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### Empowering Narratives: Ideological Constructs through References for Women in *True Love East Africa* and *The Parents* Magazines in Kenya

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This article examines various references given to women in *True Love East Africa* and *The Parents* Magazine and emergent ideological constructs. It presents results of a study whose one of its objective was to identify and analyse the ideological constructs brought out by references for women in the discourses of the two magazines and what these references revealed about the Kenyan women. The study investigated the portrayal of women in the two magazines, employing a mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative and quantitative analyses. Utilizing thematic content analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA), the research explored how these magazines constructed and negotiated identities for millennial mothers and independent women within a rapidly evolving socio-cultural context. By analyzing the references, the study revealed a significant shift in narratives, showcasing women not as passive subjects but as active participants in societal change. Key themes identified include the emergence of the “millennial mom” ideology, which celebrates women's economic participation and challenges traditional gender roles, highlighting their professional achievements and contributions beyond domestic spheres. The findings underscore a transformation in the depiction of women, reflecting broader societal trends prioritizing gender equality and women's empowerment. Discourses surrounding single motherhood, professional success, and resilience in the face of societal expectations emerged, illustrating how these narratives challenge entrenched patriarchal norms. The study emphasizes the critical role of media in shaping perceptions of gender, calling for advocacy to amplify diverse and empowering narratives. It recommends policy development that supports equitable representation in media, urging further longitudinal studies to track the evolution of these representations. By highlighting the intersection of media, gender, and societal transformation, this research contributes to the understanding of women's roles in contemporary Kenyan society.

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## INTRODUCTION

Language is a reflection of societal attitudes, and the references used to depict women are windows into prevailing ideologies. By closely scrutinizing the references employed in the discourses of *True Love East Africa* (henceforth referred as **TL**) and *The Parents Magazine* (henceforth referred as **PM**) magazines, the study aimed to identify and analyse the ideological constructs associated with the portrayal of women. This analysis sheds light on the magazines' perspectives on femininity, women's roles, and their place in society. The language used to refer to women is pivotal in shaping societal ideologies, influencing perceptions, and reflecting cultural norms and various theoretical underpinnings have been used in various investigative studies. Feminist Linguistics theory explores how language reflects and perpetuates gender inequalities (Talbot, 2010). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines how discourse shapes social power dynamics, including gender relations (Gee, 2018). Sociolinguistics approach studies how language use varies and reflects social identities and group memberships (Hudson, 1996).

A study by Kearney (2020) used content analysis of 500 articles from major international newspapers and found that women were often referred to in relation to their family roles (e.g., "mother," "wife"), which reinforced traditional gender roles. Kearney argued that this perpetuates a narrative of women as secondary to men in societal structures. Cameron (2014) through qualitative interviews with 30 women from

diverse backgrounds, participants reported feeling marginalized by gendered language in professional settings. Cameron concluded that such language could inhibit women's professional advancement and contribute to a culture of gender bias.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (2018) discourse analysis of selected African literary texts found that women are often portrayed through traditional lenses that emphasize subservience and domesticity. He suggested that literature plays a crucial role in both reflecting and challenging societal norms surrounding gender. Wane's (2019) mixed methods study involving surveys and focus groups with urban youth in Kenya revealed a significant shift in language use among youth, where gender-neutral terms were increasingly favoured. Wane highlighted the potential for these changes to foster more egalitarian gender relations. Ochieng's (2021) qualitative interviews and focus groups with Kenyan women from various socio-economic backgrounds, women reported being referred to predominantly through familial ties, which they felt limited their professional identities. Ochieng emphasized the need for more diverse representations of women in public discourse.

Mwangi's (2022) content analysis of social media posts and user interactions found that social media platforms often amplify both positive and negative gender references, creating spaces for empowerment as well as the perpetuation of stereotypes. This duality highlights the complex

role of modern communication in shaping gender perceptions.

This current study explored various sections of the magazines, including articles, advertisements, and opinion pieces looking for recurring patterns in language use and the portrayal of women. In establishing the references used, the study employed a content analysis focusing on identity references (how women were referred to in articles e.g. "wife," "mother," "career woman," or "independent woman"), adjective choice (e.g. "strong," "nurturing," "ambitious," "vulnerable," or other adjectives in order to decipher the ideological implications of these choices, career and role representations, marital and family terms, age and appearance descriptors (whether there were age-specific terms like "young," "mature," "beautiful," or "attractive" used and how these references contributed to societal beauty standards and age expectations) and empowerment language.

