



## Stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media and its effects on societal norms: A theoretical perspective

**Ikharo Seluman**<sup>1\*</sup>, **Aghwadoma Eguono**<sup>2</sup>, **Arikenbi Peter Gbenga**<sup>3</sup>, **Ainakhuagbor Aimimode**<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1, 3, 4</sup> Department of Mass Communication, Edo State University Uzairue, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Department of Mass Communication, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

\* Corresponding Author: **Ikharo Seluman**

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### Abstract

The media landscape wields immense influence as a reflection of social values and a creator of cultural narratives. The extent to which gender is authentically represented in media content directly impacts how individuals form their perception of the world. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes, once deeply ingrained in media, have gradually evolved due to growing societal awareness and activism. This study therefore, examines the stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media and its effects on societal norms. The researchers embarked on this study with the intent of achieving two objectives; and based on the objectives of this study, two research questions were formulated to serve as a guide for this study. This study is anchored on the social learning data. Data were collected using the secondary method of data collection. Findings from this study reveal that mainstream media have a profound impact on shaping societal attitudes and beliefs. The extent and nature of the portrayal of gender and diversity in mainstream media are critical aspects of media analysis. The study further revealed that mainstream media has often perpetuated gender stereotypes. Women have been predominantly portrayed as caregivers, homemakers, or objects of desire, while men have been depicted as breadwinners, leaders, and protectors. Although progress has been made in challenging these stereotypes, they still persist in many forms of media. The study concludes that the portrayal of gender in mainstream media holds significant sway over societal norms. The study therefore, recommends that to address the stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media and its effects on societal norms, it is crucial to encourage greater diversity within media production teams.

**Keywords:** gender, societal, Stereotypical portrayal

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### Introduction

The Nigerian media landscape has a significant influence on shaping societal perceptions and reinforcing cultural norms. However, the portrayal of gender in Nigerian media often perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces traditional gender roles, which can have far-reaching implications for societal attitudes, gender equality, and women's empowerment. One prevalent stereotype in Nigerian media is the portrayal of women as submissive and primarily focused on domestic roles. This can be observed in numerous Nollywood films where female characters are often cast as housewives, mothers, or dependents, reinforcing the idea that women's primary values lie within the confines of their homes. Conversely, men are frequently depicted as dominant, assertive, and breadwinners in Nigerian media. They are frequently shown in positions of power, whether as successful businessmen, politicians, or action heroes in movies. A prime example is the portrayal of 'Chief Obi' in a famous comedy series, where the character's wealth and influence perpetuate the stereotype that a man's worth is measured by his financial success. These stereotypes not only reflect but also shape societal perceptions and expectations of gender roles in Nigeria.

They can have real-world consequences, such as limiting women's career opportunities and reinforcing traditional gender norms, which can hinder progress towards gender equality.

The misconception that our world as humans is a 'men's world' is based on the fact that men completely outweigh and dominate women in all parts of our public lives. Modern education has greatly expanded women's ability to acquire new skills and has improved both their productivity and potential, notably in the last century as a result of the simultaneous acceleration of science and technological growth. With the help of these two, women's roles have evolved beyond domestic caregiving and procreation to important and substantial contributions to advancement in all spheres of human endeavours. However, despite the fact that women have made major contributions to contemporary society, they have nonetheless been treated unequally and as second-class citizens in the process of modern human evolution.

Men's representation in media and popular culture in Nigeria perpetuates stereotypical notions of masculinity. In television shows, movies, and advertisements, Nigerian media are often depicted as strong, powerful, and dominant figures. They are portrayed as breadwinners and decision-makers while women are relegated to supporting roles. The media industry serves as a reflective mirror to society, offering a mix of images and narratives that shape our understanding of the world around us. The portrayal of gender and diversity is a predominant aspect of this mirror, affecting societal norms and stereotypes in profound ways. Durodola (2019) noted that the media plays a significant role in shaping societal perceptions and attitudes towards gender and diversity. It informs us of what is considered 'normal' or 'acceptable' in our society and has the power to either reinforce or challenge stereotypes. For years, mainstream media has been criticized for its stereotypical and often biased representation of gender roles. Women have often been represented as submissive, emotional, or concerned with beauty and domestic affairs, while men have been portrayed as strong, rational, and career-oriented.

The stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media has significant implications for societal norms. Okon (2015) noted that traditional gender roles have been reinforced through media portrayals that cast men in positions of power and women in supportive or domestic roles. Such portrayals can limit individuals' aspirations and potential, reinforcing the idea that certain roles, behaviours, and careers are gender-specific. These portrayals not only limit the societal roles and expectations of individuals but can also contribute to harmful phenomena such as sexism and gender discrimination. However, in recent years, Usman and Haruna (2019) noted that there has been a slow but significant shift in media representations of gender. More diverse portrayals of men and women are emerging, challenging traditional gender norms and stereotypes. For instance, media depictions of strong, independent women and emotionally expressive men are becoming more prevalent. These evolving portrayals can help dispel gender stereotypes and promote gender equality. According to Okolie (2021), media texts unintentionally reflect the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, which is similar to that of most other societies. For instance, because most commercials are structured to uphold the status-quo, they disproportionately feature men in traditional roles. The Nigerian advertising media firmly maintains a gender

imbalance with women overrepresented in the house and underrepresented in the outdoors and in professional settings, despite more women holding positions of responsibility in the nation. According to Jimoh's (2017) research of modern Nigerian commercials, males are frequently shown in positions of authority and dominance over women, while women are constantly portrayed as housewives, mothers, homemakers, and sexual objects. For instance, a well-known MTN fastlink modem advertisement features a young female personal assistant at the workplace who receives a call from her male employer asking her to pick up certain documents he requested the day before but required right away because he was about to arrive at the office. Before the 'male' boss arrived at the office, the woman quickly pulled out her MTN fastlink and downloaded the files. In the advertisement, a purported typical guy is depicted as constantly in charge and giving orders to the female under his authority, while a supposed typical female is depicted as always docile, obedient, and eager to please the 'male' employer. Similar advertisements for Sensodyne toothpaste, Dettol soap, and other products overemphasised men's responsibilities as bosses in the workplace and as breadwinners in the family. It's interesting that more Nigerian women are working outside the home to support their families, but few advertisements seem to acknowledge these shifts. Despite the fact that gender stereotypes are frequently employed for humorous relief, the repetitive portrayals do nothing but reinforce prevailing gender roles rather than work to alter them. These adverts repeatedly send notions of masculine dominance and female subordination to young individuals who see them and this made Chandler (2016) to assert that viewers are typically encouraged to identify with male characters and to objectify women.

### Statement of the Problem

The stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media has a significant impact on societal norms. Despite progress made towards gender equality and inclusivity, media representations often reinforce traditional gender roles, reinforce harmful stereotypes, and marginalize diverse communities. This problem has consequences for individuals, communities, and society at large, as it perpetuates inequality, limits opportunities, and hinders social progress. The media play a powerful role in shaping public opinion and influencing social attitudes. However, the representation of gender in mainstream media frequently falls short of reflecting the diverse realities of society. Women are often portrayed as hypersexualized objects or limited to traditional roles such as caregivers or romantic interests, reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes. The effects of these stereotypical portrayals are far-reaching. They contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality by reinforcing harmful gender norms, such as the expectation that women should prioritize their appearance or that men should be dominant and emotionally detached.

However, various studies have been carried out on the stereotypical of gender in Nigerian media but none has efficiently dealt with the portrayal of gender in mainstream media and its effects on societal norms and stereotypes; thereby leaving a gap. It is this gap that this study intends to fill.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows;

1. To examine the extent and nature of the stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media.
2. To investigate the impact of the stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media on societal norms.

### Research Questions

Based on the objectives of this study, the following research questions were formulated to serve as a guide for this study;

1. What is the extent and nature of the stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media?
2. What is the impact of the stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media on societal norms?

