body image, self-esteem, self-worth and overall mental health. Blumenfeld (2017) also comments that "females have been constructed as second-class and even third-class citizens", and that this male-dominant system has been held together by its "relative invisibility", granting them many privileges that have not been questioned or scrutinized by many throughout history. Due to its great impact on society, male dominance in different domains will be further discussed in the following section.

2.3 Male worldview and dominance

The previously mentioned patriarchal norms and values deeply imbedded in our ways of thinking and acting have been imposed through the male worldview. If maleness is the norm, the reinforcement of unrealistic standards and limitations women face in their everyday lives is not yet being challenged on a global level. Connecting the previously mentioned gendered language to the contemporary postfeminist perspective of viewing women, Gill (2007, 8) states that sex and sexuality continue to pervade all media forms and various public domains. Female bodies tend to be sexualized in all aspects of their life through use of specific vocabulary items that put women to vulnerable and inferior positions (Blumenfeld, 2017).

In 1975 Laura Mulvey, a British film theorist, wrote an essay explaining the difference of portraying women and men in narrative cinema, and her concept of *male gaze* pervades other media forms that shape our perception of reality. Male gaze can thus be defined as looking at women through heterosexual male perspectives, therefore, creating one-dimensional female characters and portraying them as mere sex objects in order to satisfy men's needs (Mulvey, 1975, 10-11). This means that a woman exists as a passive figure that serves as a medium of this (heterosexual) male gaze, that heavily projects its fantasies and desires onto the female body (ibid.). According to the author, women serve two functions: "as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium" (ibid., 12). This implies that women play as props for the male audience and male protagonists in the film. The author (ibid., 2) criticizes the oppression of women by stating:

> "Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier of the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning."

When applied to representation of women in media, does their role differ than that in narrative cinema? The concept of the male gaze can be expanded upon with the term 'sexual objectification', a term coined by Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts in 1997. This term refers to the process that happens "when a person is reduced to and/or treated solely as a body or a collection of body parts for sexual use", regardless of their gender (Calogero, 2012, 574). The author primarily associates this issue with the female body, asserting that these manifestations of sexual objectification are beyond a woman's personal control (ibid.). Calogero (ibid.) further notes that sexual objectification is most evident in two areas: *interpersonal encounters* – which encompass live interactions with familiar individuals or strangers, and *media encounters* – which shall be further discussed.

As stated by Berberick (2010, 2), the use of women in media has exploitative functions. Gill (2007, 8) notes that women are often depicted as sexualized objects that appeal to male consumers or as domesticated subjects that cater to male needs. Furthermore, the author even mentions the shift in perspective of objectification to which a woman is nowadays praised for being a "sexually autonomous heterosexual young woman who plays with her sexual power and is forever 'up for it'" (ibid., 10). This means that women are encouraged to present themselves as

attractive, desirable, and compliant to the male gaze through self-objectification in order to be accepted members of society (ibid.).

The next issue would be the news media where women are often marginalized as a group and tend to be viewed as victims in sensational stories for profit gain (Lazarević Radak, 2019, 111). Lazarević Radak (ibid., 114) also remarks that there are "links between the representation of masculinity and violence, and between femininity and victimization" in the Serbian media. Any woman portrayed in the media is therefore judged by how well she can balance both traditional and postmodern roles, i.e., how much her body and her fertility can be exploited by a male-dominant system (ibid., 123). Women in political domains do not receive better treatment in media coverages either. According to Reese (2012), men are rarely referred to by their gender in politics because they are viewed as the norm within the field of leadership, while women are characterized by their appearance such as outfits, age, weight, attractiveness, etc. In a literature review conducted by Sjøvaag and Pedersen (2019, 217), many resources state that women tend to appear less than men in the media, i.e., women seem to be mostly featured in entertainment stories, but are avoided in hard-press journalism. Authors (ibid., 218) also confirm that women are often evaluated on the basis of their personalities and personal life matters rather than for their achievements and contributions (as cited in Devitt, 2002) as well as are more easily in the centre of a scandalized storyline (as cited in Pollack, 2009).

Referring to the word "scandal", it seems to appear often in those titles where women are the victim of some type of crime such as domestic violence, sexual abuse or pornographic cases. In a critical discourse analysis of Indonesian articles related to female victims, Mardikantoro et al. (2022, 12) noted that multiple newspapers contain gender-biased reporting language that undermines women and makes them appear weak and helpless while superficially describing the actual turn of events and mitigating offense acts and male roles. Another study on news coverage on violence against women was conducted in Turkey which states that crime coverages tend to be "sensational and titillating" and that they insensitively describe the case in too much detail using personal information and provocative pictures of women (Alat, 2006, 308). This type of news reporting brings a toil on the victim's part because it trivializes the crime and does not exclusively put blame and attention on the perpetrator (ibid.).

Another problematic area is sport. According to McKay et al. (2000; as cited in Rowe, 2013, 395), the sport is viewed as:

> "a sociocultural domain where men place themselves at the center and marginalize women" which "remains resilient in its constructions of celebrated, exclusivist masculinity that both overtly and covertly tends to position femininity as subordinate, peripheral, sexualized, and even contemptible".

However, women are commonly even indirectly targeted since men tend to be feminized by their opponents through the use of gendered language insults such as "playing like a girl" (Rowe, 2000, 397). The author further remarks that this creates a gender hierarchy in which women become direct or indirect subjects of sexist abuse, meaning that this type of narrative undermines female athletes and keeps them out of many sports (ibid.).

Hence, it is of great importance to understand the role of the media in creating gender-equal and truthful representation of reality of women. Through gendered and ideological language, women remain in social, intellectual, and physical subordination to men. Taking into consideration that nowadays every piece of information can be accessed on mass media, male-dominant ideologies and power are present and successfully maintained in various private and public domains in society. Given the problematic areas women still face in the media world, the following chapter will explain the methodology which can be used to recognise, examine and challenge such discourse.

3. Multimodal critical discourse analysis

After learning about crucial feminist terms and issues, the second part of the theoretical framework will focus on defining Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis which will be used for the analysis of data. I will refer to a group of authors who have made great contributions to the fields of *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)* and *Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA)* as well as present the key relations between discourse, knowledge, and power.

