

Portrayals of Women in Transnational Arab Television Drama Series

Tamara Kharroub and Andrew J. Weaver

This content analysis of 15 Arabic and 3 Turkish drama serials on transnational Arab television examined the gender portrayals of characters. The analysis of 743 characters found that women were underrepresented, less likely to have recognizable jobs, and more likely than men to be portrayed in sex-typed occupations, activities, and settings. The analysis also revealed that programs with female writers were significantly less gender stereotypical. Moreover, differences were found among the producing Arab countries in terms of the portrayals of women; conservative countries had more sex-typed portrayals than the more liberal Arab countries, whereas Turkish programs had similar portrayals to Arabic programs produced in the liberal Arab states. The general findings are discussed in comparison to U.S. programming, and in relation to selective exposure, identification with characters, and potential effects on Arab viewers' gender role beliefs.

Empirical studies have consistently found that portrayals of women in the media world-wide are stereotyped (Collins, 2011). Such depictions have been shown to socialize the viewers' gender beliefs and attitudes (Signorielli, 2012). Experimental and non-experimental research shows positive correlations and causalities between media use and sex-typed attitudes and behaviors of both adults and children (Oppliger, 2007). However, very little is known about the television portrayals of women in the Arab world, and no empirical studies that examine the portrayals of women in Arabic drama serials can be found. The current study investigated gender portrayals in transnational Arab drama serials from different countries.

Portrayals of Women in the Media

U.S. television's portrayals of women and gender roles have been studied since the 1950s but research peaked with the momentum of the women's movement

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in the late 1960s (Signorielli, 2012). One of the main areas of concern has been the underrepresentation of women. Although studies of U.S. prime time broadcast television have shown that the proportion of women increased from 24% in 1967 (Signorielli, 1985) to 41% in 2009 (Signorielli, 2012), the shift occurred in the mid-nineties and the proportion of women has remained at 40% since (Greenberg & Worrell, 2007; Signorielli, 2012; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). Overall, research shows that women are still underrepresented, are cast in stereotypical roles and occupations, and are younger than men (Signorielli, 2012). In terms of genre, women are least underrepresented in situation comedies and most underrepresented in drama and action-adventures, suggesting that women are taken less seriously than men (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). When looking at the nature of these portrayals, research has consistently found stereotyped roles of women (Herrett-Skjellum & Allen, 1996; Signorielli, 1989). In terms of traits and age, women are often shown as emotional and weak (e.g., Gauntlett, 2008; Signorielli, 1997), and more likely to be younger than men (Lauren & Dozier, 1999; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999) where older women are more likely to be categorized as elderly than older men (Signorielli, 2004) implying that women's value is in their youthfulness (Signorielli, 2012). Other stereotypical portrayals of women are found in occupational roles. Although fewer women appeared in traditional female professions after the mid-nineties (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999), traditional occupational portrayals remain prevalent. More men than women have occupations overall (Signorielli, 2012), married women are still less likely to be shown working outside the home (Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001), and more men are found in male-stereotypical occupations (Signorielli, 1984; 1990).

Studies of gender portrayals in other countries found similar results. Collins' (2011) review of 18 empirical articles on gender stereotypes in the media worldwide shows that women are under-represented across a range of media and settings. Moreover, women are more often portrayed in a negative light; sexualized and shown in traditional female stereotypes and roles such as nonprofessionals and homemakers. Nassif and Gunter's (2008) review of gender representations in advertising also reveals consistent findings across many different western and eastern nations; women are underrepresented and portrayed in more domestic roles and indoor settings while men are shown in professional roles and outdoors. Moreover, in terms of traits, women are portrayed as dependent and unintelligent consumers, whereas men appear as experts, authoritative, and key information sources (Nassif & Gunter, 2008).

Effects of Media Gender Portrayals

The underrepresentation and stereotypical portrayals of women in the media are particularly important, as these gender portrayals socialize the viewers' gender beliefs and attitudes. The effects of gender portrayals on viewers' gender beliefs have been demonstrated by a number of meta-analytic studies. Hearold's (1986)

analysis of 230 studies found that television viewing had a strong effect on gender role stereotyping. Herrett-Skjellum and Allen's (1996) analysis of 30 studies found positive relationships between television viewing and traditional views of gendered occupations and acceptance of sexual stereotypes ($r = 0.10$). Morgan and Shanahan (1997) analyzed 14 gender-role cultivation studies over 2 decades and found a mean overall effect size of $r = 0.10$ between amount of TV viewing and perceptions of gender roles that reflect television's view. Oppliger's (2007) analysis of 31 studies also shows positive correlations between media use and gender stereotyping for experimental (average $r = 0.24$) and non-experimental (average $r = 0.12$) studies.