### Literature Review

#### Gender Portrayal and Advertising in the Mainstream Media

Advertising disseminates various forms of marketing data designed to satisfy the requirements of both buyers and suppliers. A product or service's image is created during the public education process via advertising, which extends beyond the simple facts that are communicated in the message. The roles given to women in the advertisement most frequently draw attention to the image message. Women are frequently objectified in common ways and represented by body parts like their legs or their chests, which typically leans mind towards sexual attraction. Another frequent way they are shown is as being weaker than the man, whether it is through the composition of the advertisement or a specific scene. Men typically have their lips open whereas women frequently have theirs closed. When a product is being represented by a woman's body, objectification is more clear. A perfume or beer bottle shaped like a woman's body would be an illustration of this (Grover, 2014). In this context, Grover (2014) noted that there are six prevalent stereotypes about women in advertising. This includes being portrayed as a domestic maniac, a selfless nurturer, a sex object, an unreachable goddess, a precarious juggler, or a bit player. Media outlets utilise advertising as a potent instrument to project an image, alter an idea, or influence an attitude. Advertising may sell a person, or in this example, a gender, even though society typically views it as a tool for the sale of goods. It supports the sexism that permeates society. Men frequently use their stature, attention, and posture as advantages. A committee on Status of Women in India (1975) cited in Afolabi (2023) noted inter alia:

The media re-in force prejudice that the women's place is in the home; the most important and valuable asset of a woman is physical beauty; a woman's energies and intellect must be directed at finding the right man and keeping him, women are submissive.

According to a study of broadcast commercials in Canada, "men were significantly more likely than women to be presented as experts or authorities." Accordingly, Tuchman and Busty (2018) make the firm argument that "men are shown as dominant, active, and authoritative while women tend to be shown as submissive and passive."

Studies like those by Courtney and Whipple (2018) and Barthel (2019) demonstrate that popular culture, especially advertising, has firmly established the identification of women with particular home roles. Wolf (2021) adds that "the roles offered to women are very limited" in order to bolster the aforementioned claims. Many entail a woman

being confined to the home, including cooking for her husband, cleaning the house, and caring for children.

Its social structure and psychology both take gender into account. Our reactions to what we see and our purchasing decisions are influenced by our gender. Advertisers leveraged the distinction between the gender roles of production and consuming to legitimise their industry and elevate it in the public eye. Women now account for 80% of all purchases, making them the largest consumer group, according to Wakefield (2015). Recognising this, advertisers are making an effort to target more women with their products and services. She added that "most advertisements geared towards women portray them as sophisticated, intelligent consumers who handle the bulk of household purchasing decisions."

Advertising psychology shapes our response and operates below the level of structural divisions. Just as Baudrillard (2014) accurately remarked that "advertising assumes the role of the female," this psychology has a gendered aspect. The logical man argues that commercials manipulate, yet that is exactly the function of the woman—to manipulate, beg, and seduce someone in a way that he is unaware of the cues being used.

Advertising is gendered, according to Barthel (2019), in that it frequently speaks to our physical sense of self and the knowledge we get about the outside world through our bodies. It talks about how important it is for us to express our social identities by how we look. Men "create a sense of identity by extending out from their body, using its and their evident power to control objects and others," according to Barthel (2019). We can easily see this in commercials for cars, stereos, and particularly cigarettes. Women, on the other hand, manipulate the body. The female body conveys her presence and self-worth more than her dominance over others. This is then mirrored in the strong focus placed on feminine body ornamentation through clothing and cosmetics.

"Advertisements tell us what it means to be a desirable man or woman," write Jacobson and Mazur (2015). The message for man is clear: he must be strong, wealthy, self-assured, and athletic. The messages are all directed at women and have the same message: she must be "beautiful." They asserted that, while women have always been judged against cultural ideals of beauty, advertising has worked in tandem with sexism to make those ideals more pervasive and unachievable than ever before. Of course, the idea that women should be valued as ornaments was not invented by advertising, they added. According to Barthel (2019), gender-specific commercials are effective because they may relate to women on some level by connecting with them in some area of reality. Traditionally, social standing has been attained for women by their physical attractiveness. For guys, being with a stunning lady demonstrates his social standing because he was able to "get her." In order to become an object herself, she must have opulent possessions and attractive presentation overall. Advertising demonstrates how women are given contradicting messages. They are made to feel as though they must fulfill this ideal and that, if they don't, they have failed. They are supposed to be flawless. Thus, it may be argued that advertising use and reinforce gender stereotypes.

