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How do various media portray gender issues in the Middle East?

K. Collins Greenslade, supervised by R. Farnum

Abstract

This essay critically compares and contrasts how gender roles in the Middle East are presented in various media. Particular focus is given to the portrayal of male feminists, a group rarely discussed in the media. Stories from a variety of sources originating from the United Kingdom, especially, are used to show how the same issue is presented differently across regions. This comparison will be used as a case study to consider the greater issue of media bias in society.

Body

The main source of information on current events for people is the media. Whether in the form of newspapers, news reports on the television, or online reports the media influences the way in which we perceive the world. Factors influencing news articles include the writer of the report, the newspaper in which it appears and the country from which it originates. The opinions and information may vary, despite the story being based on the same event that has occurred due to the amount of bias from the writers of the report, the general direction of opinions from the newspaper. If a newspaper is considered a credible source, then it is more likely to be considered as a source that produces a fair representation. However, it is difficult to find an unbiased article and more often than not, the media reports what it feels is a worthy article and can manipulate the facts to give their opinion of the story more evidence without lying. This is particularly clear when stereotypes are discussed, especially stereotypes of gender, as these change dramatically depending on the policies and opinions that the newspaper follows. Ideas surrounding the Middle East are particularly biased, as the media portrays the Middle East as very extreme and Western newspapers have strong opinions on what gender equality means and can be an issue because the majority of people do not read further into the truth of the newspapers, as we are led to believe that these newspapers only report the truth. However, it is possible to make the information on an issue without presenting information that is false, and so we are influenced by the way that the media presents the information on the various issues.

The topic I have chosen to cover, believing that it is infrequently discussed, is the way that gender in the Middle East is presented. I will place an emphasis on the men of the Middle East, as men are usually presented as women’s oppressors. Although this is sometimes the case, rarely are the men from the Middle East which are described as equal or better represented. Women from the Middle East are often talked about being forced to do things (e.g., wearing a hijab, whereas in many cases the women believe that they should be able to choose). While I do believe that women are oppressed by men and that some views presented by the media are correct, I also believe that women in many modern and modern Western societies, the media tells us that women are equal to men. In many cases, media present women in stereotypical ways when discussing working environments regarding pay, representation in leadership positions, and stereotypes of gendered careers), but because we are looking at these stereotypes, we are not actually representing gender equality, when we look at other cultures, we often see them as opposing women. This is due to different standards and expectations in the Middle East often believe the same about our culture, seeing women in the West as being inferior (e.g., to men, media, and newspapers). There are, without doubt, restrictions on women in both societies, and many women could speak of the unfairness in which they are treated, but in the media, virtually all narratives are made about women and the stories that are told are of women being oppressed, scared and scared for their lives to try to change things, or attempting protests but failing, whereas men are presented as being violent and trying to stop others from having an opinion. Throughout the media, some sources are seen as more credible, but even within these sources, information can be biased. This article is featured in The New York Times, a newspaper based in New York, USA. It is a slightly leftwinger newspaper, as it is an opinion-based newspaper. This article was written by Alissa J. Rubin with input from Lynsey Addario. It is written in a non-biased manner and has not been published. I have chosen this writer because it is known for its “photographs, features and breaking news focused on humanitarian and human rights issues across the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa.” While the two contributors have experience and knowledge of similar issues around the world, the article appears to be quite biased, specifically the female police officer in Afghanistan being shown as being in a tone supporting the women rather than as a neutral topic. Opinions from both sides are presented, but the side and opinions of the women is dramatically more biased. Phrases such as “Taliban curse”[1] when talking about how things changed when the Taliban came to power highlight the author’s views about the events that took place. Most of the words and phrases used made the reader feel sorry for the women, this is a running theme throughout.

