

**LAU**  
School of Arts and Sciences  
Institute of Media Research and Training

**MDLAB** media  
digital  
literacy  
academy  
of beirut

## Commodification of the Body, Beauty, and Sexuality

Media and Gender

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*#ReinventCommunication*



## Beauty

How do we measure beauty?

## Beauty

**Social comparison theory:**

In the absence of any other objective external benchmark, people define themselves by comparing themselves to other people in their environment.

## Beauty

### Socio-cultural theory:

Pervasive social and cultural values, especially from peer, parental, and media influences, have a tremendous effect on individual values and behaviors.

## Beauty

### Symbolic Annihilation:

the absence of representation, or underrepresentation of some group of people in the media (George Gerbner, 1972)

## Beauty

### Media's dominance

The average person is exposed to 4,000-10,000 Ads per day (2018 estimates).

The average girl will watch 5,000 hours of TV & 80,000 ads, before she starts kindergarten (2007 estimates).

## Media Portrayals of Women

### The four stereotypes



Femme fatale



Supermom



sex kitten



nasty villainess

## Media Portrayals of Arab Women

Two stereotypes:

Submissive covered woman... exotic "harem"



Beyond the Stereotypes

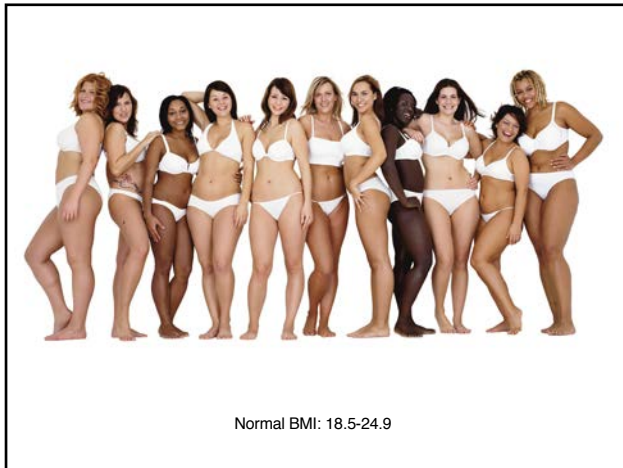
## Normalizing Beauty

## Normalizing Beauty

*thinness*

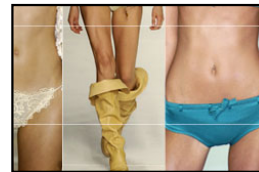
## Normalizing Beauty: Thinness





### Normalizing Beauty: Thinness

A young woman has  
7% chance to be as slim as a catwalk model  
1% chance to be as thin as a supermodel



Milan Fashion week (2006): Italy banned models with a BMI below 18.5. Same occurred in Spain and Brazil where two models (sisters) died from anorexia.

### Normalizing Beauty: Thinness

#### TV shows:

Over 3/4 of the female characters in sitcoms are underweight

Only 1 in 20 are above average in size.



### Normalizing Beauty: Thinness

Normal BMI: 18.5-24.9



Julia Roberts and Cameron Diaz have BMIs of 17.

Kate Moss borderlines severe anorexia at 16.  
(2010)

### Normalizing Beauty: Thinness

Heavier actresses often receive negative comments about their bodies

80% of comments followed by canned laughter.



### Normalizing Beauty

*youngness*

### Normalizing Beauty: Youngness

Female characters younger than male characters

Men are twice as likely as Women to be 50-60 years old

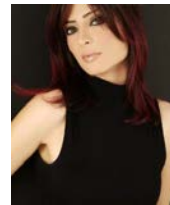


### Normalizing Beauty: Appearance vs Brains

Arab anchors also getting (or looking) younger, thinner and focused on appearance



Ghida Fakhry,  
Al-Jazeera



Wafaa Kilani,  
Egyptian TV



Mona Abou Hamze,  
Murr TV

## Normalizing Beauty

*appearance*

### Normalizing Beauty: Appearance vs Brains

When Greta Van Susteren moved from CNN to Fox in 2002

surgically altered her face to appear younger and more "beautiful."