#### Gender Portrayal in Movies

Gender dominance in African countries is based on male dominance over the female population, which has led to

endless debates. For women, this undercuts the entire tenet of feminism, which advocates egalitarianism or gender equality. Umukoro & Okwuowulu (2018) remarked that as a result, 'Nollywood filmmakers... it has been noted, attempt to replicate exactly, in finite terms, visual text culled from social reality; reinforcing thus the vision of gender imbalance and to the dismay of feminist crusaders who opposed such.' As a result, Nollywood's storytelling in the video-film medium develops its assertiveness based on the narrative structure, making the viewers witnesses of the acts taking place in the visual experience. The film's gender dominance-themed narrative tends to mirror contemporary socioeconomic realities, which tends to redress the imbalance. Interesting cultural effects on gender and conflict between men and women, particularly in marriages, are evident in these cinematic narratives. This assertion is supported by Okoronkwo and Nwankwo (2019), who assert that cultural influences have an impact on the creative input for film storytelling. As a result, the majority of the photographs are from the current and contain inspirational messages that encourage societal change. Every movie has a motivation that either sympathises with or targets a character or scenario in order to uphold a particular moral principle.

The division caused by gender is largely determined by a person's sexual orientation, which is equivalent to a person inheriting their genitalia. As a result, depending on one's gender orientation, these directly or indirectly produce social roles and behavioural patterns that are evaluated and approved in society. As a result, each culture has established the social norms that apply to the two conventional genders that make up that society. But since the development of the feminist movement, which aims to depatriachize society, masculinity has been experiencing a model and form crisis. For instance, the 2012 Nollywood film *Mr. and Mrs.*, written and directed by Chinwe Ekwuagu, caricatures males and portrays them in the context of traditional feminist notions of masculinity. The movie portrays Ken, the main character, as a very unreasonable, careless, domineering, and chauvinistic husband. He lacks empathy and treats his wife like a regular housekeeper. Beginning with the very first scene of the film, the director accosts the audience with this high temperature in the narrative. The first sequence of the film shows Susan peeling yams in the kitchen. This is done in order to set up the thematic core, into which the director rushes the audience. The scene that follows reveals Ken's hegemonic, chauvinistic, and monstrous attitude. When Ken returns from work, his wife greets him, and the following discussion takes place:

**Susan:** Hello darling, how was work today?

**Ken:** (Unconcernedly) like every other day. Food is not yet ready?

**Susan:** No... it will be ready in a second, I was...

**Ken:** (Cuts in) Susan, it's Friday, you know I have to eat, take a nap before clubbing with the boys

**Susan:** Darling today was very hectic. I had to do the monthly shopping and then I had to do the laundry before...

**Ken:** (cuts in) Just get my food. I don't get it, I make sure I provide everything we need as family. What is so difficult in being a house wife?

**Susan:** (pouring juice for him) I told you, today has been very hectic, it's not been easy with me

**Ken:** (cuts in) What is this? I made it clear this

morning, mango juice

**Susan:** mango is a seasonal fruit

**Ken:** I don't bloody care, get this thing off my table

The picture that is being painted is of a sociopath who enjoys making a loved one suffer. Ken is depicted as a slave owner whose only motivation is to maintain his ego while playing the role of a husband. This, however, goes against the gender role idea, which outlines obligations for both the husband and the wife. While Ken is shown as a typical male stereotype who is a control freak, a chauvinist, and a brutalizer, Susan is portrayed as a typical feminine cliché who is marginalised, mistreated, and emotionally tormented by a brutish masculine while being obedient. The connection becomes toxic as a result, and the audience is compelled to take sides emotionally. The message is clear: Men are brutes who always seek to dominate women. While it is not uncommon to discover guys that may easily fit the description of Ken in real life, it is important to recognise these features for what they are—hegemonic masculinity. Ken embodies this distorted version of the ideal man. The prevalent characteristics are all present in Ken's personality, including toxicity, control, chauvinism, self-centeredness, and pride. It is important to remember that this is an acquired social offence.