## METHODOLOGY

The current study utilized a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative analyses to collect data on **references to women in *True Love East Africa* and *The Parents Magazine*, and their ideological constructs**. Qualitative methods are defined as research approaches that yield findings that are not derived from statistical processes, focusing instead on personal narratives, social interactions, and perceptions (Strauss & Corbin, 2015) and offer an understanding of the meanings and themes within textual data, making it ideal for examining identity and ideology in magazines (Kothari and Garg, 2014). **Thematic content analysis** was employed to identify and interpret these references within magazine texts. This method helped reveal recurring patterns related to identity construction, such as gender roles and cultural representations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, critical **discourse analysis** was utilized to explore how those references constructs social realities and power relations in magazine content (Gee, 2018). Through **quantitative content analysis** systematically

coded and quantified textual data to get the frequency of the references, providing a broad overview of identity representation in magazines (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017; McRobbie, 2009). This dual approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how magazines shape and reflect social identities and ideologies.

Data analysis involved classifying, coding, and tabulating information as per qualitative research guidelines (Kothari & Garg, 2014; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2015). The study utilized Critical Discourse Analysis as the theoretical framework and its tools to investigate how these narratives contest traditional gender roles. CDA posits that language is not merely a means of communication but a tool through which we construct reality and negotiate meanings (Fairclough, 2015). As Naidu et al. (2023) indicate, discourses are culturally established ways of understanding the world, shaped by specific social contexts and power relations. This means that language reflects particular ideologies, reinforcing or challenging dominant societal norms (Gill, 2020). Key tenets of CDA utilised included: power dynamics (CDA examines how language perpetuates or resists power inequalities, making it crucial for understanding the representation of marginalized groups (Nadia, 2021); ideological structures (discourse serves ideological functions, shaping societal norms and beliefs (Van Dijk, 2003); and historical context (the socio-political context in which discourse occurs is vital for understanding its implications (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Using Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional framework—text, discursive practice, and socio-cultural context—the study analysed how references in Kenyan magazines construct and negotiate identities for millennial mothers and independent women revealing a significant shift in narratives, illustrating women as active participants in societal change rather than passive subjects confined to traditional roles.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The exploration identified and analysed ideological constructs of a woman as home

makers, liberal feminists, career woman, millennial mom and phenomenal woman.

### Homemaker and nurturing

The construction of this ideology was overwhelmingly associated with women's conventional roles as mothers within the family, wives in the family, caregivers and their nurturing abilities in the society. Faced with the challenging life of balancing work and family, a woman's pride still stops at her success in the upbringing of her children as a mother. This is what we got from the conversation with Naomi Munyi in Article 18, the successful trailblazer in the insurance maze:

*"While most would definitely term her career trajectory a success, Naomi considers the fact that her two children turned out well as her greatest success. Despite challenges with work-life balance, she opines that motherhood is very rewarding, especially seeing the values she imparted in their lives"* (PM, March 2020:31).

Women were said to even sacrifice their jobs in order to take care of their families. As Teresa Omondi said in her conversation on women empowerment:

*"I've seen women turn down jobs or career enhancing opportunities because they feel that they have to be at home all the time, which happens more often than we care to admit. As a gender specialist, I try to encourage a shift in mindset as ideally empowering women tends to have a ripple effect"* (PM, February, 2020:25).

For Wanjira Maathai (Article 19), the daughter of Prof Wangari Mathai, she described her mother as loving, caring and hardworking. *"To my two brothers and I, she was just a mother and we never saw her in any way."* (PM, December 2019:26). Amidst her busy schedule in trying to keep her mother's legacy, she noted that motherhood was important having learnt some virtues from her mother and she wanted the best for her daughters too. *"My daughters keep me grounded..."* (2019:27).

Joanne Mwangi, a successful Marketing Guru in business, was keen to caution other women entrepreneurs when it came to balancing their careers with other aspects of their lives.