These findings suggest that similar effects may occur as a result of gender portrayals in transnational Arab television. Such potential impacts are particularly important in the Arab region where women have not achieved their full participation in society and many remain victimized (UNDP, 2006).

Portrayals of Women in Transnational Arab Television

Few studies can be found that examine gender portrayals in transnational Arab Television; the few that do exist are limited to specific shows or genres and take a primarily qualitative approach. In addition, research of Arab fictional television programs is scarce. The existing studies indicate that representations of women in Arab television vary by genre, yet are restricted to certain stereotypical roles.

In music videos, a qualitative semiotic content analysis of 45 videos from music channels concluded that Arab music videos are divided into two groups; one that exploits sexualized female images with seductive poses and another that maintains the traditional gender images of the "woman longing for a lover" (Ismail, 2005). In TV commercials, Nassif and Gunter's (2008) content analysis of commercials on a national Saudi television channel found that men and women were equally visually represented as lead characters but male voice-overs dominated. Women appeared more often in domestic roles and settings and less often in occupational or leisure roles, and were much more likely than men to promote body care and household cleaning products (Nassif & Gunter, 2008). Women were also more likely to appear as dependent consumers, whereas men were more likely to be shown as experts and information sources (Nassif & Gunter, 2008). In a cross-national comparative study, Kalliny and his colleagues (Kalliny, Dagher, Minor, & De Los Santos, 2008) examined gender representations in TV advertising in four Arab countries (Lebanon, Egypt, U.A.E., and Saudi Arabia) and compared them to U.S. advertising. Of particular interest, the study found differences among Arab countries, where Egypt and Lebanon portrayed women "less modestly" than Saudi Arabia and U.A.E. Women in Egyptian and Lebanese programs were shown belly dancing, wearing minimal clothing, and not wearing a veil, whereas Saudi Arabian women and a high percentage of U.A.E. women appeared to be veiled (Kalliny et al., 2008). In terms of occupations, there was a significant difference in the case

of Lebanon and U.A.E., where women were more likely to be shown working than in Egyptian and Saudi advertisements (Kalliny et al., 2008).

Regarding gender portrayals in children's programs, a content analysis by Al-Shehab (2008) of children's programs in two countries (Kuwait and Egypt) is one of the few quantitative studies of Arab television that can be found. Al-Shehab's (2008) analysis of 30 hours of children's programs (including drama, cartoons, news, commercials, and interviews) found that male characters outnumbered female characters on both the Kuwaiti and the Egyptian channels but female characters were portrayed less frequently on the Kuwaiti channel and major male characters appeared more on the Kuwaiti channel (96.4%) than in the Egyptian channel (54.8%). In terms of traits, the study found that men in Kuwaiti programs had more male stereotypical traits than in the Egyptian channel such as being aggressive, independent, dominant, responsible, and leader-like, active, and acting as rescuer. Similarly, female characters in the Kuwaiti programs had more female stereotypical traits than in the Egyptian programs such as being rescued, submissive, dependent, weak, follower, and passive (Al-Shehab, 2008).

Overall, the literature about gender representations in pan-Arab television is limited to qualitative research of specific programs and few quantitative studies of specific genres or channels. As a result, there is still a vast gap in the research literature regarding gender representations in Arab television especially in terms of quantitative and large scale studies that can lead to generalizable findings. In summary, the available literature suggests that in Arabic-language television women are generally portrayed in stereotypical roles. Moreover, there seem to be differences in portrayals among the Arab countries. With the exception of some ethnographic work (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 2001; Salamandra, 2005), very little is known about the portrayal of women in Arab television drama, despite popular interest (e.g., *The Media Note*, n.d.) and press discussions (e.g., Al-Ka'bi, 2013). The present study conducts a quantitative content analysis to examine portrayals of women in Arabic drama serials, and the differences in portrayals according to the producing country.

