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## Gender and Feminine Identity in Present Songs of Iran

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### Extended Abstract

#### Aim

Songs are central to communicating gender messages across society as a significant cultural expression (Kreyer, 2015). Examining recent trends in gender representation in popular love songs in Iran can provide insights into how femininity and feminine identity are formed for the young generation, the primary audience of these cultural artifacts.

This article investigates identity formation through ideologies such as gender roles. Stereotypes of femininity can be ingrained in society through the textual universe that love songs create (Waligroska & Huhle, 2013; Altorki, 2015). The behavioral and physical concepts associated with a beloved girl in the lyrics may not only reflect gender norms in society but also construct them. This study aims to explore the key gender messages embedded within Persian song lyrics.

#### Methodology

The study is categorized as a qualitative research study utilizing content analysis. It aims to examine themes associated with the representation of femininity. As Hansen (1998) asserted, content analysis is an appropriate method for identifying patterns that emerge from specific coding frameworks. However, it is important to note that content analysis does not consider the listeners' attitudes that may result from engaging with these cultural products. The data consisted of textual collections from existing lyrics. Among the vast number of songs available in the market, the data was limited to a selection of love songs released over the five-year period from 2017 to 2022. The sample for the content analysis included fifty song lyrics from the most famous male singers, as dictated by the Islamic laws of Iran.

For each clause or sentence of the lyrics, the following questions were posed to identify sexual representations normalized in the language of the songs, i.e., "performing deconstruction." Thus, the content analysis focused on hegemonic relations and gender roles from a feminist perspective.

1. Is the woman's "ownership" by a man inferred? Does the vocabulary or structure of the text directly or indirectly suggest an "owned female"?

2. Is the woman represented as "obedient and under control" or as free and powerful?

3. To what extent is she depicted as an "object," including as an element of nature (weather, mountain, sea, plants)?

4. Is the woman portrayed as an independent human with free will and choice?

5. What, if any, positive evaluation of non-physical spiritual characteristics of the female role is expressed? Are qualities like kindness, loyalty, intelligence, power, and independence highlighted and praised by the lover?

6. Which negative non-physical features of her character (behavioral or mental) are most criticized by the male narrator?

7. Does the woman show activeness and an agentive role, or is she portrayed as a passive figure, such as "an abandoned woman," "a forgetful, irresponsible person," or "one running away from the loving man"?

8. Does she assume the role of a service-giver to please the man, serving his needs?

Themes that reflect gender stereotypes were grouped into four categories: power and control over the feminine figure, objectification of her, described characteristics of her, and her scope of influence. To achieve a consistent and unbiased study of themes related to femininity representation, function coding was conducted with the cooperation of three coders, including the researcher. The codes focused on conceptualizing gender and aimed to convert words and their strings into structured themes of gender stereotypes. Krippendorff's alpha coefficient was measured to assess the reliability among coders. With a percentage of agreement at .81, the coding demonstrated sufficient reliability.

### **Findings**

We observed that in the phrases and words of the sample song lyrics, emphasis is solely placed on the body and physical beauty, with no mention of non-physical characteristics in the representation of women. None of the studied songs, even implicitly, referenced traits such as loyalty, understanding, intelligence, or strength in the beloved female. While only "beauty and sexual attraction" were valued and praised, the female role in a romantic relationship was not portrayed at all. Sexual stereotypes of "ownership" or "physical charm" signal the notion of women's inferiority from the domineering male perspective. From the standpoint of power relations and dominance, the terminology and phrases indicate that the female character was merely one option among the male's possible selections. Therefore, the female is depicted as someone to be chosen by him, among other alternatives, indicating her lack of power. The behavior of women that is praised by men involves flirting and showing off for the purpose of male seduction, thereby rendering women as sexual objects, the object of male pleasure.

### **Conclusion**

The focus on gender terminology and feminine representation of power and influence indicates the objectification of women, emphasizing their physical attractiveness as the most prominent quality admired by men. The prominence of objectification in the sample of Persian songs is significant. As noted by Bibi (2020), the objectification of women by male singers in Arab world songs was more frequent than the objectification of men in lyrics by female singers. A high frequency of objectification was also observed in the representation of girls in Rasmussen & Densley (2017), where the objectification by male and female singers over 25 years exceeded 50% of the sampled lyrics in America. In the present study on Iranian songs, while physical charm through objectification was prioritized, there was no reference to inner positive qualities, such as responsibility, free will, and honesty, in constructing the feminine identity of a beloved girl or woman.

Gendered messages in the songs depicted a beauty idol, an inactive, passive female character likely to leave unfaithfully. Active influence and freedom in decision-making by the beloved female were not represented except in the context of sexual seduction of the male. This serves to conceptualize love as a trap that captivates the man.

**Keywords:** Gender, Identity, Media Psychology, Women, Music.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research has been conducted in accordance with the necessary ethical principles. Attention has been paid to gender traits and characteristics in the interpretation of analytical texts, and the writer has adhered to ethical considerations in writing.

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**Conflict of Interest**

The author acknowledges that there is no conflict of interest in this article.

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