*"I think I gave too much to the business immersing myself too deeply. If I was to live my life all over again, I don't think I would work the kind of long hours I did. Not that I would give less to the business, but I would have strived for balance in life, especially when my children were younger. It is possible to enjoy both a successful career and give attention to the children but it has to be deliberate."* (PM, December 2019:28).

In another article titled, 'Changing the Status Quo' (TL Feb 2020:34), Quenter Mbori Saina, when her husband Oscar Saina moved to Tanzania to work, she followed him and ended up becoming Bang Magazine's editor in chief. Unfortunately, she was forced to relocate again to Kenya from Tanzania when the husband did so:

*"For me, starting all over was the scariest part. I was doing well in Tanzania and I did not want to come and start job hunting again. I had to move back to Kenya when my husband did. These are just some of the things we do for love. (P. 34)"*

Quenter can be viewed as someone ready to sacrifice her economic goals for the stability of the family institution. A prerequisite for conventional motherhood and the family, marriage was similarly depicted as desirable for all women. Discourse mostly synonymizes wifehood and motherhood and women were seen to have achieved a desired status in society upon entering matrimony, assuming parenthood will follow. In the PM, the same was extensively explored in the article that appeared in the inspiration columns. In the case of Evans (30) and Faith Wafula 27 who fell in love while teenagers, their story in the interview chiefly described the potential bride as socialized to effectively execute domestic chores, especially cooking.

**FAITH:** *I used to think marriage was all about cooking for my husband 's favourite*



*food and doing the wifely things. I realized that it was more. Initially, I assumed if my husband came from work late and we had taken supper, he could just go and serve himself especially if I had gone to bed already. I learnt to present him with hot food even if he come late. I also learnt to make room for your husband's feeling. (PM: March 2020 pg 35)*

The interview with Evans and Faith Wafula and her comments highlighted the gendered socialization of women into domestic roles, particularly in terms of cooking and other wifely duties. Faith's comments indicate the expectation for women to embody specific domestic and social practices as part of their gendered socialization.

The above selected cases depict women at the centre of the home and brings them out as caring, nurturing and solely responsible for the success of the home and family, thus advancing the ideology of them as homemakers. For instance, Naomi Munyi highlights that despite her professional achievements, she considers her children's well-being her greatest success (PM, March 2020:31). This reflects a common sentiment among women, as they often prioritize family responsibilities over career ambitions, sometimes sacrificing job opportunities to fulfil domestic roles. The narratives also emphasize the gendered expectations surrounding marriage and domestic responsibilities. Faith Wafula's reflections illustrate how women are socialized into traditional roles, perceiving marriage primarily as a domestic obligation (PM, March 2020:35). This socialization reinforces the notion that a woman's identity is closely tied to her ability to fulfil these domestic duties, thereby perpetuating conventional gender norms. The influence of interdiscursivity, as noted by Fairclough (2015), is evident in how these narratives interact with broader societal discourses. The portrayal of women as primary caregivers not only reflects but also reinforces traditional gender roles, establishing motherhood and marriage as essential components of a woman's societal identity (Van Dijk, 2005). The emphasis on language and power

relations, as discussed by Wodak (2019), further reveals how discursive strategies perpetuate stereotypes and traditional power dynamics within the family structure.

Comparing these findings with other studies on gender representations in media, such as Romaine (1999), reveals a consistent pattern of reinforcing traditional gender roles and stereotypes. These studies highlight how media representations often portray women in domestic roles and emphasize their responsibilities as caregivers and homemakers. Similarly, Mulvey's (2016) analysis of the male gaze underscores the objectification of women in media content, aligning with the narratives observed in this data. The references to women in *TL* and *PM* reflect and influence women's ideologies and identities by promoting narratives that prioritize traditional gender roles and responsibilities. The emphasis on motherhood, sacrifice for the family, and the importance of marriage constructs an ideology that reinforces women's roles as primary caregivers and homemakers. These representations shape societal perceptions of women's identities and influence women's self-perceptions and behaviours, particularly in terms of prioritizing family responsibilities over personal and professional aspirations. These references reflect and influence women's ideologies and identities and perpetuate ideologies surrounding women's roles as homemakers, caregivers, and nurturers within the family and society.