Analysis of Gender Portrayals in Arab Television Dramas

Borrowing from Clark's 1972 analysis of racial portrayals on television, Signorielli and Bacue (1999) use the two concepts of "recognition" and "respect" for analyzing the portrayals of women. Recognition refers to the quantity and frequency of appearance, which is important because underrepresentation of female characters limits the range and diversity of roles in which women can be portrayed (Signorielli, 1997). To measure "recognition," some studies have looked at the prevalence of male and female characters in significant speaking roles (Gauntlett, 2008). The present study examines the frequency of male and female characters in Arab television, and hypothesizes that men outnumber women in drama serials.

H₁: Male characters outnumber female characters in transnational Arab television drama serials.

The second concept used in investigating the portrayals of women is respect, which refers to the types and breadth of roles in which women are portrayed. Signorielli and Bacue (1999) operationalize "respect" in relation to three elements; the genre in which women are found, their age, and their occupations. Specifically in terms of occupations, studies have consistently found that fewer female television characters work outside the home and when they do they are most often cast in traditional female occupations such as secretaries, nurses, and teachers (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). The current study hypothesizes that women will be shown in stereotypical gender occupations.

H_{2a}: Male characters are more likely to have jobs than female characters.

H_{2b}: Male characters are more likely to be cast in male stereotypical occupations while females are cast in female stereotypical occupations.

H_{2c}: Married female characters are more likely to be unemployed (i.e., homemakers) than single female characters.

To measure "respect," studies have also considered the activities characters are seen doing (Signorielli, 1997), such as domestic matters vs. careers (Gauntlett 2008). Therefore, the portrayals of women can be assessed by observing the stereotyped activities they are shown doing (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). The present study hypothesizes that men are more likely to be seen working on the job while women are more likely to be seen in home settings and doing housekeeping work.

H_{3a}: Male characters are more likely than female characters to be shown working on the job.

H_{3b}: Female characters are more likely than male characters to be shown in home settings.

H_{3c}: Female characters are more likely than male characters to be shown doing housekeeping tasks.

Moreover, studies of U.S. television have found that the gender of behind-the-scenes personnel influences the portrayals of women (Signorielli, 2012). For example, Glascock (2001) found a positive relationship between the number of female producers and writers, and the number of main female characters. Similarly, Lauzen, and Dozier (1999) found that female characters are more verbal in programs that had female executive producers. The present study hypothesizes that programs with a female writer, producer, or director have more female characters and less stereotypical portrayals of women

H₄: Female characters will be shown with greater respect and recognition in shows with a female a) writer, b) producer, and c) director

Transnational Arab Television Content

The organization of the Arab television system is unique and provides another reason to consider gender portrayals in this context. With 565 fully functional free-to-air (FTA) satellite TV channels in 2012, the Arab satellite television industry is the most popular medium in the Arab World increasingly expanding in popularity and size (Arab Advisors Group, 2012). The transnational Arab television industry serves an estimated population of 300 million Arabic-speaking viewers (Kraidy, 2002). This transnational industry connecting two dozen countries, commercially, politically, and culturally is "arguably historically unprecedented" (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p. 10). However, this large Arabic-speaking market is far from homogeneous, as the Arab countries vary greatly in their social, political, economic and legal systems, as well as cultural sensibilities (Kalliny et al., 2008; Kraidy & Khalil, 2009). In order to capture this diversity, Kalliny and colleagues (2008) placed Arab countries on a liberal-conservative continuum with regard to cultural values, for the purpose of identifying cultural differences in Arab advertising. In their continuum, Lebanon is placed on the most-liberal end, Egypt and UAE in the middle, and Saudi Arabia as the least liberal of the Arab nations (Kalliny et al., 2008).

Although such great diversity exists in the Arab world, some argue that this diversity may not be reflected in transnational Arab media content due to the substantial Saudi influence in this industry. The transnational Arabic-language satellite television industry was first established through the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) and primarily financed by Saudi Arabia after the Arab Gulf war in 1991 when Arab audiences turned to Cable News Network (CNN) for information (Kraidy, 2002). This event motivated the Saudi royal family to change their media strategy and find new ways to control information in the Arab World in order to ensure their survival and their power in the region (Cochrane, 2007; Hammond, 2007). Although no formal regulations of the pan-Arab Satellite TV industry exist, the Saudi influence on content through ownerships and financial control is evident (Cochrane, 2007). Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., and Egypt host the highest number of FTA satellite channel headquarters in the Arab World (Arab Advisors Group, 2012), and the Arab gulf countries own almost 50% of the channels and nearly all of the most popular channels (Faraz, 2009). Moreover, Saudi ownership of channels headquartered in other Arab countries (e.g., MBC) is a common practice (Al Qassemi, 2012; Cochrane, 2007).

