

The Rise of Equitable Gender Representations in Kenyan Media- Unpacking Gender Dynamics and Shifts in *True Love East Africa* and *The Parents Magazine*

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Abstract

In contemporary society, the discourse surrounding gender roles and expectations continues to evolve, challenging traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. The objective of this article was to explore the evolving perspectives on gender roles as depicted in contemporary magazine articles, focusing on the portrayal of men and women embracing equity and challenging traditional notions on gender stereotypes. Utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis, the study examines narratives from selected articles in True Love East Africa and The Parents Magazine, highlighting stories of real-life couples and individuals illustrating a significant paradigm shift. Findings reveal significant shifts towards more progressive portrayals, though traditional stereotypes persist. These narratives not only reflect changing societal expectations within marital dynamics but also highlight men's active roles in fostering gender equality and reshaping traditional gender norms. They also illustrate shifting dynamics in women's perspectives from traditionally ascribed norms, findings that can play significant role in policy formulation.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, empowerment, gender roles, gender stereotypes, intersectionality, gender representation, media.

Introduction

Gender roles evolve over time, influenced by various cultural histories and societal changes. Historically, gender roles were distinct, with clear boundaries between tasks, values, and behaviours assigned to women and those associated with men (Lazarus et al., 2020). Even today, African societies', traditional roles and work distribution remain gendered, with family management predominantly seen as a male responsibility (Kabira, 2016). In many cultures, gender patterns emphasized a patriarchal model where men were the primary breadwinners and decision-makers exerting financial control within households, while women were depicted as financially dependent mothers and housewives with limited autonomy (Fadiman, 1982; see also Gyan et al., 2020; Melhuus & Stolen, 1996; Yating, 2019).

In Kenya, traditional gender roles often restrict women's access to resources and decision-making power. A 2014 survey conducted by Kenya's government and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) revealed that 85% of land in the Upper Tana River drainage was owned by men, while only 7% was registered to women (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2019). The literature on gender roles in agricultural communities indicates that women often bear a disproportionate burden of labour while having limited control over resources. According to the Upper Tana Natural Resources Management Project, women worked an average of 15 to 17 hours a day, compared to men's six to seven hours (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2019). Despite this, men predominantly made decisions about farming and finances, while women's decisions were confined to domestic spheres. However, a deliberate effort to empower and change this narrative by Thomson Reuters Foundation shows a great shift. The organization's report on the impact of the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) on gender roles and property rights in Kenya, focusing on the Upper

Tana River drainage area and various counties where GALs has been implemented highlights changes in decision-making dynamics, economic practices, and the empowerment of women in agricultural communities (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2019).

Land is crucial for Kenya's economic, social, and cultural development, yet traditional and cultural practices often favour male inheritance of family land, and the implementation of gender-sensitive family laws is slow. This creates a conflict between constitutional and international provisions on gender equality and customary practices that discriminate against women in land ownership and inheritance. Women are under-represented in land-related institutions, and their rights under communal ownership are not well-defined, allowing men to dispose of family land without consulting women. Financial constraints also limit women's participation in the land market. According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (2014), only 8% of women own a house alone, and 7% own land alone. Overall, 42% of women own a house, and 39% own land either alone, jointly, or both (KDHS, 2014). Without secure land rights, women's participation in and benefits from land uses, such as agriculture, are restricted. Lack of secure land rights also affects women's housing rights.

Societal shifts have led to more equitable opportunities for women, with increased responsibilities for women and more involvement of men in housework and child-rearing. Patriarchy is declining in many societies, leading to power reversals and new family arrangements (Connell, 2002). Media, including magazines, have played a pivotal role in reinforcing gender norms and stereotypes in the past. Male chauvinism, characterized by the belief in the superiority of men over women, has been a pervasive theme (Connell, 2005). Media significantly shape perceptions of gender, embedding messages about gender into everyday consciousness through various forms such as radio, broadcast, and print. Media often perpetuate unrealistic, stereotypical, and limited views of gender and emphasize on traditional roles that normalize violence against women. However, recent shifts in societal attitudes towards gender equality have prompted changes in how men and women are portrayed in the media. This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine these changes and their implications as well as establish how the print media portrays such shifting paradigms. According to Fairclough (2015), CDA posits that language is not just a communication tool but a means to construct reality and negotiate meanings. This perspective is reinforced by Naidu et al. (2023), who note that discourses are culturally embedded ways of understanding the world, shaped by specific social contexts and power relations. CDA is particularly relevant in this study as it enables an analysis of how media narratives perpetuate or challenge traditional gender roles. The analysis focuses on the following key tenets: power dynamics-CDA reveals how language perpetuates or challenges power inequalities, particularly regarding marginalized groups (Nadia, 2021); ideological structures- discourse functions ideologically, shaping societal norms and beliefs (Van Dijk, 2022) and historical context -understanding the socio-political context is crucial for analysing discourse implications (Wodak & Meyer, 2022). Utilizing Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional framework—text, discursive practice, and socio-cultural context—the study investigates changes in how men and women are portrayed in the media.