### **Liberal feminist**

In male-dominated societies, women are presumed to be weak and powerless (Mark, 2020; Charles et al., 2020 and Qafzezi & Kadi, 2023). To counter such sexist notions, female scholars and writers have made attempts to outline enormous powers women demonstrate and should harness in the society. Liberal feminism is a branch of feminism that focuses on achieving gender equality advocating for equal treatment and opportunities for women in all areas of society, pushing for changes in laws and policies to eliminate discrimination, focusing on the

autonomy of individuals and their right to make choices and promoting access to education as a means to empower women. Liberal feminists believe that systemic change can be achieved through advocacy, legislation, and active participation in political processes. More prevalent in this discourse was the depiction of solidarity in empowering women through women's movements that uplifted them to be full participants in society alongside men. Scores of articles in both *TL* and *PM* featured women who were committed to programs that raised women in society through education and training, not only towards the empowerment of women themselves, but also the societal growth and development that comes along with it.

The article "*Standing up for wildlife*" exemplifies feminine power. It is a story of Paula Kahumba (30years old), a lady described as the Wangari Maathai of wildlife who was so passionate about wildlife conservation. "*I have been threatened before for my aggressive lobbying against poaching but, I have and will never give up on this fight*" she explains. (The *PM*, October 2019:26). Hers is a success story aimed at identifying with the belief that nothing is impossible and a woman can think and come up with exciting out of the box innovations to save the planet. The article presents an inspiring story that motivates women to take a lead in the role of serving the planet. The article captioned "*The Green Warrior- Planting trees to save the planet*" presents a 19-year-old Anita Soina whose love for the environment is so profound. Anita is keen on reclaiming forests in the country and bringing onboard as many youths as she can reach.

*"People in my generation only like to do things when they look cool. If I were to tell them to join me in planting trees, few would show up. But if I ask them to go hiking, team building, or photo shoots and incorporate tree-planting in the activities, they will be more receptive to it and that is how I onboard the youth to this cause, she says."* P. 41

These narratives construct an ideology that positions women as agents of change and

challenges patriarchal structures (Van Dijk, 2020). For instance, Paula Kahumba's and Anita Soina's passionate activism against poaching and environmental reclamation reflects a determination to challenge societal norms and make a difference. Van Dijk's notion of context emphasizes how these representations are situated within broader societal structures that shape and are shaped by ideological beliefs about gender.

The story of Mahnaz Sarwar, the founder and owner of An-Nisa online taxi-hailing business specially designed by women for women is an inspiring one.

*"I always felt unsafe in taxi with a stranger, especially if it was a man. Being in the passenger's seat was plainly putting myself in a vulnerable situation. I was never comfortable and was always in search of female driver. It dawned on me that a good deal of women felt the same way"* (*PM* February2020:27)

The story of Scolly Cheruto titled "*Conquering Kenya's film industry*" was another inspiring conversation of a young woman who had taken up many roles and ventured into paths not approved by family to become successful. (*PM*, December 2019:46). The discourse around women's empowerment is also evident in the stories of Mahnaz Sarwar, who created a taxi-hailing service for women, and Scolly Cheruto, who navigated the film industry against familial expectations. Both narratives reinforce the idea that women can succeed in non-traditional paths, furthering the liberal feminist agenda by challenging existing power dynamics.

The story of Saran Kaba Jones, a Liberian social entrepreneur (*PM*, December 2019: 55 magazine issue as a trailblazer. Saran Kaba Jones, a clean water advocate and social entrepreneur from Liberia who in 2009, founded FACE Africa - an organization whose main intention is to strengthen water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure in rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa. Under her lead, by 2017, the organization had built over 500 WASH systems

that allowed rural communities in her native land and beyond to access clean water. *“As a result of this, life changing programs have been brought to more than 100,000 people.”* (PM December 2019:55). At the time of this feature story, Saran was a board member of the UN Women Civil Society Advisory Group West /Center Africa and a 2013 world Economic Forum young global leader. She was listed by the guardian UK as one of Africa 25 Top women achievers. She was a frequent speaker on topics such as water infrastructure, gender equality and entrepreneurship. Saran Kaba Jones's work in water sanitation and hygiene exemplifies the potential for women to drive societal change, impacting over 100,000 lives through her initiatives.