These ownership and financing patterns are believed to greatly influence media content. For example, Al Qassemi (2012) argues that during the uprising in Syria, the two most popular Arabic news channels, Al-Arabiya news channel (part of MBC group) and Al-Jazeera, have distorted the news in order to support the political interests of the countries financing them; Saudi Arabia and Qatar respectively. Furthermore, the Saudi Assistant Minister of Defense for Military Affairs Prince Khalid bin Sultan's financial involvement in LBC (Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation) allows him "to exert certain pressure over LBC to pander to the Saudi establishment" (Cochrane, 2007, para. 9). Moreover, with the high budgets of

Saudi-owned television channels, most journalists, producers, and editors in Arab media are on the payrolls of the Saudi Kingdom, and will not run stories that could jeopardize their careers (Cochrane, 2007).

In addition to ownership and financial control, the Saudi influence is further strengthened by advertising interests. An estimated 40–70% of advertising expenditures in the region is spent in Saudi Arabia (World Association of Newspapers, 2008), which has the largest wealthy population in the region with 25 million Arabic-speaking consumers and high per capita income (Kraidy, 2010). Therefore, as television companies aim to attract the largest number of wealthy consumers, they must cater to the tastes of Saudi viewers (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009) and be aware of what is acceptable in the distinct Saudi market (Cochrane, 2007), especially in terms of gender representations. For example, LBC, which started as a Christian militia station after the Lebanese civil war and is known for its liberal Arab Christian values, features Saudi hosts particularly targeting Saudi viewers (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009).

The ownership patterns and advertising influence discussed above suggest that the pan-Arab TV industry may possibly present unified television content that suits the distinctive Saudi context. Alternatively, it is possible that the media content reflects the gender norms of the producing Arab country. The present study examines differences in gender portrayals between the different producing countries. Based on previous findings (Al-Shehab, 2008; Kalliny et al., 2008) we hypothesize that programs produced in the more conservative gulf countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) show more stereotypical portrayals of women than programs produced by the more liberal Levant countries (e.g., Lebanon and Syria).

H₅: Female characters in programs produced in conservative Arab countries will be shown with less recognition and respect than characters in programs produced in more liberal Arab countries.

In addition to programs produced in Arab countries, Turkish drama serials (dubbed into Arabic in Syrian dialect) have become extremely popular in recent years. This trend was started in 2007 by MBC (Buccianti, 2010) and reached 85 million Arab viewers (out of whom 50 million were female) in 2008 with the airing of the popular Syrian-dubbed Turkish soap opera *Noor* (Radsch, 2009). Unlike Turkish programs, most American television imports are subtitled into Arabic and the imported Mexican telenovellas were dubbed into literary Arabic (Buccianti, 2010), thus maintaining a social distance between the characters and the viewers. In contrast, Turkish series are dubbed into colloquial Arabic and the characters' names are Arabized (Buccianti, 2010), generating greater controversy regarding their potential effects on Arab viewers. In addition to criticism of political 'Turkish hegemony' and extension of Ottoman colonization (A'wdat al haymana, 2008), criticism of Turkish drama serials as a form of cultural imperialism has risen and Turkish soap operas have caused moral media panics in the Arab World (Salamandra, 2012). Some of the cultural values presented in these shows (e.g., alcohol consumption, abortion) have

been heavily criticized by Saudi clerics (Buccianti, 2010). Moreover, it has been argued that these Turkish drama serials challenge traditional gender roles (Buccianti, 2010). As a result, the present study also examines Arabic-dubbed Turkish drama shows.

RQ1: What are the differences in gender portrayals between the Arabic and Turkish drama serials?