Literature Review

Gender roles, comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviours deemed appropriate for women and men by society, are diverse and continuously evolving (Connell, 2002; Silberschmidt, 2004). These roles arise from various cultural histories across different regions, transforming over time. Scholars assert that the dynamics of gender, masculinity, and femininity are fundamental to societal formation (Freeman & McElhinny, 1996; see also Fadiman, 1982; Morrell, 2005; Sunderland, 1994). Cultural influences perpetuate prejudiced views about women's capabilities, undermining their roles (Phillips, 1991). These societal biases are

reflected in electoral outcomes, where political positions are generally seen as more suitable for men, resulting in limited support for female candidates. This persistence of gender stereotypes continues to hinder women's political participation, as they are still predominantly viewed as domestic workers (Kenyatta, 2023). The struggle women face when entering politics is compounded by deep-seated beliefs that view the political arena as exclusively male territory (Chafetz & Dworkin, 1986). While there is some approval for women's inclusion in politics in Kenya, the dismissive language directed at female candidates underscores entrenched patriarchal attitudes toward women's leadership (Bouka et al., 2019). The gender role model posits that males and females occupy distinct ascribed roles with specific behavioural expectations based on their biological sex, influenced by institutions like families, organizations, and communities (Eagly & Wood, 2011). These gender roles shape societal norms and expectations regarding male and female behaviours, leading to the development of different skill sets when these expectations are not strictly followed (Diekmann & Schneider, 2010). Cultural beliefs often demand that women prove their worth as spouses and housekeepers before being considered for elective positions—a standard not applied to men (Kenyatta, 2023). Traditional institutions like the council of elders are typically reluctant to support female candidates, viewing them as the weaker gender and thus unsuitable for leadership (Tripp et al., 2014). Modern societies continue to elevate men and marginalize women, portraying women as weak compared to men (Bouka et al., 2019). This dynamic, described as patriarchy, makes it challenging for women to compete equally with men (Kenyatta, 2023).

Over time, these roles have transformed, with increased responsibilities for women and more involvement of men in housework and child-rearing. Patriarchy is declining in many societies, leading to power reversals and new family arrangements (Connell, 2005). In Kenya, there is an increasing trend toward informal “*come-we-stay*” marriages, a notable departure from traditional arrangements due to socioeconomic changes impacting masculine identities (Amuyunzu & Paul, 2006). Contemporary Kenyan societies have significantly deviated from the patrilineal inheritance principles that once prevailed (Mburugu & Adams, 2001).

The Constitution of Kenya lays the groundwork for gender equality and non-discrimination, establishing a national policy framework aimed at realizing these constitutional mandates. Article 10 of the Constitution highlights National Values and Principles of Governance, emphasizing principles such as equality, equity, inclusiveness, and non-discrimination, which are essential for achieving gender equality. Article 27(1) declares that everyone is equal before the law and entitled to equal protection and benefits, while Article 27(3) ensures equal treatment and opportunities for both women and men in political, social, economic, and cultural spheres. Furthermore, Article 27(4) prohibits discrimination based on various grounds, including pregnancy, race, sex, marital status, health, ethnicity, social origin, colour, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language, or birth. To achieve these goals, Article 27(6) mandates the government to implement legislative and other measures, including affirmative action, to address disadvantages resulting from past discrimination. The State Department for Gender, under the Ministry of Public Service, Youth, and Gender, is responsible for promoting gender equality and empowering women in Kenya. This includes developing and reviewing gender policies and legislation (Republic of Kenya, 2019).

The *Women, Business, and the Law (WBL) 2023* report presents an index covering 190 economies, structured around the life cycle of a working woman. The figure below presents Kenya gender landscape data as of March 17th, 2024.

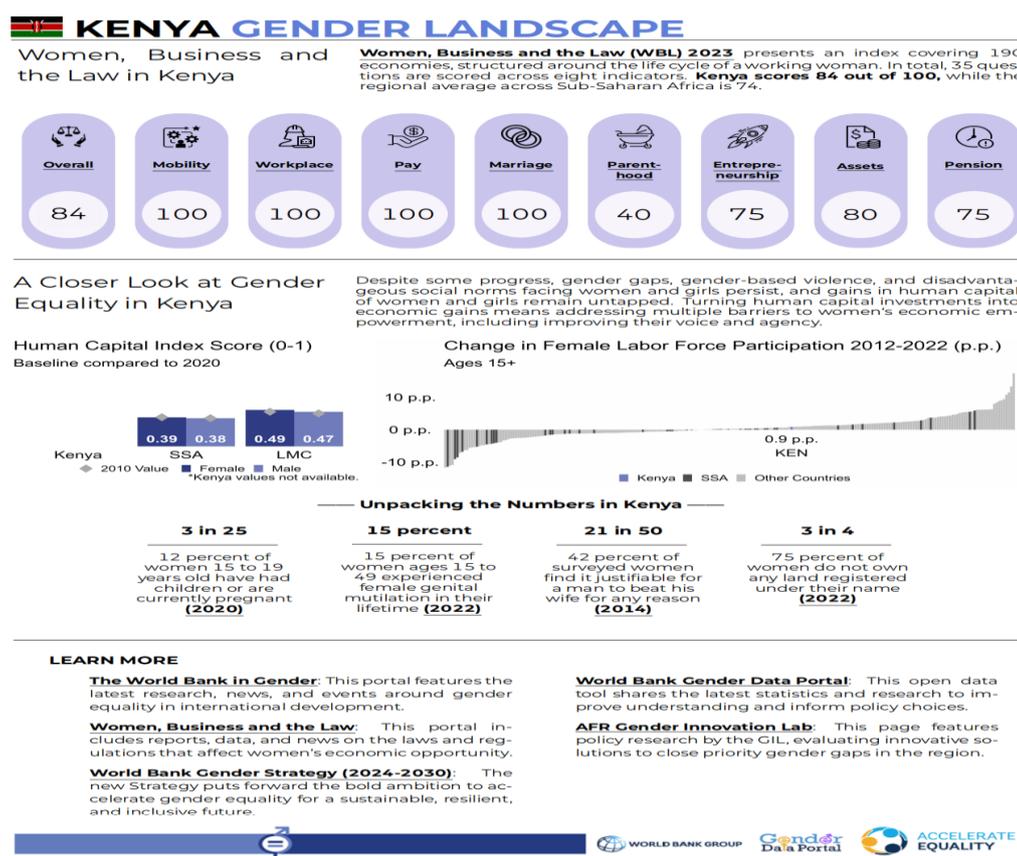


Figure 1: Kenya Gender Landscape data as of March 17th, 2024.