The last article that I found to answer my question was titled “Thousands march in Kabul over mob killing of woman.”[2] This article also covers the death of Farkhunda in Kabul, the Afghan woman murdered in March 2015. Farkhunda was falsely accused of burning a Quran[3] and the protests that took place within Kabul were significant. It is an article broadcasted in Qatar (a country within the Middle East on the Persian Gulf).[4] The article is written by the owner of the newspaper, Al Jazeera, and is based in Qatar, where the article was written in either Afghanistan, the place that the murder happened, or another region. The article does not tell you who wrote it, possibly suggesting that it was written by a group of journalists. The information is based on an article by putting together all of the information that they had discovered on the issue. This could mean that it is more reliable because it is a collective of opinion and information, or it could mean that it is more unreliable, authored by a very biased and/or untrained writer. The article includes interviews with many of the people involved in the event, both male and female, but does not interview anyone that was against the protest. I believe that the author did this because it is a positive portrayal, and it is possible to put the blame on female police, send us male police.’” he said, alluding instead of female police, send us male police. This article is featured in the International Women’s Day. The article talks about or Qatar, where the president “promised to champion women’s rights and equality of all genders – yet this is rarely talked about in news and communities. As a result their children would also be unfairness in which they are treated, but in the media, virtually all narratives are made about women and the stories that are told are of women being oppressed, scared and scared for their lives to try to change things, or attempting protests but failing, whereas men are presented as being violent and trying to stop others from having an opinion. Throughout the media, some sources are seen as more credible, but even within these sources, information can be biased. This article is featured in The New York Times, a newspaper based in New York, USA. It is a slightly leftwinger newspaper, as it is an opinion-based newspaper. This article was written by Alissa J. Rubin with input from Lynsey Addario. It is written in a non-biased manner and has not been published. I have chosen this writer because it is known for its “photographs, features and breaking news focused on humanitarian and human rights issues across the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa.” While the two contributors have experience and knowledge of similar issues around the world, the article appears to be quite biased, specifically the female police officer in Afghanistan being shown as being in a tone supporting the women rather than as a neutral topic. Opinions from both sides are presented, but the side and opinions of the women is dramatically more biased. Phrases such as “Taliban curse”[1] when talking about how things changed when the Taliban came to power highlight the author’s views about the events that took place. Most of the words and phrases used made the reader feel sorry for the women, this is a running theme throughout.

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Introduction

In this essay, I argue that humans are self-interested, not sympathetic. In doing so I rely on Bernard Mandeville's psychological theory of universal self-interest, and I make a case for including male feminism in the analysis. The combination of two theories done by using three criteria: the emotional basis of competing scientific theories, namely inductive support, simplicity, and experimentum crucis. And I also use modern day examples from within society.

Discussion, Part I

Mandeville explains how all animals are self-interested and only care about pleasing themselves, but are split into two varying severities. Mandeville (1) argues that "all untaught animals are only solicits of pleasing themselves" and that "naturally" they follow "the bent of their own inclinations", doing so "without considering the good or harm" that others may receive. Mandeville believed that you cannot persuade or teach anyone to go against their "natural inclinations" to "prefer the good of others to their own".

Some people may say that you can persuade someone to go against their own inclinations, however, the problem is that the people only change out of self-interest. For example, a businessman's sister told him that he was doing was selfish and that he should become a charity giver. If that man didn't become a charity giver he may lose his relationship with his sister and regret not giving to charity. So by giving to charity he receives the emotional gain and love from his sister, therefore changing out of self-interest.

All animals have to be self-interested to survive. If an animal doesn't care about itself, shelter and dominance, it will die. So "naturally" it does "follow the bent of its own" inclinations. (1) This leads me to another point. I have observed that self-interest is misunderstood. When describing an act of self-interest we seem to portray it in a negative way, but I argue it is not. It is not selfish to act in self-interest, it is natural and vital for survival. Therefore, with animals "naturally" follows "the bent of their own inclinations", which is not negative, nor are they selfish. As a result, this proves my claim, because every person living on this planet must be self-interested.

Also, the feeling of sympathy, contentment and happiness derived from performing a sympathetic act is impossible to attain without self-interest. I believe that people give to charity because the personal gain we receive from committing an act outweighs the sympathy involved in the act itself. Alternatively, people may be persuaded to give some amount out of sympathy, but discretely, then they're truly sympathetic. However, if that person later is given to charity they may feel an emotional loss such as guilt and regret, so by giving to charity they feel a kind of emotional gain. As a result, "truly sympathetic" acts are disproved on the grounds that they don't do the perfection of the act will be done.

I believe that there are varying levels of self-interest, as did Mandeville. He believed that the (1) "whole species" is divided into two classes, each class being "true representatives of their sublime species". One consisting of "abject, low-minded people" who have "no aim higher than their private advantage". The other class is a mix of "beloved creatures" who are not "sordid" or "selfish", who despise "what they had in common with the abject creatures [the first class]". Both classes are ones of self-interest but "the first class by more degrees". I think this is true, because we can consider businessmen and people like the members of 'Dragon's Den'. If we image a scale of self-interest, they would be at the top because they care about wealth and success, by investing money and by picking up and dropping off the profit to a charity giver. As said earlier I think that people give to charity because they receive, whether that be abolition of regret, pride or flattering.

The level of self-interest in charitable giving is hard to gauge, because if a rich person gives a huge amount of money, which is only a small percentage of their wealth, it still is a very poor person gives a little amount, which is a high percentage of his or her wealth. The rich person will receive more emotional gain because they gave a higher amount. As we can observe, the levels of self-interest of the business man and charity giver are different.