Methodology

Sample

This content analysis sought to examine the portrayals of women in Arab television's fictional drama serials (*Musalsalat* in Arabic). Unlike North American soap operas and South American telenovelas that last more than 100 episodes, *Musalsalat* generally consist of 15 episodes during the year or 30 episodes produced specifically for the month of Ramadan (Abu-Lughod, 2001), where each episode is 30–60 (average 43) minutes long. Drama serials attract the largest proportion (21%) of advertising spending from pan-Arab television genres (Chahine, El Sharkawy, & Mahmoud, 2007) indicating their popularity among viewers. In addition, compared to other television genres, the narrative capabilities of *Musalsalat* have allowed them to transcend national cultural and political differences and they have become the dominant pan-Arab programming genre.

The sampling unit was each program that was a serial drama shown on the top watched transnational Arab television channels. According to a report by Arab Advisors Group (2009), general programming channels have the highest average advertising rates, indicating the most viewership. Therefore, the first step in the sampling procedure was to identify the top watched television channels, with the criteria requirements that they are general programming channels and show Arabic or Turkish drama serials. According to Faraz (2009), only a handful of channels are viewed by the majority of audiences across the Arab world and obtain 80% of advertising revenues. These channels include Middle East Broadcasting Corporation—MBC group (e.g., Al-Arabiya news, MBC1, MBC action, MBC4, etc.), Rotana channels (Rotana Cinema, Rotana Music, etc.), Melody group (Melody Aflam, Melody Hits, etc.), Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI), and Al-Jazeera news channel (Kraidy, 2002). Survey research by Arab Advisors Group confirms that MBC Group's Arabic language General channel—MBC1—has the highest average advertising rates among the FTA satellite TV channels, due to its variety of content and highest viewership rates (Arab Advisors Group, 2011; 2012). Surveys of Arab senior managers showing the top watched television channels are consistent with these reports (Ipsos, 2007).

As advertising rates for each channel are not publicly available and popularity ratings (similar to Nielson ratings in the U.S.) do not exist in the Arab television

market, the most popular channels were identified based on the reports described above (Arab Advisors Group, 2011; 2012; Faraz, 2009; Ipsos, 2007). The channels that regularly show Arabic language drama serials were selected, giving seven channels: MBC1, MBC4, LBC, Future, Dubai TV, Abu Dhabi 1, and Syria TV. The sample of programs was drawn from programs shown during the second week of July 2011. For the seven channels selected, a list of Arabic-language television serial dramas and Turkish dramas airing during prime time (6:00–11:00 p.m.) was compiled using the programming schedule from each channel's Web site. Historical drama series (often taking place in early twentieth century or during the Islamic empire) were excluded as gender portrayals in this subgenre would be significantly different than other programs. Fifteen Arabic-language drama serials that met the criteria were found (five from Syria, four from Kuwait, three from Egypt, two from Saudi Arabia, and one from Lebanon) and were all included in the present study. In addition, in order to compare the Arabic and Turkish programs, a list of all Turkish soap operas on the top general programming channels was compiled, giving six Syrian-dubbed Turkish soap operas, of which three were randomly selected to include in the study. The Turkish programs were similar to the Arabic programs in the sample in that they were the same drama genre, were shown on the same channels, had the same length, and featured a similar number of characters as the Arabic programs. The final sample consisted of 15 Arabic-language drama serials (including comedic, social, thematic, and feminist subgenres) and three Turkish soap operas. As the drama serials on Arabic television are typically 15 or 30 episodes long, three episodes from each drama were randomly selected during the second week of July 2011. Similar content analyses use week-long samples often drawing one episode from every program shown during the selected week (e.g., Signorielli, 2009; Signorielli, & Kahlenberg, 2001). Therefore, three episodes from each drama series (10–20% of the full set of episodes) are sufficient to capture the characters' portrayals, giving a final count of 54 episodes (40 hours of television drama) analyzed in this study.

Units of Analysis

The main unit of observation was every recurring male and female character. The recurring character was operationally defined as a character that is identified by name and appears at least once. In Arabic, people are often (and sometimes only) referred to using the titles "Abu" (the father of) and "Um" (the mother of). Therefore characters identified by these titles were included in the analysis. The final sample consisted of 743 characters.

Coding Categories

Every program was coded for the gender of the script writer, producer, and director whether it was male, female, both, or a company. Moreover, each program

was coded for the country producing the show, and whether it was Turkish or Arabic.