Source: *Women, Business, and the Law (WBL) 2023* report

It evaluates various indicators and provides scores as follows for Kenya: **Overall Score: 84/100; Mobility: 100; Workplace: 100; Pay: 100; Marriage: 100; Parenthood: 40; Entrepreneurship: 75; Assets: 80 and Pension: 75.** Despite progress in some areas, challenges persist in gender gaps, gender-based violence, and disadvantageous social norms affecting women and girls. Gains in human capital for women and girls remain untapped. Investing in human capital and economic gains means addressing multiple barriers to women's economic empowerment, including improving their voice and agency.

Kenya has implemented several policies and laws to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, including the National Policy for Gender and Development (2000) and Sessional Paper No. 2 (2006) on Gender Equality and Development. National development plans such as the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth Creation (2003-2007), Kenya Vision 2030, and the Medium-Term Plans (2008-2012, 2013-2017, and 2018-2022) recognize the importance of equal access to opportunities and assets for sustainable development (Government of Kenya, 2009).

Additional gender-awareness policies include the National Land Policy (2009), which acknowledges women's rights to property, and the National Policy for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence. Parliament has enacted laws such as the Matrimonial Property Act (2013), the Marriage Act (2014), and the Land Act and Land Registration Acts to enforce constitutional provisions on gender equality. The Succession Act Cap 160 is under revision to address gender issues in inheritance. The Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act (2010), the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Act (2011), and the Sexual Offences Act (2006) address specific forms of violence against women and girls. The Kenya Citizenship and

Immigration Act (2011) allows married women to confer citizenship to their foreign husbands, a departure from past practices where only men could confer such status (Government of Kenya, 2019).

Kenya has made notable strides in gender equality and female empowerment, although significant challenges remain. The country scored 80.6 out of 100 on the Women, Business and the Law 2021 index and ranked 95th out of 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report 2021, with an overall score of 0.692. However, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated inequalities between men and women, particularly in education, health, political representation, and labour market participation (USAID, 2022). Young women and adolescent girls in Kenya are particularly vulnerable to poverty, gender-based violence, and harmful cultural attitudes. Limited control over land and resources restricts their economic participation, and unequal unpaid care work limits their mobility and access to market resources. Despite constitutional mandates for gender equality, women in Kenya face structural barriers and gender inequality persists in Kenya, fuelled by patriarchal social structures supported by statutory, religious, and customary laws and practices, highlighting the need for comprehensive policies to address gender discrimination and inequality (Kariuki, 2017; USAID, 2022).

Methodology

This study employed qualitative research methods, specifically utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine changing perspectives on gender roles and relationships as portrayed in contemporary magazine articles to explore how men are increasingly embracing modern values of supporting women while challenging traditional stereotypes. According to Strauss and Corbin (2015), qualitative research involves deriving findings through the exploration of individuals' lives, behaviours, and perceptions rather than through statistical analysis. This methodological approach facilitates the transition from raw data to comprehensive explanations and interpretations of the phenomena under study. A descriptive case study design was adopted, prioritizing depth over breadth to analyse the ideological and identity discourses specific to *True Love East Africa* and *The Parents* magazines (Kothari, 2004). Nassaji (2015) defines descriptive research design as an approach aimed at providing an account of a phenomenon without manipulating the data, focusing instead on analysing existing material. Purposive sampling was employed to select articles exhibiting the narrative content from magazine issues published between April 2019 and March 2020. This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of women's representation and the influence of media on their identities (Muema & Mutisya, 2012).

Data analysis involved thematic content analysis, which included classifying, coding, and tabulating information essential for qualitative analysis (Kothari, 2004;). This approach aimed to uncover underlying social meanings within media texts by delving beneath surface connotations. Mugenda and Mugenda (2008) highlight that qualitative data analysis involves organizing and interpreting collected information. By triangulating textual analysis with insights from existing literature, this study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of how changing perspectives on gender roles and relationships are portrayed in contemporary magazine articles. (Fairclough, 2015). CDA serves as a theoretical framework for understanding how language constructs and perpetuates social realities, including gender norms within the fashion and modelling industry (van Dijk, 2020; Wodak, 2019). The literature emphasizes the transformative potential of discourse in challenging dominant ideologies and promoting diversity and inclusion. Additionally, this qualitative study applies CDA to analyse articles focusing on themes of gender diversity and inclusivity.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis revealed a noticeable shift in the language used to describe men and women. Early articles often employed language that reinforced traditional gender roles, such as referring to women primarily in domestic contexts and men in professional contexts (Gill, 2007). However, more recent articles have begun to use more gender-neutral language and emphasize the capabilities of both men and women in diverse roles. For instance, Diana is described as a "highly sophisticated modern lady" and an "embodiment of millennial moms" who balance various roles (*The Parents Magazine*, 2020, p. 22). This reflects a shift towards recognizing the diverse nature of modern womanhood, challenging traditional notions of female passivity and domesticity.

The themes and narratives within the articles have become more inclusive. Articles now often highlight stories of female empowerment, male vulnerability, and the importance of shared responsibilities in both domestic and professional spheres (Lazar, 2007). This reflects a growing recognition of the complexities of gender identities and the rejection of simplistic, chauvinistic perspectives. For example, as the writer observes in the article about Diana, a media personality:

Diana lived up to the expectations when she turned up for the interview: 'flawless make up, six inch heels, a maroon soft faux fur gilet worn over white, t-shirt, and black skinny jeans'. She is all casual glam, a combination that screams home maker, fashionista, and a working mom. She is always a news item-whether it is for marrying a younger man, a viral break up video, dealing with a baby man or just being herself' pp. 22

Diana is portrayed as a strong, independent woman who, unlike the traditional mother who got entrapped in the chains of motherhood and marriage, she redefines the concept of motherhood in the 21st century. Her dressing style and her marrying a younger man exemplifies women emancipation and empowerment. Instead of viewing motherhood as a restrictive space, she customizes it to fit her situation: *'I am working on something. I wanted it to be a vlog but now it makes better sense to get it on a major TV station. I have been getting a lot of questions on marriage'* (pp. 22). This narrative counters the traditional stereotype of the submissive, dependent woman, highlighting a shift towards more equitable gender discourses.