3.1 The notion of discourse

Since discourse is a central term to Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, it requires to be defined regardless of its different definitions and various limits. Discourse can be simply explained as "language in real contexts of use" (Machin & Mayer, 2012, 20) because it happens

outside of the world of grammar and semantics in order to be realized in different domains, whether cultural, social or political. According to Wodak and Meyers (2001, 38), people are active participants in distributing meaning to things throughout present, past and future time, i.e., creating reality. This means that discourses serve as application tools and offer the knowledge necessary to make something meaningful or, in other words, make it real (ibid., 39). Gee (2005, 26) further explains that "Discourse" is language combined with other aspects such as one's actions, interactions, beliefs, values, means of thinking, etc. which help them perform their identity or identities in its entirety, depending on how they want to be recognized in which context and what is expected of them in those circumstances. When referring to "discourse" with a lower letter "d", Gee talks about language in use such as conversation or stories, without the "extras" (ibid.).[1] Therefore, language is not the only aspect of discourse, but is effectuated through the way someone speaks, acts, dresses, engages or at least pretends to do something the "right way" at the right time and place (ibid., 21).

3.1.1 Discourse in relation to knowledge and power

Having analysed the notion of discourse, we need to explain its relation to the phenomena of power and knowledge. As defined by Fairclough (2001, 22), "language is a form of social practice". In other words, the author considers that language cannot be external to society but is a process which is continually intertwined within a society and conditioned by its non-linguistic factors. Fairclough (ibid., 23) further develops his statement by saying that "…the whole is society, and language is one strand of the social. And whereas all linguistic phenomena are social, not all social phenomena are linguistic …". Moreover, the author mentions that since language is a social process, it ought to be referred to as *discourse* because it encompasses elements outside of the text itself like people's knowledge of the world, values, assumptions, beliefs, etc. (ibid.). A text is merely a product, one part of this whole process he calls *discourse* (ibid.). Wodak and Meyers (2001, 36) develop this by saying that discourses are not solely material, but also societal, which means that they "produce societal realities". Discourse is not determined by an individual, but every subject actively contributes to producing it, which represents an ever-changing and continuous result of historical processes (ibid., 37). How may discourse be linked to knowledge?

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[1] Gee (2005) differentiates *Discourse* with a capital D and *discourse* with a lower case d.

Through language use, individuals can access and contribute to the collective knowledge conveyed by discourse (Wodak and Meyers, 2001, 37). Discourse, however, communicates more information than individuals are able to comprehend since they have limited access to or are unaware of this collective knowledge and history (ibid.).

Regarding power relations, it appears in many different settings such as between different ethnic groups, between young people and old people, but most importantly for this study, between men and women. Our focus on media representation between men and women do not include intersectional factors in detail since there are also noticeable differences between constructing an image of women among themselves, e.g., a black woman vs a white woman, a lesbian vs a straight woman, a transgender vs a cisgender, etc. Regardless of intersectional factors, there is a need to try to emphasize the influence discourses have in general. Link (1983) views discourse as an institutionally related concept that performs an action which consequently exercises power (as cited in Wodak and Meyers, 2001, 34). Likewise, Jager (1993 and 1999) says that discourse "determines individual and collective doing and/or formative action that shapes society, thus exercising power" (as cited in Wodak & Meyers, 2001, 34). Miller (1989, 120) states the following:

> "…the notion of power alone will not do, for power in itself presupposes an array of phenomena which are not themselves power. For example, it presupposes something that is exercising the power; properties in virtue of which it is possible for that thing to exercise power; another thing over which the power is exercised, and this would necessarily include changes in the thing as the result of the exercise of power upon it…"

In other terms, the definition of power encompasses those parameters that make the exercise of power possible and valid (ibid.). The exercise of power is fulfilled once it is able to control, affect and even "produce" the behaviours and thoughts of others, since, according to Foucault, entities over which power is exercised is not merely a coercive act, but also constructive (as cited in Miller, 1989, 122). There are multiple ways for gaining power through language, such as interrupting, using aggressive language, selecting the topic, directing the conversation, or even remaining silent (Ruha, 2023). However, power can also be exercised through visual means since discourse, as mentioned earlier, encompasses more elements than just textual properties or speech. The multimodality of discourse will be further described in Section 3.2.

3.2 Principles and methods of MCDA

Critical discourse analysis, apart from the previously explained notion of discourse, is based upon the term *critical* and *multimodal*. In the field of linguistics, *critical* refers to a critical perspective that views social problems as institutionalized and in return challenges unjust professional discourse and the relations of struggle (Wodak & Meyers, 2001, 2). More precisely for CDA, this adjective occurs within the detailed production and interpretation of connections found between society and discourse (Van Dijk, 2008, 23).

According to Wodak and Meyers (2001, 34), it is important that anyone conducting research using CDA situates themselves outside the situation of the discourse they want to analyse. Otherwise, their analysis may become unfounded since they do not dismiss their own values, norms, beliefs, etc. and objectively approach the task. The authors further emphasize that "these are themselves the historical outcome of discourse, and that his/her possible bias is not based on truth but represents a position that in turn is the result of a discursive process (ibid.). Equipped with this position he/she is able to enter discursive contests and to defend or modify his/her position" (ibid.). Referring to Fairclough's notion of discourse (2001, 25-26), he differentiates three stages of CDA: description, interpretation, and explanation. The first stage deals with the formal characteristics of a text, i.e., its stylistic, grammatical, and structural properties (ibid.). Then, interpretation focuses on examining the relationship between the text, which is the outcome of discourse – and interaction (ibid.). Finally, the stage of explanation delves deep into the relationship between the previously mentioned interaction and social context (ibid.).

The final segment of explaining MCDA is the adjective *multimodal*. Multimodality has allowed us to connect language and discourse to other modes of communicating meaning, i.e., how different modes create meaning together (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Machin and Mayr (ibid., 9) state the following:

> "Both text and image can be thought of as being composed of communicative choices by authors that seek to do certain kinds of work for them. (…) Text will use linguistic and visual strategies that appear normal or neutral on the surface, but which may in fact be ideological and seek to shape the representation of events and persons for particular ends."

This is of great importance to this study since the supplementary photos in a newspaper article do not always relate to the main message of the text (Oostdijk et al., 2020, 4343), or on the

contrary, photos may substitute something which is not or cannot be expressed by words. In addition, Machin and Mayr explain that MCDA is a way to examine the *how* behind the creation of meaning since all modes of communication both influence and are influenced by society and ought to be examined together in order to see the full picture (2012, 10).