Each character was coded for sex (male or female), marital status, occupation, setting, housekeeping, and working. Occupations of characters were coded in several steps, following the procedure done by Signorielli and Bacue (1999). First, the coders described the occupation of every character, which produced 69 different occupations. Second, occupations were classified into one of four categories; male stereotypical (e.g., lawyer, doctor, driver, bodyguard, law enforcement, politician, religious leader, business owner/manager, soccer player), female stereotypical (e.g., school teacher, secretary, nurse, tailor, nanny, housekeeper, homemaker, midwife), neutral (e.g., college student, writer, artist, criminal, musician, paramedic, assistant, employee, cashier, chef, waiter, hotel receptionist), and none (unemployed or unknown). Characters' occupations were also coded for having a recognizable job or not, and whether the character was a homemaker or not. If a female character was shown at home most of the time and was not mentioned as having a job, the character was considered a homemaker. No male characters were coded as "homemakers."

Moreover, following previous research on gender representations (Nassif & Gunter, 2008), the characters were coded for the setting in which they appear. In the present study, a character was coded as only appearing at home if the character was only shown in his/her home including a house garden or closed areas of the house.

In order to examine the activities that characters were seen doing, characters were coded for whether they were shown doing housekeeping tasks and whether they were shown working on the job. For housekeeping, a character was coded as doing housekeeping work ("yes") if the character was seen engaging in at least one housekeeping activity such as cooking, cleaning, or serving food and drinks. Taking care of children was not coded as housekeeping work, as we are interested in this study in female stereotypical activities related to housework rather than nurturing and family caretaking. For working, the character was coded as doing work-related tasks as part of the character's job ("yes") if the character was seen performing at least one job task, including being at work but not performing work-related tasks (e.g., sitting in the office) or performing work-related tasks while not at the work place (e.g., making a work phone call from home). If the occupation was coded as college student, then being shown in college was not considered working. Characters whose job involves housekeeping tasks were coded as doing both housekeeping tasks and working when shown doing housekeeping work. For characters whose occupations were social leaders, being shown doing social leadership tasks was coded as working.

Coders and Intercoder Reliability

Two primary coders collected the data, while six additional coders provided intercoder reliability checks during the pretest stage. For the intercoder reliability

pretest, seven programs (episodes from different shows) including 112 characters were coded by seven Palestinian students who speak Arabic. They were two males and five females, who were trained on using the coding instruments. Intercoder reliability was established where the minimum Krippendorff's Alpha was 0.81, the maximum was 1.00, and the average was 0.94.

Results

In order to answer the hypotheses and research questions, chi square tests were conducted to examine categorical differences. In looking at the overall number of characters in the sample ($N = 743$), H_1 was supported, as significantly more of the characters were male ($n = 422, 56.8\%$) than were female ($n = 321, 43.2\%$), $\chi^2(1, N = 743) = 13.73, p < 0.01$.

Regarding the job status of males and females, H_{2a} was supported, $\chi^2(1, N = 743) = 40.86, p < 0.01$, as only 26.2% of female characters had recognizable jobs compared to 49.3% of male characters. H_{2b} was also supported, $\chi^2(3, N = 743) = 218.06, p < 0.01$, where 42.7% of female characters had female stereotypical occupations compared to 2.8% of male characters. Moreover, 37.7% of male characters had male stereotypical occupations compared to 6.9% of female characters. H_{2c} on the relationship between marital status and employment was supported as well. In looking just at female characters, we found that marital status does significantly relate to the depicted occupation. Specifically, 63.1% of married women have female stereotypical occupations compared to only 15.8% of single women, $\chi^2(12, N = 321) = 73.70, p < 0.01$, and 64.1% of married female characters were shown as homemakers, compared to 6.3% of single female characters, $\chi^2(4, N = 321) = 78.55, p < 0.01$.

Turning to activities shown, H_{3a} was supported; 43.6% of male characters were shown working on the job compared to 21.5% of female characters, $\chi^2(1, N = 743) = 39.68, p < 0.01$.

H_{3b} was supported as 37.1% of female characters were shown only in a home setting compared to 14.7% of male characters, $\chi^2(1, N = 743) = 49.56, p < 0.01$. Females were also more likely than males to be shown doing housekeeping tasks (13.4% to 1.4%), supporting H_{3c} , $\chi^2(1, N = 743) = 42.43, p < 0.01$.