### **Liberated/Empowered Feminist**

The magazines play an important role in advancing the current societal discourse on reform agenda on female empowerment. An empowered woman is an ideal and authentic woman who is expected to be educated, career or business oriented, working and embracing marriage. In **Article 10**, *‘The Retrofit Beadworker’*, Elizabeth Korkel, a 24-year-old Turkana lady, contests traditional notions of womanhood. She comes from a family of 12 kids. She opines that life was not great when she was growing up and that is how she ended up running away from home on two different occasions. In her own words:

*“I really wanted to get my education but due to financial constraints, my The Parents’ wages could not raise the fee needed for me to enroll in school. I spent my time doing domestic chores including fetching water, herding goats and milking them in the evening”* (TL magazine October 2019:56).

Education is seen as a powerful empowerment agency in women’s lives. Sadly, at 15 years old, Elizabeth got married off by her parents to an old man whom she bore a son with. In her culture, the bride price was a source of income for the girl’s family. However, she ran away after two years of marriage due to her tender age and her husband’s disapproval of her working. From the interview in

the article, she argues that in her community, married women were only expected to do domestic work and engaging in work that would bring food to the table was out of question. These representations commodify women in some way, aligning with McLoughlin (2017) and Yu (2019). Fairclough's (2015) approach to CDA emphasizes the interplay between discourse, ideology, and social structures. Elizabeth's story exemplifies this struggle against patriarchal norms, where marriage is used to restrict women's emancipation. It confined her to the domestic space. Any attempt to empower herself economically was met with resistance. This explains why she decided to walk out of her marriage so as to rediscover her authentic self. In order to her true self-hood, she started making ornaments as a hobby. She taught herself how to make beads and people started buying them. She used the money she got and started a small shop in Turkana to support herself. The acquired financial independence enables Elizabeth to support her family: *“I am the breadwinner in my family since I am the only one who has managed to go to school. I educate my older and younger siblings and I also help my older sister raise her seven children.* Pp. 56.

The analysis touches upon how traditional gender roles, particularly in the Turkana community, suppressed women's emancipation, limiting them to domestic spaces. This resonates with the work of Ladegaard (2019) and Mohammed (2019), who have examined how discourses and social structures suppress women's agency and freedom.

Vivian Maina’s story in *‘Changing the Status Quo’* (TL, March 2020:35) is about why she is hell bent on changing society’s perception of women. On whether she always wanted to be an editor, Vivian confessed that she loved sciences and had dreams of becoming an engineer but her dad pushed her to study education. She observes that:

*“In my field of work, I have seen how women are portrayed in mainstream media. I’ve had to fight with my colleagues about how stories about women get sexualized. It saddens to see this pattern being normalized. When a woman*

*does something that is considered socially unacceptable, it gets a lot of attention. There are success stories of women out there that are not being told and I am going to tell them. I also think that the notion that women are their worst enemies is a LIE!” (pp. 35).*

At this point, she morphs into a crusader against gender injustices. From Fairclough (2015) point of view, this narrative challenges societal norms and advocate for female empowerment. 'Changing the Status Quo' highlights the fight against gender injustices and the normalization of women's stories. This reflects Fairclough's concept of interdiscursivity, as it highlights how narratives can challenge dominant societal norms and advocate for empowerment.

### Independent career woman

In establishing the references and terms given to women, the study focused also on how they were referred to and regarded in terms of professionalism, career success, individual achievements, economic contributions, discrimination in workplaces, stereotyped achievements and hierarchical achievements. In the various articles and topics where the women were featured, they were, first and foremost, identified by their professions and work-related achievements as shown below:

- In the Dec 2019 issue; the story of Prof. Wangari Mathai, a Nobel Peace prize Laureate and environmentalist extra ordinaire was told as one of the most accomplished Kenyan women. She was the founder of the Greenbelt movement founded in 1977 whose focus was on poverty reduction and environmental conservation through planting trees. (PM, October. 2019 pg 26).
- The story of Joanne Mwangi, titled “*The Marketing Guru*”. Joanne is the founder and CEO of professional marketing services PMJ GROUP. After university, she got her first job at The Standard Newspaper; selling advertising space followed by a one – year stint at the Kenya Postal Directors as a brand Manager.
- The feature or the story of Teresa Omondi – Adeita, a 39-year-old, the Deputy Executive Director of the Forum for African women Educations educationist (FAWE) and a part time lawyer at Riara University. (PM, February 2020:25)
- Naomi Murigi’s story “*Trail blazing in the insurance Maze*” who is the general manager, strategy and innovation, at ICEA Lion group and the highest-ranking female officer in the organization. (PM, March 2020)
- Loise Kamanu, the founder and managing director of Modest Collections, a delivery service company that seeks to elevate the conveyance industry focusing mostly on online trade. (PM, February 2020:45).
- Jihan Abbas, a 26 years old, founder and CEO of Griffin Insurance, the first digital car insurance company in Kenya. (PM, March 2020:47)
- The story of Mahnaz Sarwar, the founder and owner of An-Nisa online taxi-hailing business specially designed by women for women. (PM February2020:27)
- The story of Saran Kaba Jones (born 1981) a Liberian social entrepreneur is appearing in
- In ‘*Changing the Status Quo*’, Quenter Mbori Saina’s first editing job was at Macmillan Publishers, then Bang Magazine’s editor in chief in Tanzania and later, she gets hired by Standard Media Group Ltd in Kenya. (TL magazine pg 34)
- In the story of Paula Kahumba (PM October 2019 pg 26-27), a wildlife conservationist, a PhD holder in ecology and evolutionary Biology, aggressive officer of *Wildlife Direct*, a body behind many initiatives such as “*Hands off our Elephants*”, “*Save Nairobi National Park*” and “*I Love Lions*”. She was also the founder of “*Wildlife Warrior*”, and “*NTV Wild*”, series aired in National televisions.



the Dec 2019: 55 Magazine issue as a trailblazer. Saran Kaba Jones is a clean water advocate and social entrepreneur from Liberia who 2009, founded FACE Africa - an organization whose main intention is to strengthen water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure in rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa.” By 2017, the organization had built over 500 WASH systems that allowed rural communities in her native land and beyond to access clean water. “As a result of this, life changing programs have been brought to more than 100,000 people.” Saran was a board member of the UN Women Civil Society Advisory Group West /Center Africa and a 2013 world Economic Forum young global leader. She was listed by the guardian UK as one of Africa 25 Top women achievers. (PM December 2019:55).

- Finally in the May 2019/No. 170 edition, the article ‘*The Rise and Rise of Diana Marua*’.

The featured women are predominantly introduced by their professions, showcasing notable achievements across diverse fields. These discourses on the working woman further portrays the female traversing institutional hierarchies and moving into gendered workspaces traditionally thought of as the reserve of men; findings that are similar to Yu & Tian (2022) where women were found in medical fields, Xu & Kreshel (2020) representation of elite female athletes, Xu et al (2018) representation of women in gymnastics and; Altman et al (2024) on sportswomen under the Chinese gaze. The data reflects a broader societal trend that prioritizes women's economic participation over familial roles, aligning with Fairclough's (2015) perspective on how discourse shapes social identities. Women are depicted as capable of overcoming workplace discrimination and stereotypes, thereby redefining societal expectations (van Dijk, 2020). This narrative counters traditional views of women, emphasizing their contributions to the economy and their roles as independent figures in professional environments.

Women were found to be portrayed as being professionally active and successful in these two magazines as opposed to some of the previous studies such as Yu (2019), Mark (2020) and Charles et al, (2020) where their portrayal seemed to relegate them to household spheres where they were depicted as happily raising children and providing a soothing environment for their husbands at home. References in the magazines on women as career beings was noted in many lead feature stories and discourses on the career woman were depicted where women were active in different forms and levels of employment. Additionally, the magazines portray women balancing career and family responsibilities, reflecting the evolving societal expectations of gender equality. The overall representation constructs an ideology of a resilient, educated woman who embodies both career ambition and familial balance, indicating a positive shift towards women's empowerment in contemporary society.