Pertinent to this study, we will differentiate two modes – linguistic and visual. Fairclough (2001, 28) emphasizes the importance of these two modes by explaining that the two "operate in a mutually reinforcing way which makes them very difficult to disentangle". In brief, when talking about the linguistic mode, whether it is spoken or written language, we can talk about the most basic kind – lexical analysis – which is used to examine different lexical choices, overlexicalization and lexical absence in the text (Machin & Mayr, 2012, 30). However, texts communicate in several meaningful ways which encompass non-linguistic features (Fairclough, 2001, 27). Fairclough (ibid.) collectively refers to all nonverbal items as *visuals* and implies that the linguistic part cannot be fully comprehended if one does not refer to the "extras". The author states that "a photograph is often as important in getting across the 'message' of a report in a newspaper as the verbal report…" (ibid., 28). Machin and Mayr (2012, 49) explain in more detail that images are not the only visual element, but that the font type, colour, line spacing, size and text alignment make a difference in the overall impression.

II.   RESEARCH

4. Research design

4.1 Methodology

This study employs a multimodal critical discourse analysis to investigate how women are represented in media. Various data have been collected and considered for the purpose of affirming the gender-biased media portrayals. However, I have sourced only ten examples, which were taken from the following online sources: *Daily Mail*, *Mirror*, *New York Post*, *The Sun, Heavy, Washington Times*, and *Hello*.

4.2 Aims and research questions

This study aims to explore the representation of women on social media, more precisely to analyse the stereotypes and gender biases used in creating the image of women. Moreover, there will be an attempt to analyse how men are perceived in comparison to women in similar or same scenarios in order to prove gender inequality and/or inequity.

Therefore, three research questions are formulated to address the main research objective:

I. What kind of discourse is used to represent women on social media?
II. What kind of discourse is used to represent men on social media?
III. According to the differences and similarities, are the two genders equally and equitably represented?

5. Data collection – individual analysis and discussion

The data, collected and analysed in the following sections, have been chosen according to the connection of the research questions. It is further categorized according to different problematic areas which feed harmful stereotypes to the public, put women in inferior places and indorse unequal gender-biased standards for their behaviour, body image and ways of thinking.

5.1 Exclusive men's club – ageing and "extra" weight

The first category concerns double standards found in physical looks expected from men and women in the media. These examples may show the hypocrisy of ageing since women seem to be valued only if they are young, thin and beautiful since characteristics such as signs of ageing, weight gain and body hair on female bodies are not accepted or normal.

5.1.1   Figure 1

The first chosen article, shown in Figure 1, was published by The Daily Mail on March 20, 2023. The article refers to the Queen Letizia of Spain and discusses her appearance, focusing on the grey streak on one side of her hair. The title says "Sorry Letizia but going grey just says a woman has given up: CHRISTA D'SOUZA sounds a warning after Spain's Queen sported a startling silver streak" (D'Souza, 2023).

The author is Christa D'Souza, and her name written in the title in all capital letters may suggest an authoritative voice. What also immediately grabs attention is the part *sounds a warning*, which sets a serious and cautionary tone for the reader, while the adjective *startling* implies something unexpected. By stating that a woman who does not colour over her grey hair means that she has given up, it might imply that the woman is no longer looking desirable or decent.

Looking at the picture of Letizia, one could argue that the lighting and frame of the shot portrays her positively. Letizia's posture, outfit and a kind face show a powerful, yet likable person. Looking at the whole picture, Letizia seems to look rather conventional for a queen. She appears sophisticated in the red dress and with a straight posture. This could mean that the photo has been chosen to challenge the title and the comments about *giving up* because of grey hair. The mentioned silver streak is, at first glance, likely to seamlessly integrate into her appearance and not provoke dramatic reactions among readers. Nonetheless, the picture may be perceived negatively by readers because the author highlights grey hair as an issue among women. The photo clearly captures the side where the grey streak in Letizia's hair is visible and noticeable, which could reinforce the negative connotations suggested by the title and the text.

Reading further than the title itself, the introductory paragraph seems to deliver a backhanded compliment by saying "My goodness, Queen Letizia of Spain, 50, is beautiful. That skin. That figure. And that hair — luscious and brown and now with a single grey streak running down one side. Although on the hair front, if I may be so bold, Your Majesty, are you sure you're OK with the grey?" (ibid.). This means that it tries to be positive by describing the queen as *beautiful*, with a great figure and *luscious* hair, but then sets a negative undertone by claiming that the grey hair is *bold* and rhetorically asking if Queen Letizia is *OK with the grey*. Other phrases are also used to reinforce the negativity behind women having grey hair such as "…those disobedient grey hairs march to the beat of their own drum"; and "…I know we all want to be our authentic, natural selves, but does it actually look better?" (ibid.). The author Christa also shares her awareness and struggles of having of grey hair as a woman in society and explains how she did not feel confident not comfortable with grey streaks of hair. Yet, it seems that women are not only pressured to look (nor feel) their best by men, but also judged by other women who share the same insecurities.

The intended audience's interpretation of the article surely depends on their existing beliefs and attitudes on the matter. Since grey hair is given maximum attention in the title and is commented on throughout the whole article, it is uncertain whether Christa D'Souza tried to provoke positive reactions by challenging the ageist beauty industry or amplify negative aging narratives with regards to these standards among women who show signs of ageing.

5.1.2 *Figure 2*

The second article shown in Figure 2, published by The Daily Mail on February 11, 2021, has been chosen to compare how men are perceived differently than women regarding the previously mentioned signs of ageing. It deals with the same physical trait – grey hair. The article discusses Colin Farrel's appearance, the title of which says "Colin Farrell is a silver fox as he sports noticeable grey and white stubble... after recently shaving his head bald" (Johnson, 2021).

Colin is more likely to be perceived positively by the reader since his new look is being affirmed by using the term *silver fox*, suggesting attractiveness and charm associated with grey hair among older men (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). The title also mentions the verb *sports* and *grey and white stubble*, which we may interpret as Colin's short grey hair enhancing his overall look. This means that even without hair, other Farrell's features contribute to his attractiveness. Referring to the picture, Colin is shown strolling around Los Angeles in an athletic outfit, further reinforcing a positive image of himself as a healthy and active person. The choice of mentioned phrases along with the image challenge beauty norms relating to the notion of ageing in males.