Greta Van Susteren—Before 2002



Greta Van Susteren—After 2002

### Normalizing Beauty: Representation

#### Female Journalists in Lebanon

(4:1) Females : Males in journalism/media programs

(1:2) Females : Males in news industry

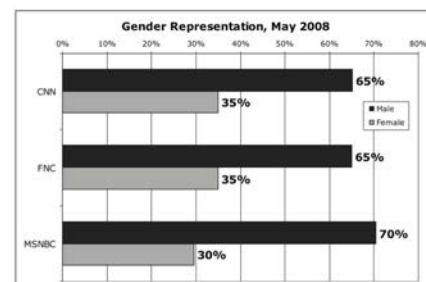
Management: only 22% women

Boards/ownership: 15% women



### Normalizing Beauty: Representation

#### Guests on prime-time news programs



## Normalizing Beauty: Representation

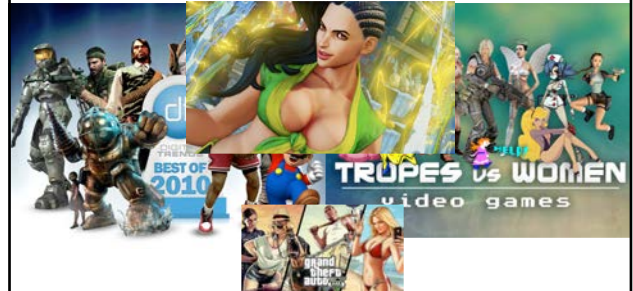
Males outnumbered females nearly 2-to-1 in primetime TV (2011).  
 In 1970s: 3-1  
 Today in top G-rated films: 2.5-1



## Normalizing Beauty: Representation

### Video Games

1 in 7 characters in best-selling video games are women  
 (40% wore revealing clothing, were partially or totally nude)



## Normalizing Beauty: Representation

What is the percentage of family films with a female narrator?

- A. 12%
- B. 26%
- C. 32%
- D. 41%
- E. 50%

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What is the percentage of prime-time shows with gender-balanced casts?

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- D. 44%
- E. 55%

### Normalizing Beauty: Representation

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### Normalizing Beauty: Representation

What is the percentage of speaking characters in prime-time comedies by gender?



### Normalizing Beauty

*sexiness*



## Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness

Female body parts in **America**



sell everything from food to cars.

## Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness

Female body parts in **Lebanon**



sell everything from malls to cable

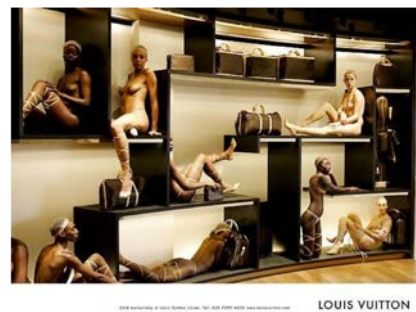
## Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness

to lottery...




## Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness

To slavery...



Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness  
and used cars...




Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness

Ministry of Tourism MEA advertising campaign  
2008



Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness

Ministry of Tourism "[Lebanon Blues](#)" campaign  
2011



**Normalizing Beauty**

*Domestic-ness & Subservience*

### Normalizing Gender: Domestic-ness



1950s



2013

### Normalizing Gender: Male Dominance



1970s



2015

### Normalizing Beauty: Domestic-ness



### Normalizing Beauty: Domestic-ness

#### The Bechdel Test? (movies)

What is the % of movies that have at least two women, who talk to each other, about something besides a man?

**approx. 50%**  
**(as of 2016)**

Latest:  
<https://bechdeltest.com/>

### Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness

Other Arab countries?