### **Millennial mother**

Millennial mom ideology constructs the Kenyan woman as the working wife and mother. The discourses in the magazines seemed to deconstruct the male dominance and undermine the males in order to bring women's ideals to the center and focus on their struggles to meet up with the demanding aspects of family, relationships, life struggles and personal achievements. This kind of woman was also brought out as emancipated from the traditional ideologies. The millennial mom was also brought out as not being too keen in working out and maintaining the marriage, hence could easily get out of the marriage and embrace single parenthood. Most stories in the featured samples exhibited this phenomenon. Most of the moms opted out of marriage and were living out as single parents, those in marriage have had to quit and come back and seem to have stuck a working relationship with their partners where there was no inequality.

In the article, ‘*The Rise and Rise of Diana Marua*’, the foregoing is aptly brought out. Diana Marua

exemplified a replica of a highly sophisticated modern lady.

*‘Diana Marua falls smack in the middle of that new breed of moms mushrooming in East Africa. They are the digital savvy millennial moms with skin as thick as cowhide and can do attitude. She is an embodiment of millennial moms who are trying to figure out what it means to have it all; be wives, stay fashionable, raise digital savvy kids and maintain a lucrative career’ (PM, May 2019: 22).*

The excerpt above refers to millennial moms as “the digital savvy” who “raise digital-savvy kids and maintain a lucrative career”. Millennial mothers, defined as those born between 1981 and 1996, have unique characteristics influenced by their upbringing in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Millennial moms are depicted as adept users of technology to enhance their parenting experiences. Magazines highlight the use of parenting apps for tracking milestones, monitoring child development, and accessing parenting advice (Smith, 2021). For instance, apps that help with sleep training or nutrition planning are frequently recommended, indicating a reliance on digital solutions to address parenting challenges.

Social media platforms play a significant role in the lives of millennial mothers. Research shows that these moms often use platforms like Instagram and Facebook not only for personal connections but also as resources for parenting tips and community support (Johnson & Lee, 2022). Content analysis of magazines featured articles about how to leverage social media for parenting, including the pros and cons of sharing children’s milestones online (Brown, 2023). Unlike the traditional mother who got entrapped in the chains of motherhood and marriage as patriarchal institutions, Diana Marua redefines the concept of motherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Instead of viewing it as a restrictive space, she customizes it to fit her situation:

*“I am working on something. I wanted it to be a vlog but now it makes better sense to get it on a major TV station. I have been getting a lot of questions on marriage’ (pp. 22).*

Being a celebrity comes with its ups and downs (Mark, 2024). Bahati and Diana Marua, have been the subject of many blog posts and much has been said and written about them, mostly in a controversial light, most coming from people close to them and in the same industry but the couple chooses to ignore the critics and also learnt to deal with this criticism in a positive manner. Diana and Bahati established a reality show which documented various aspects of their lives instead of shielding them from the prying eyes of the general public and gossip blogs. Also, they established a social media page for everyone in their household - including their nanny and small children. Diana says:

*“With the show, we could control things since we only show about 30 per cent of our lives,” and Bahati adds; “In the era we are in, if you are in the public eye you don’t really have an option since everything is in the public domain and it doesn’t matter how much you try to hide.”*

This article suggests that millennial women have a choice to do what pleases them most without weighing themselves through the society’s lenses. This is a break from the traditional women who always would want to be complacent and do what is acceptable to society even if it means sacrificing her own goals and desire.

Diana and her husband, Kevin Bahati, discovered the secret of Reality TV. With 2.5 million viewers tuned into their latest viral episode ‘Diana’s Relocation to Italy’, they are definitely creating the blueprint of what a successful reality show in East Africa entails: “We frequently found ourselves featuring in blogs and we decided that if our lives interest people that much, why not start a reality show?” (p. 23). This portrays a vibrant picture of a progressive modern Kenyan woman. Instead of basking in the glory of being on the limelight and allowing herself become an object