The readers may also think that Colin's look appears to be shocking and unconventional since the article later states the following phrases: "Colin Farrell recently shocked fans as he debuted a freshly shaved head."; "Farrell sported a noticeable amount of grey and white stubble on his head, instead of his recognizable brunette tone." & "Despite going without his dark brown strands, the Lobster star looked as hunky as ever, while getting in his midday calorie burn." (ibid.). Even though such narrative could appear as negative, especially as shown in the previous scenario of a single grey streak on Queen Letizia, it is likely to be affirmed positively with the use of the previously mentioned words such as *silver fox* and *stubble*. Other positive connotations are used throughout the article like *as hunky as ever*, reinforcing Colin's attractive and well-built figure. Overall, the article seems to take a positive stance on Colin's new look, discussing his previous roles and appearances in public where he had such short hair or was bald.

If we compare the language used here with the previous example of Queen Letizia, we may notice that such scrutiny for signs of ageing is not applied in this case. Colin's example seems to depict grey hair more positively and as a desirable or at least neutral trait in overall appearance among men compared to elderly women.

5.1.3   *Figure 3*

The article in Figure 3 deals with women who are mothers and their appearances. It is titled "FASHIO-NO I'm a fashion expert – 5 items that make mums look old and frumpy & it's time to ditch skinny jeans on the school run" (Fieldsend, 2022), published by The Sun on June 24, 2020.

The title gives several mentions to physical features of moms, stating that they may appear *old* and *frumpy* if not taken care of. The first word *FASHIO-NO* relies on a pun, combining words *fashion* and *no*. The author is likely to suggest or give advice later in the article relating to fashion, or in other words, what to avoid in fashion if you are a mom. Taking into consideration that it is written in all capital letters, it sets an authoritative and aggressive tone towards the readers. Referring to the front image, a woman is photographed from behind while walking with what seems to be her daughter. It most likely refers to the scenario from the title of walking one's children to or from school. This woman is wearing a green cagoule, skinny jeans and a low crossbody bag, most of the items which are further mentioned and criticised as a bad fashion choice. The description below says: "From skinny jeans to zip-off trousers, there are a few major fashion errors that only make you look old and frumpy" (ibid.). Choosing to use the phrase *major fashion errors* further strengthens the pressure women may feel for not meeting societal standards.

Throughout the article, several fashion choices are mentioned as *errors*: cagoule, zip-off trousers, orthopaedic shoes, low crossbody bags and skinny jeans. The author opts for objectively harsh adjectives and descriptions of these clothing items and the way they make mothers look if wearing them. The list goes as follows: *I-do-everything-mom*, *ugly*, *unstylish*, *frumpy*, *big no-no*, *clunky*, *dated*, *unflattering*, *tragic*, etc. Further comments such as "…like you've given up on yourself and have no sense of what looks good" and "they're drab and old-fashioned making you look older beyond your years" (ibid.) seem to unapologetically judge and shame such outfit choices, prioritising physical appearance over a mom's well-being, comfort and practicality.

From a feminist perspective, this highlights how women are often judged based on their appearance and adherence to fashion norms. The pressure to conform to certain clothing standards can reinforce gendered expectations put on women – accepting the role as mothers while also looking physically fit and well-dressed in every scenario. Women are likely to be a lot more pressured than men to always look put-together, even in casual settings like school drop-offs. Such commentary may lead to the reinforcement of gendered stereotypes and leads to lower self-esteem among women. Additionally, *mom bods* are represented as undesirable unless taken care of and bouncing back to their pre-pregnancy body. The comparison between mom and dad bods will also be commented on within the next example.

5.1.4 Figure 4

The article seen in Figure 4 has been chosen with regards to the previous one talking about mom bodies and their fashion choices. It is titled "Dad bods' are the biggest turn-on for singles in the pandemic sex era" (Weiss, 2021), published by New York Post on March 25, 2021. The title positions the concept of "dad bods" as desirable during a specific context in time – the pandemic.

The use of the noun *turn-on* implies sexual attraction, emphasizing the article's focus on physical appeal of the mentioned body type among men. The tone of the article appears to be celebratory and enthusiastic, rather than judgemental. Throughout the article, *dad bods* are being portrayed as attractive and appealing. By celebrating dad bods, the article indirectly questions the societal norms that prioritize extreme fitness and lean physiques. This concept of dad bods seems to be presented as a refreshing alternative, i.e., a more relatable and approachable form of masculinity since it challenges the traditional ideal of a muscular body.

By looking at the lead image, readers can respectively recognize three male celebrities - Hugh Jackman, Andy Cohen and Luke Hemsworth. All three male celebrities can be seen walking at the beach, wearing swimming trunks and having their whole upper body exposed. The description states "Hugh Jackman, Andy Cohen and Luke Hemsworth rock various "dad bod" forms at the beach" (ibid.). Dad bods seem to be addressed as having *various forms*, therefore meaning that different male bodies are accepted despite not being perfectly muscular and/or lean. By saying that these celebrities *rock* dad bods, this implies that they are looking good despite not following traditional body standards.

When compared to the previous article, we may conclude that men are not scrutinized for their fashion choices nor physical attributes as women. Women seem to be at the forefront of these judgements and are often criticised for not following trends. The media plays a role in shaping what is considered fashionable, impacting how women are expected to comply to a consumerist lifestyle. Men are praised for accepting their bodies despite not looking perfectly muscular and fit. Dad bods seem to be widely accepted, even if – ironically – those men are not dads and therefore do not suffer direct childbirth consequences. On the other hand, women tend to feel the need to immediately bounce back to their pre-pregnancy weight and eliminate any signs of weight gain as soon as possible, even if it is detrimental for their health during recovery.

5.2 Women as objects of sexual desire - Celebrating tiny female bodies

In contemporary media, the portrayal of women's bodies often centers around specific ideals of beauty and desirability. We previously mentioned what physical traits are not appreciated and accepted by society. Hence, the second category delves into the celebration and scrutiny of "tiny" female bodies - the ones that conform to societal standards of slimness, fitness, and elegance. All women seem to be held against these standards, regardless of their relationship status, mental and physical state and age. Through critical discourse analysis, we explore how media representations perpetuate these norms, commenting on women's physical attributes, clothing choices, sexual attractiveness, etc.

5.2.1 Figure 5

The article shown in Figure 5 was published on May 9, 2023 by the Daily Mail. Its title says "Christine McGuinness shows off her toned physique in a TINY purple bikini in Ibiza" (Bullen, 2023). In short, Christine is a 35-year-old model who has been interviewed about her clothing brand and recent separation with her husband Paddy McGuinness.