The media's role in either perpetuating or challenging gender stereotypes is crucial, as it shapes public perceptions and societal norms (van Dijk, 1993). The society expects that the man should be older or roughly of the same age as the woman but not vice versa (Gyan et al, 2020; Yating, 2019). When this is not the case, then the woman faces negativity and ridicule from the people. This is the case of Diana in Bahati's story (*Parents magazine*, Dec 2019)

While they say love is a beautiful thing, unfortunately for them (the Bahati's), theirs started on a tumultuous note as people sought to find out who the lass was and soon enough, blogs were on her case, especially since people found out she was a few years older than him. To date, she has been the unfortunate subject of cyber bullying due to the fact.

From Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach on the cognitive processes involved in discourse comprehension and production (van Dijk, 2020), the negative stereotypes and perceptions faced by Diana reflect broader discourses about gender norms and expectations. The societal expectation that the man should be older or roughly the same age as the woman in a marriage reinforces traditional gender roles and contributes to the marginalization of women who defy these norms. Furthermore, the couple's response challenges these negative stereotypes by critiquing the societal tendency to prioritize age over other significant factors in relationships (van Dijk, 2015). This reflects a cognitive process of challenging and resisting dominant discourses that perpetuate harmful stereotypes and perceptions about women's

choices in relationships. The couple responds in a liberal manner and are clear that age does not bother them as the following experts reflect:

“The backlash was mostly on my side but honestly speaking, have you ever heard someone say they are dating someone purely because of age?” Poses the 30-year old, adding, ‘I chose to settle down with him because of his vision for the future and he was very mature’.”

Diana becomes the subject of cyberbullying and criticism because she is a few years older than Bahati. This reflects a negative perception that women who don't adhere to traditional age norms in relationships become targets for online harassment and judgement. The statement, *“The backlash was mostly on my side,”* acknowledges the existence of societal backlash and criticism, echoing Qafzezi's (2022) findings on online criticisms and trolls on women. While it may be an attempt to normalize the situation, it also highlights the negativity and judgement faced by women who defy traditional age expectations in relationships. Diana's defiance of traditional gender norms, such as marrying a younger man against the norms, challenges entrenched power structures and suggests a move towards more progressive gender discourses (Smith et al., 2019). However, the backlash she faces, including cyberbullying, highlights ongoing societal resistance to such changes. Drawing from gender studies perspectives, the excerpt reflects broader debates about gender roles, identities, and power dynamics (Yating, 2019). Diana's experiences highlight the intersectionality of gender and other social identities, such as age, and the ways in which they shape women's experiences and opportunities. Furthermore, the couple's response challenges essentialist notions of gender and celebrates the autonomy and agency of women in relationships (Gyan et al, 2020; Tabassun, 2021). Their emphasis on choosing each other based on shared values and maturity challenges the reductive focus on age in relationships and underscores the importance of individual agency and choice.

Traditionally, men have been expected to be providers and breadwinners, exerting financial control within households (Gyan et al., 2020; Yating, 2019). However, societal shifts have led to more equitable opportunities for women, challenging traditional gender dynamics. This evolution is evident in cases where men are depicted as embracing their partners' careers, reflecting a broader acceptance of women's economic contributions (*Parents Magazine*, February 2020). A specific case study from *Parents Magazine* (February 2020, p. 45) illustrates a shift in societal expectations, where a husband expresses frustration over his wife's decision not to return to work after childbirth. The complaint titled *“My wife has refused to go back to work”* clearly reflects that is what is expected of modern-day women;

My wife had our first son two years ago and since she refused to resume to work. Both of us had well-paying jobs that made it easy to cater for household expenses and our investments. I am feeling overburdened but she comes up with all forms of excuses not to go back to work. What do I do?” -stressed husband: (Parents Magazine-Feb 2020:45)

This scenario challenges traditional gender roles by highlighting the wife's autonomy in choosing to prioritize family over career (Fairclough, 2015). The husband's complaint underscores broader societal anxieties about women's roles in the workforce, reflecting evolving power dynamics within relationships (Wodak, 2009).

Fairclough's framework emphasizes how language constructs power relations and ideologies, influencing societal perceptions of gender roles (Fairclough, 2015). The portrayal of men's anxiety about women becoming breadwinners reflects a renegotiation of traditional patriarchal norms, aligning with Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 2020). These discursive strategies contribute to challenging and reshaping societal norms surrounding gender equality and empowerment (Wodak, 2020). The husband's question,

"What do I do?" serves as a rhetorical device that invites readers to contemplate the situation. This question prompts a reflection on societal norms, gender roles, and the expectations placed on women and men in the context of work and family life suggesting a shift in societal attitudes towards women's roles. Men are increasingly accepting and embracing women's participation in the workforce, reflecting broader discursive trends towards gender equality and social change, as noted by Wodak (2019, 2020), where discursive strategies are employed to challenge traditional norms and advocate for greater inclusivity and diversity. Van Dijk's (2020) concept of ideological power structures within discourse is pertinent here, as the narrative reflects evolving power dynamics between men and women, challenging traditional patriarchal norms. What comes out clearly is that the man and in general, the society expects the women of today to work and contribute to the family's income and expenses. It clearly shows that even the men have shed off the traditional expectations of a woman and embraced their new roles.