H_4 was supported, as having females involved in the production of the show did influence the types of gender depictions that emerged and resulted in less stereotypical portrayals. Overall, 37% of the episodes had female writers, there was one female co-producer, and one female co-director in the sample, therefore only the gender of the writer was examined (H_{4a}). In shows with a female writer there were 152 female characters (48.3%) and 163 (51.7%) male characters, and shows with a male writer had 146 (37.0%) female characters and 249 (63.0%) male characters, $\chi^2(2, N = 743) = 18.99, p < 0.01$. Moreover, the depictions of those female characters were different when female writers worked on the shows. Shows with female writers showed 30.9% of female characters as homemakers,

while shows with male writers showed 41.1% of female characters as homemakers, $\chi^2 (2, N = 321) = 5.28, p < 0.01$. Similarly, shows with female writers were more likely to show male characters only at home (27.6%) than shows with male writers were (6.8%), $\chi^2 (2, N = 422) = 5.70, p < 0.01$. Programs with male writers were less likely to show female characters performing work related tasks (10.3%) than programs with female writers (34.2%), $\chi^2 (2, N = 321) = 27.69, p < 0.01$. Overall, then, female characters were shown with greater recognition and respect in shows with a female writer than they were in shows with a male writer.

H₅ hypothesized that female characters in programs from conservative Arab countries would be shown with less recognition and respect than characters from more liberal Arab countries. RQ₁ asked about gender differences between Turkish and Arabic dramas. The following analyses involved breakdowns by country in order to address these questions. Programs from Syria (48.0%), Lebanon (48.5%), and Kuwait (49.4%) all had more female characters than the average. There was a significantly lower percentage of female characters in Saudi (26.7%), Turkish (34.1%), and Egyptian (40.3%) dramas, $\chi^2 (5, N = 743) = 15.31, p < 0.01$.

Saudi Arabia (66.7%) and Kuwait (55.2%) had the highest percentages of female characters in stereotypical occupations. Syria (38.0%), Lebanon (37.5%), Turkey (39.1%), and Egypt (30.8%) were below the average in female stereotypical characters, $\chi^2 (15, N = 321) = 33.60, p < 0.01$. Notably, the Turkish programs were the only episodes with a substantial number (15.2%) of female characters in male stereotypical jobs, followed by the Syrian programs (8.3%). Female characters in Saudi (50.0%) and Kuwaiti (47.1%) programs were more likely to be shown as homemakers, compared to 32.7% in Egyptian and 32.6% in Turkish programs, while in Syrian (26.9%) and Lebanese (25.0%) programs they were least likely to be portrayed as homemakers, $\chi^2 (5, N = 321) = 10.92, p = 0.053$.

Regarding behaviors, female characters in Saudi (50.0%) and Kuwaiti (51.7%) programs were more likely to be exclusively shown at home in domestic settings, with characters in Syrian (31.5%), Lebanese (25.0%), Turkish (23.9%), and Egyptian (36.5%) programs less likely to be shown in domestic settings, $\chi^2 (5, N = 321) = 14.73, p < 0.05$. Similarly, only 16.7% of female characters in Saudi programs, 10.3% of female characters in Kuwaiti programs, and 17.3% in Egyptian programs were shown working, significantly less than the 31.2% of female characters in Lebanese programs, 27.8% of female characters in Syrian programs, and 30.4% of female characters in Turkish programs who were shown working, $\chi^2 (5, N = 321) = 12.72, p < 0.05$. However, there were no significant differences among the countries in depicting female characters doing housekeeping tasks, $p = .109$.

Overall, these results support H₅ that there is a difference in portrayals of females by country, with the more conservative Arab states (e.g., Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) presenting females with less recognition and respect than the more liberal Arab states (e.g., Syria and Lebanon). To answer RQ₁, the Turkish programs generally depicted women similarly to the more liberal Arab states, which again was significantly less gender stereotyped than the more conservative Arab countries.

