Stereotyping Arab women in jokes circulated on social media during the coronavirus crisis

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Abstract

Since the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic in late 2019, fear and panic dominated the content of online news. Simultaneously, there was a prevalence of jokes on different social media sites. During the crisis, most Arab countries went through a nationwide lockdown for weeks that people found themselves trapped in their homes and resorted to social media to express their frustration about the prevailing happenings. They began exchanging jokes on social media that indirectly reflected stereotypes about them. One thousand four hundred and twenty-four jokes (1424) were collected from Facebook and WhatsApp messages for three months and were categorized based on the themes they covered. Gender-related jokes ranked the highest and were predominantly targeting women. Hence, this study is an attempt to explore how Arab Women were stereotyped in jokes circulated on social media during the coronavirus crisis. The 508 gender-related jokes were analysed in light of the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The analysis generated four main themes, namely 'marital relations' (33%), 'habits and attributes' (26%), 'beauty and makeup' (23%), and 'violence' (18%). Women were stereotyped as being ugly and less feminine without makeup, talkative, shopaholic, despising and annoying wives, and violent and harmful partners in their private sphere. The study concludes that such negative stereotypes might be unintentionally produced and reinforced through laughter-eliciting jokes circulating fast in the virtual world.

Keywords: coronavirus, stereotype, GTVH, CDA, social media, women, jokes.

1. Introduction

How could anyone write jokes in times of crisis? Although people worldwide were facing the deadly coronavirus pandemic since late 2019, it did not kill their sense of humour. Comedy is considered a free coping mechanism that distracts people from the horror of what is going on

and gives them the chance to get the worst thoughts out of their heads (Nezlek & Derks 2001). Craig Brown notes in his chronicle of the 1990s:

> Every day, there were new Global Warnings about killer viruses, killer waves, killer drugs, killer icebergs, killer vaccines, killer killers, and other possible causes of imminent death. At first, these Global Warnings were frightening, but after a while, people came to enjoy them.
>
> (Craig Brown, cited in Bauman 2006: 5)

People face crises and epidemics at first with shock and astonishment; however, they soon adapt to the evolving situation. This adaptation is reflected in different ways, one of which is creating jokes. Therefore, when media coverage of the coronavirus tended to stoke fear and panic through the choice of words and the dark images they presented, there was a prevalence of jokes on social media. Obviously, no horrifying jokes were being made about people dying. They were mostly about the quarantine life, marital relations, challenges of working from home, social distancing, rule-breaking behaviours, dealing with children, and men doing domestic chores.

Although many jokes produced in response to the coronavirus have been hilariously funny and helped relieve the psychological and social pressure, some were legitimately racist and cast a stigma on particular social groups. According to Pasaribu & Kadarisman (2016: 24), studying jokes can show "how creative human minds are in manipulating language, and at the same time it also tells a lot about the social aspect of the humour through stereotypical image". Stereotypes can be defined as "beliefs about the characteristics of groups of individuals" (Stangor 2000: 5). They are usually established based on gender, nationality, race and ethnicity, age, language, and so forth. Among the stereotypes that have deep roots in societies are those related to gender. They are usually preconceptions about femininities and masculinities, or in other words, characteristics that are expected to be possessed by women and men or the roles they should perform. While many stereotypes reveal good features that may be true to a certain degree, they are, in most cases, pejorative and entail exaggerations (Judd & Park 1993).

A relatively novel arena that can help in investigating gender stereotypes is social media. These platforms allow users to construct gender identity through comments, status updates, pictures, and jokes (Fawzi & Szymkowiak 2014). Different studies have analysed gender in online humour (see Bemiller & Schneider 2010; Cendra et al. 2019; Nayef & El-Nashar 2015; Rashad & Azher 2018). However, little attention has been paid to how gender is stereotyped in Arabic jokes. Moreover, the period that this study investigates makes it unique. During the coronavirus crisis, most Arab countries went through a nationwide lockdown for weeks where people found themselves trapped in their homes and resorted to social media as the only means of escaping. They began exchanging jokes about the unusual conditions they were undergoing, such as social distancing and shelter-in-place measures, which gave jokes a sense of shared background, experiences, and values. These jokes were widely spread on social media websites and applications and read by millions of people. Many jokes, especially those targeting certain social groups, may have indirectly reflected stereotypes about these groups. The heavy circulation of jokes during this period could serve to solidify the stereotypes of the targeted group in people's minds. Although there were many targets in the circulated jokes of this period, the largest share was gender, particularly women. Hence, this study explores stereotypes about women in Arab societies based on the jokes created during the coronavirus quarantine. It mainly answers the following question: What are the most prevalent stereotypes about women reflected in the Arabic jokes circulated on social media during the coronavirus crisis?

The paper proceeds as follows: Section (2) presents a brief account of gender and humour in general and reviews previous studies on gender in online jokes. Section (3) describes the research methodology and outlines the framework adopted in this study, which combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH). It also provides information about the corpus used in this study, the reasons for selecting the

investigated jokes, and some statistics about the size of the collected corpus. The findings are analysed and discussed in light of GTVH and CDA in section (4). Section (5) summarises the conclusion and includes recommendations for future research.

2. Literature review

This section discusses how gender is employed for humorous purposes and sheds light on the previous studies investigating gender stereotypes depicted in jokes.