The traditional view of a woman just as a subordinate and dependent (Charles et al, 2020; Yating, 2019) is interrogated in the story of Dennis "Denno" Karanja, featured in *The Parents Magazine* (December 2019), who challenges traditional views of masculinity and femininity (Fairclough, 2015). Born with visual impairment, Denno is a successful musician whose journey to fame was propelled by his hit song "Mbona," which advocates for recognizing individuals with disabilities as complete human beings capable of love, work, and admiration. Despite his success, Denno faced significant challenges in the music industry, compounded by financial constraints and societal biases related to his disability (*The Parents Magazine, December 2019*). The article portrays Faith Naliaka not only as Denno's supportive spouse but also as an active participant in their economic endeavors (Van Dijk, 2020). Denno acknowledges Faith as his pillar of strength, highlighting her emotional and financial contributions to their household (*The Parents Magazine, December 2019*). In his own words, Denno describes Faith's role: "My wife is my pillar; I do not know how many times I have said it before. It is because of her that I am not just Karanja, I am also baba Alysa" (*The Parents Magazine, December 2019, p. 25*). This statement underscores the emotional and practical support Faith provides, challenging traditional gender roles that define masculinity solely through economic provision (Fairclough, 2010).

Faith's story further challenges the notion of women as solely homemakers by highlighting her entrepreneurial spirit as a seasoned baker. This narrative challenges the stereotype of men as sole providers and depicts his wife, Faith Naliaka, as a pivotal support system and contributor to their family's financial stability as depicted in the quote: "His wife, thankfully, is a seasoned baker and every once in a while she got orders for the cakes for events. While the orders were intermittent, they at least put something on the table and supplement Dennis income from other side hustler and gigs." (*The Parents Magazine, December 2019:25*). Her baking business not only supplements their income but also underscores her agency and autonomy in contributing to their family's financial well-being (Fairclough, 2015). The article emphasizes that modern women like Faith Naliaka are increasingly viewed as capable of managing both career and family responsibilities, contrary to traditional gender expectations. This narrative challenges the dichotomy of women having to choose between either career or family, presenting a more nuanced view of women's roles in contemporary society (Van Dijk, 2015).

In contemporary society, traditional gender roles are being redefined as men and women increasingly challenge stereotypes and assumptions about their capabilities in various professions. This is the case of Wangui Njuguna, whose entrepreneurial success in the beauty industry illustrates shifting perceptions and challenges entrenched gender norms. Historically, the beauty industry has been associated with femininity, relegating women to roles such as nail technicians and beauty aestheticians (Tabassun, 2021). This gendered division of labour reflects

broader societal expectations about women's suitability for certain professions (Yating, 2019). However, recent trends indicate a paradigm shift, with men like Wangui Njuguna's father initially doubting her career choice, highlighting persistent patriarchal ideologies that value masculine professions over feminine ones (Fairclough, 2015).

She confesses that the hardest challenges she has been facing is changing the narrative about the nail business.

“For the longest time, he (her father) used to ask me whether I was looking for another job until he realized that I was actually doing fine with my earnings from the nail business. I don’t really blame him. When friends asked me what I was up to, I would not admit as proudly that I was running a nail business” she reveals. (*The Parents Magazine*, February 2020:40)

This reflects the patriarchal ideology that associates value with masculinity and professionalism (Fairclough, 2015). Ironically, she also had other stereotype challenges that she faced including the uptake and competition of men in the industry. However, she was determined to tackle it:

Now she is at the forefront of tackling such stereotypes including the misconception that people who are in the beauty industry are not educated and hence should be taken casually. Additionally, she used to encounter ladies who would snub female nail technicians bearing the perceptions that male technicians are better but according to her, so long as they have been trained properly, they can effectively offer the Delish experience. (Parents February 2020:40)

Wangui Njuguna's narrative underscores the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in male-dominated industries. Her father's initial scepticism and societal stereotypes regarding the perceived lack of professionalism in beauty professions reflect broader gender biases (Fairclough, 2015). Despite these challenges, Wangui Njuguna has successfully challenged stereotypes by demonstrating the educational and professional rigour required in the beauty industry. Moreover, her experience highlights a growing trend where men are also becoming actively involved in beauty professions, challenging traditional gender divisions and illustrates a broader shift towards inclusivity and gender equality in professional settings (Tabassun, 2021). Her leadership in "*Delish Nail Bar*," where she manages a team of over 20 individuals, exemplifies her commitment to empowering women and reshaping societal perceptions of beauty professions.

The article below in *True Love East Africa* (June 2019, p. 32) discusses male fashionistas adopting feminine appearances to appeal to a diverse clientèle. It challenges traditional notions of masculinity and femininity within the fashion industry:

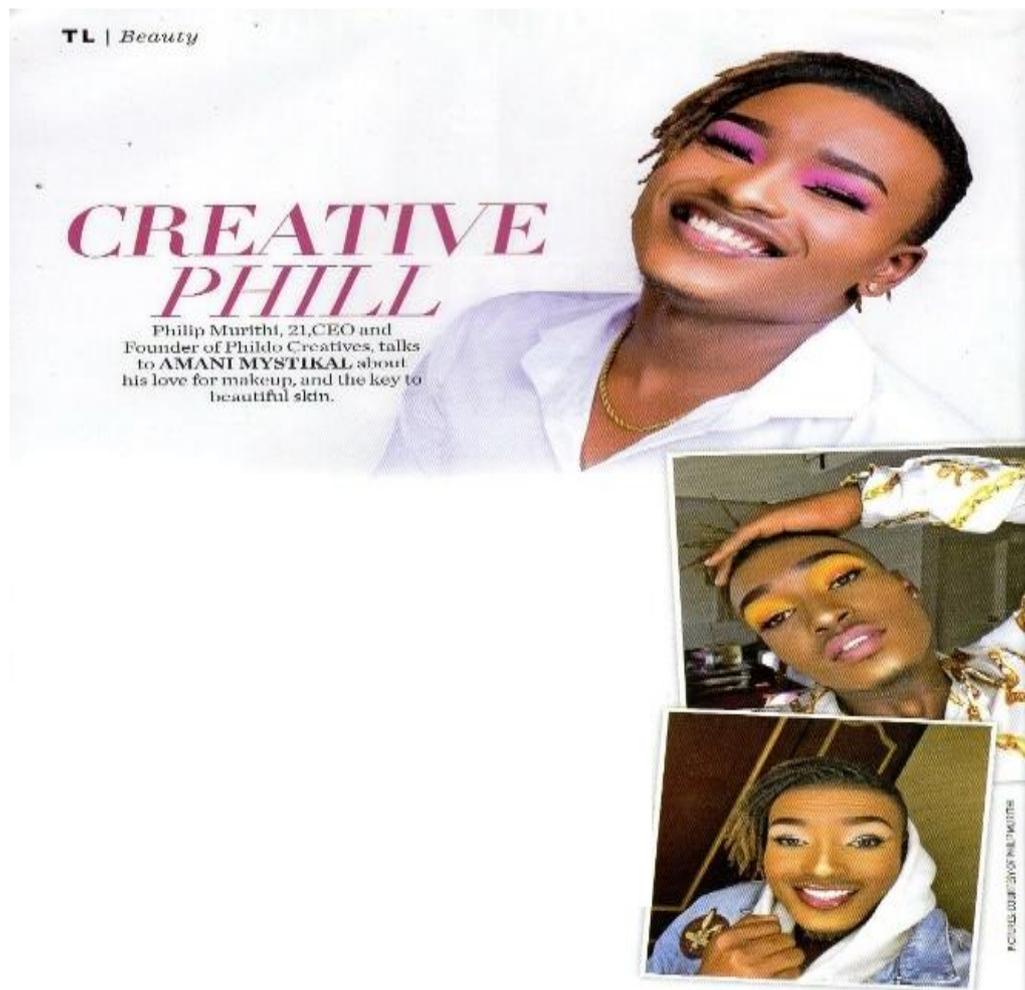


Figure 2: Male fashionistas adopting feminine appearances

Source: *True Love East Africa magazine: June 2019 pg 32*

The above figure illustrates a male fashionista who has make up like women. The inclusion of male fashionistas challenges traditional gender norms, promoting inclusivity and diversity in fashion where men have also embraced beauty ideals. This resonates with Van Dijk's (2020) emphasis on the role of discourse in reproducing or transforming power relations and with Wodak's (2019) emphasis on the intersectionality of gender with other identity factors. By including male fashionistas, the magazines challenge stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity, contributing to a more diverse and inclusive representation of gender identities (*True Love East Africa*, June 2019, p. 32). This narrative demonstrates how magazine articles contribute to reshaping perceptions of masculinity and femininity, advocating for gender equality and diversity within the fashion and modelling industry (Beasley & Standley, 2002).

Gender roles have long been embedded in societal norms, often perpetuating male dominance and reinforcing stereotypes that hinder gender equality. Articles featuring Kambua, the WaJesus family, and Lawrence Macharia (Terence Creative) were selected based on their relevance to themes of gender roles, marriage, and professional success. Kambua, a media personality and songwriter, epitomizes resilience in the face of societal pressures regarding motherhood. The societal expectation of childbearing in marriage often places undue pressure on women, leading to stereotypes and blame when conception delays. The article "*It's been a long painful and emotional journey to motherhood*" (*The Parents Magazine*, March 2020)

captures her struggle with infertility and the stigma surrounding delayed conception. External pressures exacerbated her emotional turmoil, reflecting pervasive gender biases in societal expectations of women's reproductive roles (*The Parents Magazine*, March 2020:14-16). The article illustrates how pressure intensified over time, questioning the timing and likelihood of her pregnancy. Despite this, Kambua found solace in a strong support system comprising her husband, family, and friends. Her husband played a crucial role in carrying the emotional burden with her, providing unwavering encouragement amidst societal scrutiny (*The Parents Magazine*, March 2020:14-16).

While it was not really a pressure point to the couple or their family members, outsiders were relentless in their questioning on when they would get to see a baby bump.... (The Parents Magazine, March 2020:14).

"I learnt that people in general are very insensitive and unkind to couples with fertility issues or have had a long wait" (The Parents Magazine, March 2020:15)

To cope, she would find herself withdrawing from such spaces; sometimes subconsciously as it seemed that it was so much easier for everyone else to have children except her... (The Parents Magazine, March 2020:15)

She also was thankful for she was surrounded by a great support system consisting of her husband, her family members and friends.

"It's normal to feel a certain level of disappointment but I am blessed to have a very strong husband because as much as society blamed me, he carried that burden with me. It hurt him that I was being criticized and put on the spot for not having children and would constantly encourage me." She narrates (The Parents Magazine, March 2020:15)

It was also a totally different case for the singer as her in-loves... In fact, together with her nuclear family members, they were a steady source of encouragement, something she is grateful for. (The Parents Magazine, March 2020:16)

Kambua's narrative underscores the dual role of men in modern relationships: as supportive partners and defenders against societal judgement. While societal stereotypes often target women for fertility issues, Kambua's husband and supportive network countered this narrative, emphasizing empathy and understanding. Though traditional expectations on women evidently remain, as shown by the pressure put on Kambua, the strength she displays and the support from her husband and family illustrate some changing thinking in matters of gender roles.

Lawrence and Milly's marriage faced significant challenges, including addiction and societal scrutiny. Lawrence's past struggles with gambling and smoking tested their relationship, yet their commitment to mutual growth and support prevailed. Milly's resilience and forgiveness amidst external judgement highlight the complexities of gender roles in relationships, as well as the evolving expectations of modern marriages.