### Effects of Stereotypical Gender Portrayal in Mainstream Media on Societal Norms

Mainstream media, including television, movies, advertising, and news outlets, have a powerful influence on shaping societal norms and perpetuating stereotypes. The stereotypical portrayal of gender in media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, influencing social attitudes, and impacting individuals and communities. Despite some progress, media representations often fall short in reflecting the diverse realities of society, reinforcing traditional gender roles and perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Obinna (2020) noted that one of the significant effects of gender portrayal in mainstream media is the reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes. Women are frequently presented as hypersexualized objects of desire or confined to limited roles such as caregivers or romantic interests. These portrayals reinforce harmful gender norms, such as the expectation that women should prioritize their appearance, be submissive, and conform to societal beauty standards. Similarly, men are often depicted as dominant, emotionally detached, and focused on power and physical strength. Such representations perpetuate gender inequality, restrict individual expression, and limit opportunities for women and men to explore diverse identities and roles.

Media representations have a profound impact on individuals' self-perception and identity formation. When people consistently see limited or biased portrayals of gender and diversity, it can lead to internalized stereotypes and self-doubt. Young individuals, in particular, are vulnerable and highly influenced by the media they consume. Unattainable beauty standards, gender norms, and stereotypes depicted in media can lead to low self-esteem, body image issues, and a sense of inadequacy. Moreover, individuals from underrepresented groups may struggle with their identity and face challenges in accepting and embracing their unique experiences and characteristics.

According to Ozor (2021), the media plays a significant role in shaping societal attitudes and behaviors. The consistent

exposure to gender stereotypes and limited diversity in media can lead to the normalization of these stereotypes in society. People may internalize these portrayals as reflective of reality and base their beliefs and actions on them. For instance, the portrayal of women primarily as objects of desire can contribute to a culture of objectification and sexual harassment. Similarly, biased representations of racial or ethnic minorities can perpetuate racial biases and discrimination. Media's influence on societal norms can hinder progress towards equality, reinforcing existing power imbalances and impeding social change.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Social Learning Theory and the Framing Theory.

#### **Social Learning Theory**

The social learning theory is a theory of human learning and behavior that posits that new behaviors can be acquired by observing and imitating others. It is a behavioral theory, which means that it focuses on observable behaviors rather than internal mental states. The theory was developed by Albert Bandura in the 1960s and has been widely studied and applied to a variety of areas, including education, parenting, and psychotherapy.

The social learning theory has a number of implications for the portrayal of gender in mainstream media. According to the theory, people learn about gender roles and expectations by observing the ways in which gender is portrayed in the media. For example, if people are constantly exposed to images of women as sex objects in the media, they are more likely to learn that this is the norm for women. Additionally, if people see that men are rewarded for being aggressive or violent in the media, they are more likely to learn that these are acceptable behaviors for men.

#### **Framing Theory**

Framing Theory, first introduced by Erving Goffman in the 1970s and later developed by scholars like Erving Goffman and Robert Entman, emphasizes the role of media in selecting, emphasizing, and shaping specific aspects of an issue or topic. Frames are the interpretive lenses through which individuals perceive and understand events, determining what is emphasized and what is omitted. In the context of media, frames dictate how stories are told and, as a result, impact how audiences interpret them.

Gender is a prominent and recurrent topic in media, and the way it is framed significantly influences societal norms and stereotypes. In many mainstream media outlets, traditional gender roles are often reinforced. Women are frequently depicted as nurturing, passive, and dependent, while men are portrayed as strong, assertive, and in control. This reinforcement of gender stereotypes can contribute to real-world inequalities. For example, women may face discrimination in the workplace or be discouraged from pursuing leadership roles due to these portrayals.