Three criteria can be used for choosing between Mandeville's theory of self-interest and sympathy and the combination of the classical theory of self-interest and sympathy from Hume. Fernando Morett (3) explains that "inductive support" is "the number of examples from within society that inductively support the hypothesis or claim". From source four we know that an experimentum crucis or crucial experiment gives a true character of a hypothesis or claim, "one positive instance seems to be enough". From the textbook (4) we know that "many scientists prefer a hypothesis to be better to choose theories-postulating fewer causes. Therefore, simpler theories should be chosen over their more complex counterparts.

When it comes to 'inductive support', Mandeville is a clear winner. From source eight we know that (3) "Unlike Hume, Mandeville does consider whether statesmen, patriots, mothers, and so forth could be self-interested, whereas Hume reduces them to being flattered, adorned and glorified". Again from the same source (5) we know that Mandeville's observations and surveys are more reliable because he "discusses different pride will be fed. He will get a good feeling from giving to charity, which is the "inductive support" to Mandeville's theory of self-interest. Mandeville (1) argues that "the moral virtues are the political offspring which flattery begot upon pride". This means that when we behave well, our pride is fed. We are praised and encouraged, because of what we have done, so much so that our personal gain we receive from committing an act outweighs the sympathy involved in the act itself. Alternatively, people may be persuaded to give some amount out of sympathy, but discretely, then they're truly sympathetic. However, if that person later is given to charity they may feel an emotional loss such as guilt and regret, so by giving to charity they feel a kind of emotional gain. As a result, "truly sympathetic" acts are disproved on the grounds that they don't do the perfection of the act will be done.

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Further: “Progress for women's rights has been made in recent years, but human rights organizations are worried that much of that is now being undone as conservative groups in the West are opposed to human rights. This is a growing concern as the rights and freedoms of women in many countries are threatened.”


David Hume believed that there is little media about male feminism overall. Male feminism here in its own eastern version – it is overly influenced by western values and western models of feminism. So for this reason, western values are used in this essay. I was particularly impressed by K.'s initiative in conducting her own interviews via mass emails with school students to test her hypothesis on gender equality.

In this essay, it is something that people do not talk about enough. Overall, this essay has taught me to not just look at an event from one person's perspective of the people written about. I have enjoyed looking at events with less bias, be it implicit or explicit, in reporting trends.

Ayaz and I have enjoyed having this exercise because we can consider schools and parents socialise gender relations and assume about other cultures in the media. The media has a large impact in all of these places, because it is not only our main source of information locally but also our primary way of finding out what is going on. The world in the news presents its facts can change the way we see the world, and that if we do not critically read everything we see, we can be persuaded by the newspaper to unquestioningly believe what they write and thus adopt their biases and stereotypes.

This means the media has a huge amount of power as a trusted, central source of information. Certainly there are many women who support better treatment of women overall and less violence and better laws, for example. But few women have challenged those power structures that keep women in their places. Perhaps there are many women in Middle East countries currently listening to the media along with schools and parents socialise gender relations and assumptions about other cultures in the media. The media has a large impact in all of these places, because it is not only our main source of information locally but also our primary way of finding out what is going on. The world in the news presents its facts can change the way we see the world, and that if we do not critically read everything we see, we can be persuaded by the newspaper to unquestioningly believe what they write and thus adopt their biases and stereotypes. This means the media has a huge amount of power as a trusted, central source of information. Certainly there are many women who support better treatment of women overall and less violence and better laws, for example. But few women have challenged those power structures that keep women in their places. Perhaps there are many women in Middle East countries currently listening to the media along with schools and parents socialise gender relations and assumptions about other cultures in the media. The media has a large impact in all of these places, because it is not only our main source of information locally but also our primary way of finding out what is going on. The world in the news presents its facts can change the way we see the world, and that if we do not critically read everything we see, we can be persuaded by the newspaper to unquestioningly believe what they write and thus adopt their biases and stereotypes. This means the media has a huge amount of power as a trusted, central source of information. Certainly there are many women who support better treatment of women overall and less violence and better laws, for example. But few women have challenged those power structures that keep women in their places. Perhaps there are many women in Middle East countries currently listening to the media along with schools and parents socialise gender relations and assumptions about other cultures in the media. The media has a large impact in all of these places, because it is not only our main source of information locally but also our primary way of finding out what is going on. The world in the news presents its facts can change the way we see the world, and that if we do not critically read everything we see, we can be persuaded by the newspaper to unquestioningly believe what they write and thus adopt their biases and stereotypes.