### Normalizing Beauty: Sexiness

Don't forget the music



### Normalizing Beauty: Sexual Objectification



Video 1b: Sexual Objectification:  
1:00-3:30 and 6:30-8:30

### Normalizing Beauty: Sexual Objectification

Music videos: displays of women as sex objects

Video 2: Hayfa  
Video 3: Klink



## Normalizing Beauty

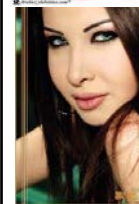
*plastic-ness*

### Normalizing Beauty: Plastic-ness



Local plastic surgeons:

Most clients consider Haifa Wehbe and Nancy Ajram as “ideal Lebanese beauty...”



Both have had extensive plastic surgery



### Normalizing Beauty: Plastic-ness



Playing on the national obsession with image.

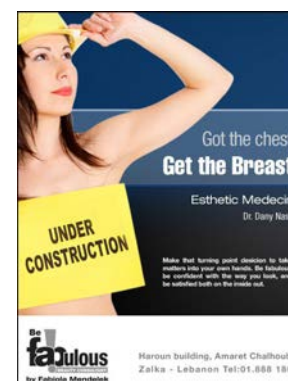


Plastic surgery to sell alcohol



Plastic surgery to sell food.

### Normalizing Beauty: Plastic-ness



### Normalizing Beauty: Plastic-ness

First Nation Bank (Lebanon):

“Have the life you always wanted...via loans for plastic surgery.”



### Normalizing Beauty: Plastic-ness

Survey of Lebanese women:

99% either *agreed* with the statement:

“Lebanese social values promote cosmetic surgery.”



What are the top three procedures among 18–24 year olds in Lebanon

- A. Liposuction, nose job, breast enhancement
- B. Eye lifts, nose job, Face lifts
- C. Botox, nose job, breast Lip enhancement
- D. Eye lifts, nose job, Butt implants
- E. Face lifts, Botox, Liposuction

*More Than Just Another Pretty Face*, 2011

### Normalizing Beauty: Plastic-ness

*Makeover shows in the USA*

*Extreme Makeover* first aired in the 2002.

From 2003–2004, 44% increase in number of cosmetic procedures.

(American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery)





### Risks of Cosmetic Surgery

“... complications can occur even in the best of hands. Hematoma and bruises, seroma formation, nerve damage causing sensory or motor loss, infection, scarring, blood loss and complications of anesthesia can occur in any surgery. More serious complications such as deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism can cause death.”

*National Institute of Health (2015)*

## Normalizing Beauty

*the unattainable normal*

### Normalizing Beauty: Unattainability

**Idealized bodies often impossible to Attain**



**Filippa Hamilton**

5ft-10 : 178cm  
120 Lbs : 54Kg  
Size 4



### Normalizing Beauty: Unattainability

Almost all images/videos we see undergo extensive beautification

Video 4: dove

### Normalizing Beauty: Unattainability

Why are the media's standards of beauty so different from the norm?

### Normalizing Beauty: Unattainability

Why are the media's standards of beauty so different from the norm?

Diet Industry **\$70B** (US 2017)

Cosmetic Surgery Industry **\$16B** (US 2016)

Cosmetic Products Industry **\$533B** (Global 2017): **1/3 goes to Ads**

Saudi Arabia GDP: \$646B (US GDP)

### Normalizing Beauty: Unattainability

Why are the media's standards of beauty so different from the norm?

Message: women always need adjustment

A woman's body is an object to be perfected.

### Normalizing Beauty: Unattainability

Exposure to idealized body images lowers women's self-worth.

#### Studies:

- People shown slides of thin models had lower self-evaluations than those shown average & oversized models
- Most girls reported that "very thin" models made them feel insecure about themselves.

Video 5: Photoshop



### Normalizing Beauty: Anorexia

#### Stringent dieting to achieve an ideal figure plays key role in triggering eating disorders, including anorexia

- 1 in 4 college-aged women uses unhealthy methods of weight control (fasting, skipping meals, excessive exercise, laxative abuse, and self-induced vomiting).