Furthermore, the media often sexualizes women, objectifying them and perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards. This contributes to body image issues and can lead to lower self-esteem and psychological problems among women and girls. On the positive side, there has been a growing movement in media to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Television series and films have started featuring strong, independent female characters and storylines that promote

gender equality. However, progress remains slow, and the persistence of traditional gender frames in media continues to influence societal norms.

Media frames have the power to either reinforce or challenge established norms. When media perpetuates traditional gender roles and stereotypes, it can impede progress toward gender equality and maintain existing power imbalances. Likewise, the media's portrayal of diversity influences how society perceives different groups and individuals. By reinforcing stereotypes, media can contribute to discrimination and prejudice. In contrast, more inclusive and positive portrayals of diversity can foster greater acceptance and appreciation of differences.

The Framing Theory provides a compelling framework to understand how the media shapes public perception and influences societal norms and stereotypes. Mainstream media plays a pivotal role in framing issues related to gender and diversity. By selecting, emphasizing, and shaping these narratives, media can either perpetuate existing inequalities and biases or challenge them. Recognizing the relationship between Framing Theory and media portrayal is crucial in fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and diverse society where stereotypes are dismantled, and social norms are redefined.

#### **Methodology**

In this study, the researcher adopted the test-run analysis as the most suitable research design for this study. This analysis is a research design that involves conducting a preliminary or trial study to evaluate the feasibility and potential success of a full-scale research project. It is a valuable approach to assess the research methodology, identify potential issues, and make necessary adjustments before committing to a larger, more resource-intensive investigation. The primary objective of this analysis is to evaluate whether the proposed research methodology is practical and can yield meaningful results. It helps researchers determine if the study can be conducted with available resources, time, and constraints.

The secondary source of data collection was used in this study. This method of data collection refers to the process of gathering information that has already been collected and recorded by someone else or for a different purpose. It involves using existing sources of data rather than directly collecting new data from primary sources. Secondary data can come from various sources such as published works, online databases, surveys and studies conducted by others, institutional records etc.

#### **Findings**

**Research Question 1:** What is the extent and nature of the stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media?

Mainstream media, including television, film, advertising, and print media, has a profound impact on shaping societal attitudes and beliefs. The extent and nature of the portrayal of gender in mainstream media are critical aspects of media analysis. Olaniyan (2019) noted that historically, mainstream media has often perpetuated gender stereotypes. Women have been predominantly portrayed as caregivers, homemakers, or objects of desire, while men have been depicted as breadwinners, leaders, and protectors. Although progress has been made in challenging these stereotypes, they still persist in many forms of media. He further noted that in recent years, there has been a notable shift towards depicting strong, independent female characters in various media

forms. Examples like Wonder Woman and Rey from “Star Wars” showcase women as heroes and leaders, challenging traditional gender norms.

Media’s portrayal of gender-based violence is a concerning issue. Often, violence against women is sensationalized or used for shock value, which can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and desensitize audiences to the real-world consequences of such violence. The media has historically struggled with the representation of racial and ethnic diversity. Minority groups have often been underrepresented or subjected to harmful stereotypes. However, recent efforts, such as the success of the film “Black Panther,” highlight the growing importance of diverse representation. Afolabi (2023) noted that age and body diversity are often overlooked in mainstream media. There is a tendency to favor youth and conventional beauty standards, which can lead to unrealistic expectations and body image issues. However, campaigns like Dove’s “Real Beauty” have challenged these norms. Also, media’s portrayal of disability has improved but still faces challenges. There is a growing recognition of the need for authentic representation, as seen in the casting of actors with disabilities in roles that reflect their experiences.

The extent and nature of the portrayal of gender in mainstream media have a profound impact on society. When media reinforces stereotypes, it can contribute to social biases and discrimination. Conversely, positive and inclusive representations can foster understanding, empathy, and social change. While significant progress has been made in the portrayal of gender in mainstream media, challenges persist. It is essential for media creators, producers, and consumers to be aware of the impact of media representation and continue advocating for more authentic and inclusive depictions. Media has the power to shape societal attitudes, and by promoting accurate and diverse portrayals, we can work towards a more equitable and inclusive future.