of pleasure, Diana Marua uses her celebrity status as an instrument for economic empowerment as she delves into being the most sought social influencer (Davis, 2022). The establishment of a reality show and social media page by Diana and Bahati is presented as a proactive response to public scrutiny, allowing them to control their public image and share aspects of their lives on their terms, (Petroni, 2019; Qafzezi& Kadi, 2023). This challenges the notion that celebrities, especially women, are passive recipients of media attention and instead emphasizes their agency in shaping their narratives and challenging stereotypes as seen from Fairclough perspective (Fairclough, 2015) Analysis from Van Leeuwen (2008) perspective, the narrative suggests that celebrities can use criticism as a catalyst for positive actions, such as turning negative experiences into opportunities for growth and empowerment. By openly discussing their challenges and sharing their journey with the public, Diana and Bahati promote authenticity and transparency in their relationship, challenging traditional narratives of celebrity relationships characterized by secrecy and image management.

The millennial mom was brought out also as one who was outright in what she wanted irrespective of social consequences. Kambua Mathu, became a victim of trolls and cyber bullying after her wedding in 2012 to Jackson Mathu (an older, successful architect and businessman ‘and moneyed’), whom she got married to a year after breaking off an engagement to a fellow artist. The question of his age raised eyebrows with people trolling her because of their age but she easily dismissed this with;

*“People will always have something to say regardless. Even if we were age mates, or were both singers, there is someone who would still take an issue with that. So long as you are in the lime light, your relationship will always bring mixed reactions” (PM, March, 2020:12)*

The analysis touches upon the patriarchal gaze and its influence on media representations of women, aligning with Mulvey's (2016) seminal

work on gender and representation in media. The criticism and trolling faced by millennial moms illustrate the objectification and scrutiny women face in the public sphere, echoing the findings from the studies of Yu (2019), Mark (2024) and Charles et al (2020).

For the millennial mother who is in a marriage, apart from having same financial priorities, engaging in continuous dialogue on finances, dividing financial responsibilities and trying to understand the partner's perspective, the article strongly advised that each couple should maintain financial autonomy.

*While having a joint account is considered ideal it is advisable to have some bit of control over your finances. And truth be told, a joint account can be a risky affair especially when you are dealing with a dishonest partner...This way, you will be killing two birds with one stone; working together towards financial goals, while retaining a little bit more of your individually and control over your finances.” (PM, February 2020:6)*

The magazines highlight financial autonomy as crucial for millennial moms, suggesting a renegotiation of traditional relationship dynamics. This resonates with studies by Lazar (2005, 2007) on patriarchy and gendered stereotypes, which emphasize the economic dimensions of power within relationships.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study examined various references given to women in *TL* and *The Parents East Africa* magazines and emergent ideological constructs. The study highlights the critical role of media in shaping gender representations and the empowerment of women. The narratives presented in Kenyan magazines reflect significant societal changes, offering a platform for women to assert their agency and challenge traditional norms. By analysing discursive practices, the research uncovered underlying ideologies that portray women as empowered, financially autonomous, and capable of navigating both private and public spheres. This aligns with Van

Dijk's (2003) assertion that CDA must be problem-oriented and aimed at addressing significant social issues such as sexism and inequality. The exploration also unveiled the emergence of the millennial mom ideology, depicted as an independent and liberated woman challenging traditional norms in motherhood and marriage. Stories of single parenthood, age-defying relationships, and the emphasis on financial independence portrayed these women as resilient individuals seeking self-actualization amid societal expectations. These findings call for an understanding of emerging ideologies on women's identities, recognizing their achievements and contributions beyond conventional roles. The findings emphasize the importance of challenging stereotypes and biases, advocating for women's merit-based recognition, and fostering a shift in societal mindset regarding women's roles.

The findings illustrate a transformative representation of women in Kenyan media, moving away from traditional patriarchal narratives. By showcasing millennial mothers and independent women, magazines are contributing to a broader discourse on gender equality. The emphasis on technology, public agency, and financial independence aligns with global trends toward women's empowerment, indicating a shift in societal values.

### Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the study recommends media advocacy to encourage media outlets to continue amplifying diverse and empowering narratives of women, as well as, promoting discussions around gender roles and expectations in local communities and leverage media narratives as a catalyst for change. Further investigations are suggested to conduct longitudinal studies to explore the evolution of gender representation in Kenyan media over time. In terms of policy development, the study advocates for policies that support gender equality in media representation, ensuring diverse voices and experiences are included.

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