### Normalizing Beauty: Body image & self worth

75% of "normal" weight women think they are overweight.

90% of women overestimate their body size.

Video 6: self-worth

### Normalizing Beauty: Manorexia



**Muscle Dysmorphia (bigorexia):** obsession with obtaining the "perfectly masculine" body.

**Lebanon:** 42.1% of gym goers use supplements.

- 10.7% Steroids
- 18.5% Creatine
- 41.1% Protein



#### Negative side-effects:

severe acne, testicular atrophy, reduced sperm count, stunted growth, increased risk of stroke, kidney and liver failure, high blood pressure, enlargement of the heart, various cardiovascular problems, mood swings, elevated aggression, and other psychiatric disorders.

### Media Portrayals of Men

The four stereotypes



Superman/  
ough guy



Suave,  
womanizing  
professional



Lazy/dumb  
dad



Nerd/Geek/  
Loser

### Normalizing Masculinity: Body Image



Using shirtless men to sell... ...air freshener

### Normalizing Gender: **Toxic** Masculinity

“Media messages encourage boys to be competitive, focus on external success, rely on their intellect, withstand physical pain, and repress their vulnerable emotions. When boys violate the code, it is not uncommon for them to be teased, shamed, or ridiculed.” Marvin Allen: “Why Men Can’t Feel”

Video 10: Mask

### Normalizing Gender: **Toxic** Masculinity

Studies show that **men**:

- Die younger (10 years) than women: low self-care
- Twice as likely to suffer from rage disorders
- More likely to abuse alcohol, drugs, engage in risky behavior
- More likely to kill and be killed
  - 90% of all murders committed by men
  - 77% of murder victims are men
  - 80% of suicides

### Normalizing Beauty: Rape Culture



### Normalizing Beauty: Rape Culture

"In a rape culture, people are surrounded with images, language, laws, and everyday phenomena that validate and perpetuate rape.



Rape culture includes jokes, TV, music, advertising, legal jargon, laws, words and imagery, that make violence against women and sexual coercion seem so normal that people believe that rape is inevitable.

The persistence of rape becomes "just the way things are."

### Normalizing Beauty: Rape Culture

Some facts on rape in the USA



- 20% of reported rapes are prosecuted
- 50% of all rapes are not reported
- 3% of rapes lead to jail time for rapists
- 25% of rapes in the US military prosecuted
  - Less than half of those resulted in any convictions

### Changing the Conversation

#MeToo Movement



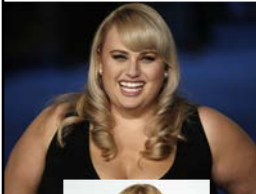
### Changing the Conversation

Past 20 years:

- Strides in how media portray women
- More women in media behind the scenes
- More watchdog groups
- More public awareness, discussion, debate, and advocacy
- New avenues of research: media's effects on men, masculinity, children



### Diversity in Media: Women & Minorities



"If you don't see a clear path for what you want, sometimes you have to make it yourself" –Mindy Kaling

### Diversity in Media: LGBTQ



"It is revolutionary for any trans person to choose to be seen and visible in a world that tells us we should not exist."  
–Laverne Cox

### Miss America: re-Focus on Brains



As of 2018:  
no more swimsuit  
and evening gown  
competitions...

### Companies are Listening...



2014: Aerie stops using  
supermodels and  
retouching in their lingerie  
campaigns...

They reported a 9%  
increase in sales in the  
following financial  
quarter.



### Demanding Change and Breaking the Cycle

- **More** participation of women in media production → behind the scenes
- Greater industry regulation, influence of watchdog groups
- Awareness campaigns; community initiatives  
video 12: Miss Representation  
video 13: [It's okay to cry](#)
- Supporting positive role models: Women in Film Fund
- Consumer demand
- Dialogue: parents play the biggest role!

### Normalizing Beauty: Rape Culture

Some facts c

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- 3% of rapes
- 25% of rape
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