The title emphasizes her *toned physique* and a *TINY purple bikini*, immediately drawing attention to her body. Without even looking at the picture of Christine, the reader can visualise the body in question with the mention of *toned*, *TINY*, and *sizzling*, all referring to her as a sexually attractive person. One can even notice that the adjective *TINY* is written in capital letters, which puts even more emphasis on her body in an admiring way of her slimness. We may conclude by

the choice of words that Christine McGuinness is constructed as an object of visual pleasure. Furthermore, the location reference to Ibiza seems to add an exotic dimension and context to the imagery of Christine in a bikini.

The image features Christine in the said bikini, accentuating her curves and physical attractiveness. Her pose, stylish swimsuit and sunglasses evoke a sense of glamour and confidence. Examining this from a feminist point of view, such representation aligns with conventional norms of female beauty, sexualizing her body for admiration. The choice of words contributes to this sexist framing, reinforcing societal expectations of women to be slim, fit, and sensual, while also remaining physically young. The text supports the idea that women should strive for a certain body type in order to be celebrated and distinguished. This could also send a message that wearing a tiny bikini is an achievement or a display of confidence. The attention is not put on the interview itself; it seems that the images are given more importance than words; which may suggest that a woman's worth is tied to her appearance, and that what she has to say may not be as relevant.

As mentioned in the theoretical part, outside the linguistic level, images also play a crucial role. We must observe the choice of images as well as the angles Christine is being photographed from, which help shape the enthusiastic outlook on Christine's appearance. The article is constantly commenting on her various looks in swimwear during the trip to Ibiza, despite her being interviewed about her clothing brand and recent relationship/family status. This may be linked to Laura Mulvey's concept of *Male gaze* (1975), which reduces women to the level of props, not allowing them to take spotlight for anything else other than to be looked at as sexual objects.

5.2.2 *Figure 6*

Figure 6 shows the article titled "Amelia Gray puts her toned abs on display in skin-tight Calvin Klein underwear" (Lamare, 2023), published by The Daily Mail on May 7, 2023. The article mostly comments Amelia's "model-like figure" and outfit choices in various Instagram posts and cat walk videos.

Right away, one may conclude that the emphasis is on Amelia's body due to adjectives *toned* and *skin-tight*. *Toned abs* highlights her physical fitness and abdominal muscles, while the choice of *Skin-tight Calvin Klein underwear* makes the reader imagine a snug fit of the said underwear, drawing attention to her body as an object of sexual desire. By focusing on her abs, the

article reinforces the idea that women's bodies are subject to scrutiny and evaluation, which is further reinforced by the phrasing *put on display*. Even though displaying one's body may be seen a form of empowerment or validation, the fact that when something is on display is most simply defined as "arranged for people to look at or buy in a store" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024), could mean that Amelia is seen as an object to enjoy and consume. Such representation can once again be linked to male gaze (Mulvey, 1975), which states that women are looked at as one-dimensional characters with a purpose to satisfy sexual desire.

The images depict Amelia Gray in a semi-revealing pose, emphasizing her abdominal muscles and body curves. The image also clearly showcases the well-known brand Calvin Klein, which further contributes to promoting consumer culture and celebrity-like lifestyle. The descriptions below the images say "Trim tummy: Amelia Gray Hamlin, 21, showed off her tiny torso in a pair of selfies she shared to her Instagram Stories on Sunday" & "Outside: The daughter of Lisa Rinna, 59, and Harry Hamlin, 71, showcased her sculpted abs in a tiny white bra and black panties from Calvin Klein" (Lamare, 2023). We may notice repetitive and synonymous language used such as the adjective tiny being used twice in *tiny torso* and *tiny white bra*. Moreover, the chosen verbs *showed off* and *showcased* seem to further confirm that Amelia's body is the focus of the article. *To show off* may be defined as "to behave in a way that is intended to attract attention or admiration" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024), while *to showcase* could be explained as "to show the best qualities or parts of something" (ibid.). Such language implies that Amelia's best features are physical since she seems to be *showcasing* or *showing off* the *tiny* or *tight* parts of her body.

The overall visual message along with the gendered language reinforce beauty standards related to fitness and body aesthetics; the standard all women seem to be evaluated on. Amelia's representation aligns with societal norms that prioritize slimness, toned bodies, and physical attractiveness, and represents her as a woman whose body is the best she can offer.

5.2.3   *Figure 7*

Figure 7 shows the title and the image accompanying the last article of the category, published by Mirror on January 25, 2022. It is titled "Khloe Kardashian unveils 'revenge body' in nude jumpsuit after Tristan cheats again" (Wilson, 2022). The author writes about Khloe being seen in public after a recent breakup with her partner Tristan but seems to focus on her appearance rather than well-being after such a public and stressful event.

By using the verb *unveil*, it denotes something hidden and unexpected, while *revenge body* means that Khloe's action came out of a negative event, most likely referring to a breakup with Tristan or Tristan's infidelity. This choice of words implies that women need to physically improve in order to be desired by men. It means that it excludes the possibility of working on yourself out of one's own need to self-improve, become healthier and feel more confident in one's own body; but rather frames self-improvement solely in relation to male approval. Khloe's narrative to become more sexually attractive stems either out of spite to men (Tristan) or a desperate need to feel wanted by him again.

The image further reinforces the title as Khloe Kardashian is shown walking around in the mentioned skin-tight, nude jumpsuit and high heels. The paparazzi's presence may suggest that Khloe is being photographed against her will or without her acknowledgement. This lack of control over the situation may seem obvious since celebrities are often pressured to share every detail of their personal life or have it exposed through other means. Despite the glamorous portrayal of celebrity lifestyle, women in the public eye are under constant pressure to appear attractive, regardless of the circumstances. Khloe's pictures are very flattering, and she appears amazing, which reinforces the title and makes it seem that an ideal (revenge) body exists and is attainable.

Khloe likely also has limited control over which images are published, and this very lack of agency signifies that the pressure put on women to conform to idealized beauty norms is subjected to circumstances. This is to note that in a different scenario with a different title, the choice of images may be more unflattering according to the type of reaction the article is trying to evoke in readers. For instance, if one imagines an image of Khloe in sweatpants and messy hair, the title may say that she has let herself go after the breakup. This type of content may be perpetuating harmful messages to the readers, promoting that women are desirable once they are thin and toned and should prioritize their appearance in similar scenarios. Breakups are emotionally exhausting, yet discussions around them, such as this article, often prioritize physical appearance over well-being and autonomy of women.