It was really hard kicking the habits, with gambling, casinos are open 24/7 and they give you drinks and food. I had become such a return client that the staff knew me and would let me in at any time. With smoking it is so much easier to carry 40 cigarettes than 40 bottles. My smoking persisted a bit longer. (The Parents Magazine, October 2019)

The result of those addictions was constant arguments with the wife, Milly, who felt he was not willing to quit. This affected their life even making it difficult for their intimacy; the stench is something the wife Milly could not stomach and she even bought him nicotine gum

to help him kick the addiction. She confesses that however the toll, she still held on strong even with everyone blaming her and never sympathizing with her woes: *“Sometimes I wonder how I managed to stay put during all that because my friends and family would urge me to leave him... (The Parents Magazine, October 2019).*

Terence and Milly's experience, also underscores the emotional toll of miscarriage on marital relationships. Milly reflects on their shared grief and the support she received from Terence:

At 13 weeks, she started spotting again and going to the hospital, they received the heartbreaking news that they had lost the baby. Naturally, it was a big blow to the couple with Milly admitting that she ‘almost lost it’ but thankfully, Terence was there all through... (The Parents Magazine, October 2019).

Terence's role as a supportive partner during Milly's post-partum depression exemplifies a modern approach to masculinity, emphasizing emotional engagement and solidarity (Wodak, 2019) challenging traditional notions of male emotional reserve, advocating for openness and support in times of crisis (Chiang & Su, 2024).

Martin Githinji's narrative similarly exemplifies a shift towards supportive masculinity, where he encourages Christine Lwanga to overcome personal challenges and pursue her career aspirations. For Christine, she was scared at first but with Martin, the couple has been able to make it, hence being an inspiration as the excerpt below illustrates.

Her being shy and awakened during public appearances and feeling under pressure to perform for a non-excited audience, she would often refuse any public engagements. Fortunately, Martin egged her on and she slowly started coming out of her shell. Now she is confident in front of her camera and has taken content creation even as she works on financing her interior design course and setting up a company.” The Parents Magazine, February 2020:14)

Evans and Faith Wafula's story below emphasizes the importance of mutual respect and consultation in marital decision-making, challenging traditional notions of male dominance and echoing findings from the Thomson Reuters Foundation (2019). Their advice to young couples underscores the evolution towards more egalitarian relationships, where both partners contribute equally to decision-making processes:

EVANS: *When I was alone, I used to make decisions without any consultation but I learnt to seek her approval and partnership before I embark on a project. It is about putting my pride aside and submitting to my partnership.*

AUDREY: *Are you saying men should be submissive as well?*

EVANS: *They should. Why should I be too proud to seek my wife’s input and approval in an area where she is an expert? If something does not sit well with her, we discuss it and come to a midpoint. It has better outcomes for both of us. Same goes when she seeks my opinion. If I carry myself as the unquestioned man of the house, where will that lead us?*

In *The Parents Magazine's* March 2020 issue, Francis Machugu is celebrated for his initiative to alleviate *"Periods Poverty"* among marginalized women (The Parents Magazine, 2020). He is portrayed as breaking traditional gender norms by actively carrying and distributing sanitary towels, traditionally considered women's responsibilities.

When it comes to Menses, women have a special camaraderie. That is why a lady can walk up to another and borrow a pad, and she will be given. But what if women could walk to men and borrow sanitary towels and men are courageous enough to carry them

around and make them available when asked? It is going to take an overhand of men's attitude... (The Parents Magazine, March 2020).

This narrative challenges the stereotype that men should not engage in issues related to menstruation, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on gender equality and social responsibility (van Dijk, 2020). The author goes ahead to say that Francis always carries a pack of sanitary towels in his bag. This is something odd for we know this usually happens with ladies. Francis' motivation stems from personal experiences witnessing the impact of period poverty, particularly among marginalized communities like Samburu.

I grew up partly in Samburu and being a marginalized community, I saw firsthand what lacking menstrual products can do to girls and women alike. It can alter health education and their whole future. What most people dismiss as a simple thing can affect ladies so badly he narrates. (The Parents Magazine, March 2020).

His initiative underscores the intersectionality of gender and socio-economic factors in confronting menstrual stigma (Wodak, 2019). By featuring Francis in the "Celebrating our Heroes" column, *The Parents Magazine* redefines heroism to include actions traditionally associated with femininity, thus challenging traditional notions of male dominance.

Similarly, Lillian Njeri's "Drop-a-Pad" initiative, addresses period poverty among women living on the streets (*The Parents Magazine, 2019*). Her efforts highlight the communal responsibility in addressing women's health issues, traditionally overlooked by mainstream discourse dominated by male perspectives (van Leeuwen, 2008). She states:

I saw what musician King Kaka was doing in schools and felt the need to do something too. I researched on what other organizations were doing on the same and I found a gap in the street families. I then wondered how women and girls catered for their menses, so I set out to the streets and asked what they use during that time of the month. I was moved when they told me they use papers such as books and newspapers or rags (The Parents Magazine, 2019:23)

Lillian's initiative challenges gender stereotypes by portraying menstruation as a shared societal concern rather than a private issue for women alone from the allusion to "King Kaka" who is a male Kenyan celebrity. (*The Parents Magazine, 2019*). Her narrative amplifies the voices of marginalized women and critiques the silence surrounding menstruation in public discourse (van Leeuwen, 2009). By framing Francis, King Kaka and Lillian as heroes in their respective communities, the magazines construct a new narrative where men and women collaborate in addressing social inequalities. This heroic discourse disrupts traditional gender roles and encourages readers to reconsider societal norms surrounding gendered responsibilities.