Discussion

The present study is the first quantitative examination of the representations of women in transnational Arab television, especially in drama serials. In terms of recognition and respect, the findings are similar to U.S. prime time broadcast television regarding the proportions of female characters (41% U.S. and 43% in transnational Arab television), and occupational portrayals. These patterns of underrepresentation of women and sex-typed portrayals in transnational Arab television are also similar to findings of women representations across various media and in several countries—including India, Spain, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, South Korea, Thailand, and the United States (Collins, 2011; Paek, Nelson, & Vilela, 2011; Signorielli, 2012). Despite popular belief, portrayals of women in Arabic fictional narrative programs are not very different from portrayals of women in the media worldwide. Nonetheless, in the Arab world in particular, these patterns are alarming. According to the special Arab Human Development Report of 2005 focusing on women's issues in the Arab World (United Nations Development Program–UNDP, 2006) and the Arab Human Development Report of 2009 (United Nations Development Program, 2009), the situation of women in Arab countries is one of the worst worldwide. Although a growing number of women have made outstanding national and international contributions in all areas of life and succeeded in achieving greater equality in society and personal relationships, many remain victims of legalized discrimination, social subordination, and male dominance (UNDP, 2006). As media have consistently been found to socialize the viewers' gender beliefs and attitudes (Oppliger, 2007), the findings of the present study suggest that transnational Arab television may contribute to perpetuating traditional gender stereotypes in the Arab region instead of changing them.

One positive finding from the present study is that shows with female writers have almost equal numbers of male and female characters and these characters are significantly less likely to be gender stereotyped. Similar to findings in U.S. media (e.g., Glascock, 2001; Lauzen & Dozier, 1999), having more females working behind-the-scenes can improve the portrayals of women. Arab media productions are encouraged to increase the number of female personnel working in key roles in production (such as writers, editors, producers, and directors), in order to change the stereotypical gender portrayals in Arab media.

Consistent with previous findings (e.g., Al-Shehab, 2008; Kalliny et al., 2008), differences in gender portrayals were found between the Arab countries producing the programs. Using the liberal-conservative continuum for Arab countries proposed by Kalliny and his colleagues (2008), conservative countries (Kuwait and Saudi Arabia) had more female characters in female stereotypical roles than the more liberal Arab countries (Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt). These findings suggest that the producing countries' influence on content is still prevalent despite the Saudi influence in the transnational Arab television industry. Housekeeping activities present an exception to this pattern. Although more Saudi and Kuwaiti female characters were shown as

homemakers and in home settings, and fewer Saudi and Kuwaiti female characters were shown working than Syrian, Lebanese, and Egyptian female characters, there were no differences among the countries in portraying female characters performing housekeeping tasks. This might be a reflection of the high income in conservative Arab Gulf countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia and Kuwait), where the main characters have housekeepers to do the housekeeping work. As the majority of housekeepers were not major characters and did not fit the definition of recurring characters (i.e., they were not identified by name) and therefore were not coded, the practice of employing housekeepers in the rich gulf countries (Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) could explain why recurring female characters from those countries were not shown performing housekeeping tasks as often as expected.

Turkish programs' portrayals of women were similar to those in Arabic programs produced by the more liberal Arab countries. Furthermore, more female characters in Turkish programs had male stereotypical occupations. These findings may be a reflection of almost a century of secularism in Turkey. However, the present study did not examine the Turkish portrayals and themes that produced controversy in the Arab region such as abortion (Buccianti, 2010).

The present study is not without limitations. First, the present study's sample only has a limited number of shows from some countries, particularly Lebanon. Further content analyses of *Musalsalat* including more programs from each country would provide replication and better support for the conclusions presented here. A second limitation of the present study is that it does not examine issues and themes of women's rights that are addressed through the plot. Future research should analyze those themes in more detail, beyond visual portrayals. In addition, the current study did not examine the sexualization and presentation of idealized body images of female characters, which may be more prevalent in programs produced in the more liberal Arab countries. Moreover, the present study sheds light on some interesting differences between subgenres of *Musalsalat* (e.g., comedies, historic, thematic, feminist). For example, one would expect feminist shows to portray women differently than historic or comedic shows. In order to understand the differences in content between subgenre of *Musalsalat*, further investigation of gender portrayals that include a more representative sample of programs from each subgenre is needed. Additional research should also address whether differences in portrayals among the producing countries will influence viewers differently. In particular, future studies should examine the Arab viewers' selective exposure to programs produced in other Arab countries, the viewers' identification with media characters from different countries and cultural settings, and whether identification influences the effects of gender portrayals on Arab viewers' gender role beliefs. In this transnational media context, there is great potential for gender portrayals to influence gender role stereotypes for both better and worse, and potentially to reduce differences in gender stereotypes across countries. Given the importance of improving the situation of women in the Arab world, there is clear benefit in further developing our understanding of the impact of gender depictions of Arab media.

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