5.3 What do we talk about when we talk about successful women?

In this section, we will delve into the multifaceted representation of women across various domains. Despite their achievements and successful careers, women continue to face discriminatory portrayals in the media. Our analysis will focus on three critical areas: sports, politics, and entrepreneurship. By examining how women are depicted in these contexts, we aim to uncover underlying biases, stereotypes, and narratives that shape public perception.

5.3.1 Figure 8

The first example shown in Figure 8 deals with successful female athletes. It is titled "Sha'Carri Richardson's Outfit Stuns at NYC Grand Prix Win" (Choiniere, 2022), published by Heavy on June 24, 2022. The author primarily discusses fashion choices of Sha Carri Richardson, one of the best American sprinters. The highlight is immediately put on the part of Sha Carri's outfit choice, even though the title mentions her *NYC Grand Prix Win*.

The first sentence states: "Sha'Carri Richardson won the NYC Grand Prix, but people kept talking about her bold fashion choice. Richardson donned an outfit with fishnet layers and neon Nike shoes during the race Sunday, June 12, 2022" (ibid.). The verb *to stun* means "to shock someone so much that the person does not know how to react" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024), which can be interpreted that her outfit is unexpected and not an ordinary attire for an athlete. Looking at the framing, the introductory sentence points out that *people kept talking about her bold fashion choice*. The choice of the term *bold* may further indicate how society determines specific standards for women and their appearance in sports since that type of outfit seems to attract too much attention and appears showy. The front image used show Sha Carri in the mentioned outfit on the day of the race, wearing a pink fishnet attire.

Moreover, author immediately mentions the clothes Sha Carri is wearing – fishnet layers and neon Nike shoes – which puts more emphasis on the outfit she chose to wear during the race, while the popular sport brand Nike plays into consumer culture full of celebrities who influence their fans and/or followers into buying their favourite items. More adjectives are used throughout the article such as *utterly eye-catching* and *vibrant*, which could prove that Sha Carri is gaining so much spotlight because of her style. Considering that the title and introduction serve as entry points for readers, the article's focus is on Sha Carri's appearance on the day of the event rather than pointing out her win at the mentioned race. Such representation of (female) athletes is likely to

undermine their achievements due to the fact that they give privilege talking about women in the context of fashion, style, appearance, etc. Moreover, men are more likely to be praised for their strength and athleticism. It seems that men's weight loss or fitness achievements are framed as discipline, dedication or are simply not given much attention at all with regards to looks, while women appear to be in the centre of fashion and/or scandalous topics for the purpose of mere aesthetics.

On the other hand, we must consider the fact that Sha Carri decided to answer to the questions referring to her style in a positive manner, explaining that she is just being true to herself and confident in her skin, possibly attempting to break stereotypes about a one-way approach to dress in sports. Celebrating women and inspiring others to feel confident should have its role in the media no matter the domain. Yet, as fashion topics usually seem to take the spotlight among female celebrities, such articles should not overshadow or be equal to their achievements.

5.3.2 *Figure 9*

The second article, shown in Figure 9, will try to shed some light on the treatment of women in politics. I have chosen the article titled "Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Spends $300 on Hairdo, Last Taxpayer-Funded Trip to Salon Cost $80" (Swoyer, 2019), published in The Washington Times on October 9, 2019. In short, the article points out Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez' hair expenses and her use of taxpayer funds for salon visits, which frames her mentioned actions as extravagant and potentially wasteful.

Looking solely at the title, Alexandria is immediately portrayed negatively, being criticized for spending that amount of money on hair. The fact that her hair appointment is highlighted in the title makes it seem like an irresponsible act, as if she is being called out to explain herself. In other words, putting focus on her appearance diverts attention from her work and achievements. The writer of the article seems to take it further than just the personal level of Alexandria's "extensive" habits but ties it to broader societal issues by stating the following: "The self-declared socialist, who regularly rails against the rich and complains about the cost of living inside the Beltway, spent nearly $300 on her hairdo at a pricey salon she frequents in downtown Washington…" (ibid.). This statement, directly addressing Alexandria as a congresswoman whose main influence has been in community activism, makes her look incompetent and hypocrite as well as undermines her contributions.

The chosen image provides a close-up of Alexandria's face and hair. She is looking serious and focused, dressed formally in a blazer and a white shirt. It does not appear to be an unusual angle or a dramatic pose. The description below reads "Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., attends a House Oversight Committee hearing on high prescription drugs on Capitol Hill in Washington, Friday, July 26, 2019 (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)" (ibid.). This photograph does not seem to reinforce the negative comments about Alexandria mentioned in the title. While the choice of this image might be random by the author or editor, the context of the photograph could also support the text's argument about hypocrisy. Alexandria's attendance at an event focused on community activism against high prescription drug prices contrasts with the "expensive haircut" she had.

On the one hand, one might wonder who has the authority to define what is "appropriate" spending? The article does not seem to address the broader context of other politicians' spending habits, it only singles out Alexandria, reinforcing gender stereotypes that prioritize women's looks over their competence. This raises the question of whether a similar article could also be seen mentioning Alexandria's male colleagues. On the other hand, if a public female presence does not "take care" of herself, i.e., her appearance in the public eye such as getting her hair perfectly cut and dyed, it seems that there would be comments about Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez' unkept looks.

5.3.3 Figure 10

The last article will touch upon the topic of successful female entrepreneurs, focusing on Oprah Winfrey as an example. The title shown in Figure 10 says "Oprah Winfrey wows in waist-cinching outfit after sharing weight loss secrets" (McKnight, 2023), published by Hello! on July 1, 2023. In brief, the author highlights Oprah's weight loss by commenting on her appearance at the mentioned event.