Eric Dayon Jumanne Mboya's journey, as portrayed in *True Love East Africa's* April 2019 issue, provides a compelling example of challenging traditional stereotypes and advocating for queer visibility. The article humanizes Eric's experiences, from childhood struggles with identity to his advocacy efforts as an adult. The writer avers that it is important to tell stories of gays like Dayon, people who have decided to live life as their most authentic selves. Born Eric Dayon Jumanne Mboya in Tanga Tanzania to a Muslim father and a Christian mother, Dayon always struggled to fit in:

Ever since I could remember I have always felt like I was born in the wrong skin. Most of my toys were Barbie dolls and other feminine stuff I got from my mom, yet deep down, I felt like I was supposed to be someone different. I never knew about gay people or that

someone could change gender from the one assigned at birth. Even though I didn't feel like I fitted in, I feared voicing what I felt (Pp. 58)

The discourse surrounding Eric's narrative challenges the marginalization of queer individuals in societal discourse. By highlighting his journey towards self-acceptance and advocacy, *True Love East Africa* encourages readers to rethink traditional notions of masculinity and support diversity. The use of linguistic devices, such as the term "*Queen of the Boys*," reclaims identity and challenges derogatory stereotypes, promoting a more inclusive society.

The article on financial management emphasizes the importance of couples planning finances together to avoid marital discord and potential divorce unrelated to infidelity. It advocates for communication, shared financial priorities, and maintaining individual financial autonomy:

While having a joint account is considered ideal, it is advisable to have some bit of control over your finances. A joint account can be risky, especially with a dishonest partner. Consider having separate accounts for personal income to work towards financial goals while maintaining autonomy (The Parents Magazine, February 2020, p. 6).

This narrative challenges traditional notions of male financial control by promoting shared responsibility and autonomy, aligning with contemporary views on gender equality in financial decision-making (van Leeuwen, 2009).

The article "*Spousal Support during Financial Hardships*" discusses the role of women in supporting husbands during financial challenges, advocating for mutual understanding and lifestyle adjustments. It highlights the importance of emotional and financial support from women:

Women play a pivotal role in sustaining marriages during economic hardships. Supporting lifestyle adjustments and providing emotional support are crucial for marital stability. (The Parents Magazine, October 2019, p. 55).

This narrative challenges traditional gender roles by emphasizing women's agency in financial decision-making and support during crises, reflecting a shift towards more egalitarian relationships (Wodak, 2019).

The article on "*Supporting Wives' Career Advancements*" acknowledges the changing dynamics in marriages, encouraging men to support their wives' professional growth:

Men should step up in supporting their wives' career advancements. With changing times, women are taking on equal roles in workplaces, requiring mutual support at home (The Parents Magazine, March 2020, p. 31).

This narrative challenges traditional views of male breadwinnership by advocating for shared responsibilities and supportive roles in women's career aspirations (Chiang & Su, 2024).

These articles illustrate a significant shift in gender roles within marriages, emphasizing mutual support, shared responsibility, and financial autonomy as key factors in fostering healthy relationships. These narratives challenge traditional stereotypes of male dominance in financial decision-making and career support, advocating for broader societal shifts towards more equitable relationships (Fairclough, 2015; van Leeuwen, 2009; van Dijk, 2020).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) reveals significant shifts in gender representation in magazine articles. Historically entrenched notions of male chauvinism and rigid gender roles are gradually being challenged as the media increasingly adopts inclusive

language and narratives. The analysis demonstrated that representations of women have evolved from being primarily domestic figures to heterogeneous individuals balancing various roles, such as career-oriented mothers and empowered entrepreneurs. The narratives explored in *The Parents Magazine and True Love East Africa* reflect a significant transformation in the portrayal of gender roles within contemporary Kenyan society. The portrayal of Diana Marua, for instance, exemplifies the modern woman navigating the complexities of motherhood, career, and societal expectations. Similarly, the narratives of men embracing vulnerability and sharing responsibilities further underscore the changing dynamics within gender discourses. By highlighting figures such as Kambua, the WaJesus family, Lawrence Macharia, and others, these articles challenge traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, advocating for a more inclusive representation of gender identities. The stories not only depict the complexities of modern relationships but also emphasize the importance of mutual support, open communication, and shared responsibilities in fostering healthy partnerships. This evolving discourse contributes to a broader societal shift towards gender equality, encouraging both men and women to confront them. Furthermore, initiatives like Francis Machugu's efforts to combat period poverty and Lillian Njeri's advocacy for women on the streets highlight a broader societal shift towards inclusivity and gender equality. These initiatives challenge traditional gender norms by portraying men as active participants in addressing social inequalities traditionally associated with women.

Data from gender representations in *True Love East Africa* and *The Parents Magazines* reveal that there are entrenched patriarchal attitudes and cultural practices that continue to hinder women's empowerment and full participation in various spheres of society. The persistence of traditional stereotypes, particularly surrounding age in relationships and the stigmatization of women in specific professions, highlights the ongoing societal resistance to these changes. To foster genuine progress, it is imperative to address these barriers through comprehensive strategies that challenge traditional norms and empower women at all levels. This includes enhancing women's access to education, economic resources, and political representation, alongside promoting equitable family roles. Furthermore, continuous advocacy and community engagement are essential in shifting societal attitudes and dismantling the patriarchal structures that hinder gender equity. This article recommends that continued media representation that portrays men as supportive partners and advocates for gender equality be encouraged. This can further normalize empathetic masculinity and challenge harmful stereotypes. Also, promoting educational programs and public campaigns that highlight diverse gender roles and encourage empathy and understanding in relationships is encouraged. This can help dismantle entrenched stereotypes and foster healthier relationship dynamics. Fostering community dialogues and initiatives that engage men and women in conversations about gender roles and relationships can help promote mutual respect and understanding within communities.

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