**Research Question 2:** What is the impact of the stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media on societal norms? Gender portrayal plays a significant role in influencing societal attitudes and behaviors. It encompasses the representation of individuals based on their gender in various forms of media and literature. The effects of gender portrayal are far-reaching and can significantly impact individuals’ self-perception, their interactions with others, and wider gender inequities. Ibrahim (2018) noted that gender portrayal perpetuates unrealistic and idealized standards of beauty, often negatively impacting body image, especially among women. The constant bombardment of flawless appearances on screens and magazines can lead to harmful behaviors such as eating disorders and low self-esteem.

Gender portrayal often reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Women are often portrayed as nurturing, emotional, and dependent, while men are expected to be strong, dominant, and unemotional. These portrayals can limit individuals’ choices, perpetuate gender inequality, and reinforce harmful stereotypes. Gender portrayal can influence career aspirations. Men are often depicted as successful professionals, while women are commonly portrayed as homemakers or in traditionally feminine roles. Such stereotypes can discourage women from pursuing careers in male-dominated fields, contributing to occupational segregation and wage gaps.

Gender portrayal influences emotional expression norms. Men are often portrayed as stoic and emotionally restrained,

discouraging them from expressing vulnerability or seeking help. Consequently, emotional well-being may be compromised for both men and women due to limited outlets for emotional expression. Also, Gender portrayal contributes to the normalization of violence and aggression, often linked to masculinity and power. Excessive depictions of violence can desensitize individuals and perpetuate harmful gender norms, indirectly impacting gender-based violence rates. Gender portrayal influences political participation and leadership roles. Dominant gender roles in media can shape societal perceptions regarding women’s competency and suitability for leadership positions, leading to underrepresentation in politics and reinforcing gender disparities in decision-making processes.

## Conclusion

The stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media holds significant sway over societal norms. Media, as a powerful influencer, both reflects and shapes the beliefs and values of society. As discussed in this paper, the extent and nature of these portrayals have evolved over time, with some encouraging progress, yet persistent challenges remain. The depiction of gender in media has seen a shift from reinforcing rigid stereotypes to embracing more diverse and empowering roles for women. Strong female characters are becoming increasingly common, challenging traditional gender norms. However, gender-based violence continues to be sensationalized, reinforcing harmful stereotypes that can perpetuate real-world harm.

The impact of media on societal norms and stereotypes cannot be understated. Media shapes our perceptions, influences our attitudes, and, consequently, affects our behaviors. When media promotes positive and inclusive portrayals, it contributes to breaking down barriers, challenging biases, and fostering empathy among different groups. Conversely, when media reinforces stereotypes or neglects diversity, it can perpetuate harmful prejudices and discrimination.

To combat the negative effects and promote positive change, media creators, producers, and consumers all play a vital role. Media professionals have a responsibility to create content that accurately reflects the diversity of our world and challenges harmful norms. Audiences must also engage critically with media, recognizing its potential to shape their perceptions and beliefs. In conclusion, the portrayal of gender and diversity in mainstream media is a dynamic and evolving landscape. While progress has been made, there is still much work to be done to ensure that media serves as a force for positive change in society. By continuing to advocate for authentic and inclusive depictions and by being mindful of the impact of media on our collective consciousness, we can strive for a more equitable and accepting world where stereotypes are dismantled, and diversity is celebrated.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

1. To address the portrayal of gender in mainstream media and its effects on societal norms and stereotypes, it is crucial to encourage greater diversity within media production teams.
2. To mitigate the negative effects of media portrayals on societal norms and stereotypes, promoting media literacy and critical thinking is essential. Schools and community

organizations should incorporate media literacy programs into their curricula. These programs should teach students how to analyze media content critically, recognize stereotypes, and understand the influence of media on societal attitudes. Media organizations and advocacy groups can collaborate to launch public awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of questioning media portrayals. These campaigns can encourage viewers to be more discerning consumers of media content and to actively challenge harmful stereotypes.

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