The article's language seems to employ gendered terms when discussing Oprah's appearance. For instance, phrases like *waist-cinching*, *tiny waist*, *trim figure*, and *weight loss secrets* emphasize physical attributes associated with the classical definition of a feminine body. Observing the lead image, Oprah is photographed wearing a patterned grey blouse tucked into metallic silver pants that highlighted *her trim waist and curves*, as put by the author. She also wore her natural curls. The article frames Oprah's weight loss as a positive transformation, linking her looks to her confidence. Oprah has stated that she encourages everyone to start taking care of

themselves without delays. However, what may seem as a body empowering article could also be interpreted as sexist since it is reducing Oprah to her physical attributes. In other words, the celebration of weight loss can be problematic. It implies that thinness is an achievement and that a person's worth is likely to increase as they lose the "extra" weight. Moreover, this narrative often overlooks the complexities of health, genetics, and individual experiences. Other than framing Oprah's weight loss as positive no matter the language used, the article diminishes her role in the cultural space of the Essence Festival.

The article's emphasis on Oprah's weight loss could indeed divert attention from her role as a speaker promoting important messages on black culture. While celebrating personal achievements is valid, it is crucial to maintain a balanced and holistic representation. The author seems to miss or avoid taking the opportunity to celebrate Oprah's influence, leadership, and cultural contributions to discussions about race, empowerment, and legacy, which was likely Oprah's core purpose at the event. Such focus on Oprah's transformed body seems to only perpetuate the idea that a woman's worth is tied to her appearance and adherence to beauty standards.

6. Conclusion

This study provides both a theoretical and empirical analysis of how female bodies are represented across various public domains such as sports events, politics, and showbusiness. The theoretical framework and key terms outlined in the first part of the paper lay the foundation for understanding the complex interplay between discourse, power, and multimodality. Through the exploration of feminist theories, I highlighted the issues of gender performativity, social and gender norms, and characteristics of the male-dominant world, which are crucial for contextualizing the findings which will be discussed below.

By employing multimodal critical discourse analysis, the main goal of this study was to identify patterns of gender biases and stereotypes as well as the ways in which media representations reinforce societal norms and power structures. It is important to note that these linguistic and visual modes of analysis focused solely on the portrayal of women in English-speaking media, limiting the study to only ten key examples specifically chosen to encompass various issues.

The first category of examples explored the double standards in physical appearance expected from men and women in the media. My analysis revealed hypocrisy regarding aging and physical traits in relation to women, who are often valued for their youth, thinness, and beauty, while characteristics such as signs of aging, weight gain, and body hair are stigmatized. The findings suggest that women are more targeted to conform to these beauty standards and are judged if they act otherwise. It may be concluded that media portrayals reinforce these unrealistic standards, contributing to a culture that prioritizes superficial attributes over individual worth and achievements.

The second category delved into the celebration and scrutiny of "tiny" female bodies, those that conform to societal standards of slimness, fitness, and elegance. Building on the previous section regarding women being held to strict beauty standards, this sheds light on the celebration and objectification of female bodies. The multimodal critical discourse analysis highlighted how media representations often comment on women's physical attributes, clothing choices, and sexual attractiveness. This relentless focus on physical appearance may suggest that women's self-esteem and body image may suffer detrimentally, perpetuating a cycle of unrealistic expectations and societal pressure.

The third category of examples examined representations of women across various domains, specifically sports, politics, and entrepreneurship. Despite their achievements and successful careers, women continue to face discriminatory portrayals in the media. This analysis uncovered underlying biases, stereotypes, and narratives that shape public perception. In sports, women often seem to be depicted in ways that emphasize their physical appearance over their athletic abilities. In politics, female politicians are scrutinized more for their looks and personal life affairs than their leadership qualities. In entrepreneurship, women appear to be frequently portrayed as exceptions rather than the norm, reinforcing the stereotype that business is a male-dominated field.

The overall results have shown that media tend to use inappropriate gendered language when discussing women's looks and personal affairs. On the other hand, men are portrayed in a positive light or celebrated for their achievements rather than being objectified. As interpreted in the empirical part, it is evident that men are not expected to conform to these superficial societal norms, while women are often held accountable and judged by these same standards. Considering the differences in media representation among women and men, the two genders do not seem to be equally and equitably represented in the chosen examples, as hypothesized. Even though my scope of research in this paper is not extensive enough to make bold statements, I conducted a larger-scale data collection prior to my analysis and had difficulties finding articles with appropriate representations of women across different domains. As mentioned in the theoretical part, many other authors have investigated feminist-related issues in news coverage, media, advertisements, etc., and had overlapping findings stating that women are often the centre of scandalized topics or used as clickbait to objectify, promote, or increase the visibility of the content provider.

Regarding additional limitations of this study, I should mention that the study did not delve deep into the category of "women" and all that the term encompasses. The study did not pay close attention to specific intersectional factors which could play a significant role in determining the extent of discriminatory and reductionist representations of women in the media. Developing an understanding of the cultural meanings and the nature of historically embedded traditional stereotypes of gender roles is crucial, as these stereotypes present harmful gendered language in various forms of media. The position of women varies depending on the country and culture, and

due to the many online media tabloids, newspapers, and advertisements it may be hard to chronologically follow and accurately display the realistic image of media portrayals of women. This means that these findings cannot be generalized and applied to all cultures due to the fact that the articles were written and published in English-speaking media. Examples written in languages other than English might have discovered some additional interesting findings. Lastly, it is important to note that the representation of men in media is not without its problems. The media often portray men in stereotypical roles and frequently overlook marginalized groups of men such as transgender individuals, homosexuals, and the disabled.

Finally, the importance of positive female representation and media literacy cannot be overstated. Media discourse that fails to promote the diversity of female viewpoints, including all intersectional factors, may contribute to social inequality and inequity as well as perpetuate harmful stereotypes. By promoting media literacy and encouraging a more diverse and inclusive media environment, we can work towards a society where everyone, regardless of their gender, can see themself represented in a positive and respectful manner. This is not just a matter of fairness, but a necessary step towards a more inclusive society. Future research should continue to explore these themes and advocate for media practices that challenge harmful stereotypes since this study managed to uncover only some of the underlying differences in the representation of women and men.

Abstract

      This paper investigates different representations of women in media through a multimodal critical discourse analysis. A theoretical framework is provided in the first part of the paper, explaining key terms linked to gendered language such as gender performativity, social and gender norms as well as the meaning and tools of MCDA. The empirical part focused on ten different articles from various media publishing houses to use as examples to illustrate different feminist-related issues. The core problems identified underrepresentation and reductionist representation of women in various domains, including everyday life, celebrity lifestyle, sports, politics, and entrepreneurship. These findings show that women are commonly portrayed in terms of their looks and personal affairs, which might reinforce harmful stereotypes. As a result, women's value is often tied to their appearance, which can create further disparity in unequal opportunities in male-dominated areas such as in sports, politics and business.

Keywords: multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA), social media, representation, gender stereotypes, objectification, gendered language

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Appendix

Sorry Letizia but going grey just says a woman has given up: CHRISTA D'SOUZA sounds a warning after Spain's Queen sported a startling silver streak

- Christa D'Souza talked about her own experiences with leaving her tresses grey
- She feels it says 'I've given up' unless glamorously styled and cared for
- READ MORE: Queen Letizia of Spain is respectful in a black evening dress as she attends a memorial concert for terror victims

By CHRISTA D SOUZA FOR THE DAILY MAIL
PUBLISHED: 20:04 BST, 26 March 2023 | UPDATED: 20:06 BST, 26 March 2023

Queen Letizia of Spain pictured earlier this month, sporting a streak of her grey hair at an engagement

Figure 1

35

Colin Farrell is a silver fox as he sports noticeable grey and white stubble... after recently shaving his head bald

By CARLY JOHNSON FOR DAILYMAIL.COM
PUBLISHED: 02:21 BST, 11 February 2021 | UPDATED: 02:49 BST, 11 February 2021

Silver fox: Colin Farrell proved to be a silver fox on Wednesday afternoon as he embarked on a stroll around Los Angeles, after recently debuting a bald head

Despite going without his dark brown strands, the Lobster star looked as hunky as ever, while getting in his midday calorie burn.

Figure 2

FASHIO-NO I'm a fashion expert – 5 items that make mums look old and frumpy & it's time to ditch skinny jeans on the school run

Clemmie Fieldsend

Figure 3

'Dad bods' are the biggest turn-on for singles in the pandemic sex era

By Suzy Weiss

March 25, 2021 | 10:14am | Updated

Hugh Jackman, Andy Cohen and Luke Hemsworth rock various "dad bod" forms at the beach.
BACKGRID

Figure 4

Christine McGuinness shows off her toned physique in a TINY purple bikini as she shares sizzling clips from her sun-soaked Ibiza trip

By CODIE BULLEN FOR MAILONLINE
PUBLISHED: 08:49 BST, 9 May 2023 | UPDATED: 15:12 BST, 9 May 2023

Wow! Christine McGuinness showed off her incredible figure in sexy swimwear on Monday as she shared a series of stunning clips from her sun-soaked holiday in Ibiza

Figure 5

Amelia Gray puts her toned abs on display in skin-tight Calvin Klein underwear

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💬**14**
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Amelia Gray Hamlin, 21, showed off her tiny torso in a pair of selfies she shared to her Instagram Stories on Sunday.

The daughter of **Lisa Rinna**, 59, and **Harry Hamlin**, 71, **showcased her sculpted abs** in a tiny white bra and black panties from Calvin Klein.

She also wore a pair of gray joggers slung low on her hips.

Trim tummy: Amelia Gray Hamlin, 21, showed off her tiny torso in a pair of selfies she shared to her Instagram Stories on Sunday

Outside: The daughter of Lisa Rinna, 59, and Harry Hamlin, 71, showcased her sculpted abs in a tiny white bra and black panties from Calvin Klein

Figure 6

40

Khloe Kardashian unveils 'revenge body' in nude jumpsuit after Tristan cheats again

Khloe Kardashian has unveiled some incredible looks since cheating Tristan Thompson was found to have fathered a child with someone else – but this is the best yet

By **Katie Wilson**, Showbiz Reporter
20:15, 25 Jan 2022 | UPDATED 20:16, 25 Jan 2022

3 | BOOKMARK

Khloe looked incredible in a nude jumpsuit (
Image: Diggzy/Jesal/REX/Shutte

She completed her look with Gucci thigh high boots (Image: Diggzy/Jesal/REX/Shutterstock)

Figure 7

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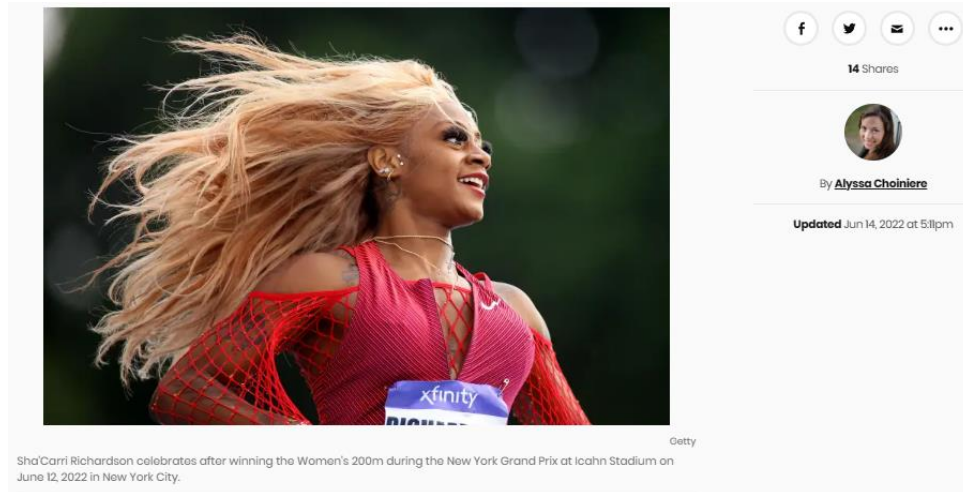# Sha'Carri Richardson's Outfit Stuns at NYC Grand Prix Win: [PHOTOS]

14 Shares

By **Alyssa Choiniere**

Updated Jun 14, 2022 at 5:11pm

Getty

Sha'Carri Richardson celebrates after winning the Women's 200m during the New York Grand Prix at Icahn Stadium on June 12, 2022 in New York City.

Figure 8

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez spends $300 on hairdo at Last Tangle Salon in Washington, D.C.

*Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., attends a House Oversight Committee hearing on high prescription drugs on Capitol Hill in Washington, Friday, July 26, 2019. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite) ** FILE ** more >*

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By Alex Swoyer - *The Washington Times* - Wednesday, October 9, 2019

Figure 9

Oprah Winfrey wows in waist-cinching outfit after sharing weight loss secrets

Oprah attended the 2023 Essence Festival of Culture in New Orleans

Jenni McKnight
US LIFESTYLE EDITOR
1 July 2023

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Figure 10

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