2.1. Humour and gender in social context

Humour is often used to deal with topics that cannot be ignored due to their social importance but are, at the same time challenging to handle in serious public discourse (Mulkay 1988). Topics related to sex, race, age, or even some religious issues are sometimes considered inappropriate in polite conversation. Their frequent use in jokes strongly indicates that such topics are more likely to be tolerated when signalled as humorous (Wilson 1979).

Among the themes that play a crucial role in creating humour, which triggers people's laughter, is gender. Conversely, analysing humour can lend insights into gender stereotypes that are well-established in societies (Kotthoff 2006). Gender or sexist humour is usually perceived as harmless fun and is considered a socially acceptable way to express sexism. Although both genders are the object of this kind of humour, it more frequently targets women by reflecting sexist beliefs about their inferiority (Shifman & Lemish 2010). Sexist jokes usually enhance the patriarchy, which gives men power over women (Anderson 2008). Males are depicted as normal, while females are socially constructed to be deviant, or the 'other' (Schur 1984). This 'othering' leads to marginalising women and highlighting their differences. They become less worthy of respect and more likely to become victims of violence (Ehrhart & Sandler 1985).

Many sexist jokes portray women as stupid, illogical, and ignorant and tend to objectify them sexually (Bergmann 1986). Some of these jokes focus on women's physical appearance. This may be due to the fact that women are expected to comply with specific beauty standards, including being thin, wearing makeup, and having long hair (Weitz 2004). Any deviation from these standards may make them subject to much ridicule. Some other jokes may be centred on women's intelligence and personality attributes and their place and housework, including cooking, cleaning, and childcare.

Gender jokes are told to elicit people's laughter; however, they reflect a negative phenomenon that attacks a specific group of people, and thus, may be deemed inappropriate (Pasaribu & Kadarisman 2016: 23). Therefore, investigating sexist jokes is a useful method that helps researchers demonstrate how language is used to stress some gender stereotypes in certain societies.

2.2. Empirical studies

The analysis of sexist jokes has attracted the attention of many researchers recently due to the increased call for equality between men and women. Bemiller & Schneider (2010) investigated how the implications of sexist humour can serve as a form of sexism by exploring the content of several internet jokes. The analysis proved that sexist jokes reflect misogyny that serves many functions, including objectifying women sexually, devaluating their personal and professional abilities, and supporting violence against them. Women's bodies were scrutinised and always needed some modification. In other jokes, however, they were constructed as objects for men's sexual pleasure. In the workplace, women were labelled as unintelligent and never qualified for high ranking positions. More precisely, they were associated with the private sphere (home,

children, and sexuality). Furthermore, if women are not up to the stereotypical expectations of femininity, violence against them is justifiable or even a desirable outcome. Men, on the other hand, were represented as being dissatisfied with marriage.

In the same vein, Nayef & El-Nashar (2015) probed into the stereotypes attached to women in Egyptian sexist internet jokes. The study sheds light on how language is used to maintain gender inequality and masculine hegemony in Egyptian society. The data were collected from the internet and classified according to four themes: women and language; women in public and private spheres; women as sex objects, and Egyptian women compared to non-Egyptian women. The analysis followed Van Dijk's (2008) ideological discourse strategies. The study revealed that men were represented positively as being superior, knowledgeable, and rational. At the same time, women were always depicted as talkative, ignorant, and unfit for the public sphere, such as politics, work, academia, or even driving. Regarding the other two themes, there were only a few jokes depicting women as sex objects due to the conservative culture of the Egyptian society, and Egyptian women were negatively represented when compared to non-Egyptian, be they Arab or Western.

Rashad & Azher (2018) explored the representation of women in jokes on Pakistani social media by concentrating on four themes: women in general, women's skills and intellectual abilities, women as life partners, and teenage girls/young women. The study analysed twenty jokes gathered from different social media sources such as Facebook and Whatsapp based on the GTVH. The study found that women are represented as talkative, ignorant, and devoid of intellect. They are shown to be domineering and intimidating figures as life partners, and the representation of teenage girls/young women reinforces patriarchy in society.

Likewise, Heidari-Shahreza (2019) investigated how Persian males and females were employed in creating humour by analysing jokes collected from a mobile application in light of the GTVH. The study revealed that a significant proportion of online jokes was gender-biased. Persian females were more targeted than males with much focus on their reasoning abilities, beauty and makeup, and general skills. In male-focused humour, however, the trending themes were related to feminine beauty, heterosexual orientation, and social position. The findings proved that Persian verbal humour truly reflects Iranian society, which is shifting from masculine hegemonic concepts to new emerging patterns that are more in favour of Persian females.

Similarly, Cendra et al. (2019) examined gender stereotypes reflected in sexist jokes collected from an online website. The data were analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH). The study concluded that most jokes were targeted at women (90%), and only a small number was targeted at men (10%). Women were stereotyped as talkative, stupid or brainless, and belonging to a lower class than men. They were also represented as sexual objects, emotionally expressive beings, and homemakers. Men, on the other hand, were depicted as being worse than women.

Based on the discussed literature above, it is evident that different studies analysed gender in online humour. However, little attention has been paid to how gender is stereotyped in Arabic jokes, especially during the coronavirus crisis. Therefore, this study adds to the existing literature on the stereotypes reflected in Arabic gender jokes.

3. Methodology

This section includes the data compilation and size and the theoretical frameworks used, namely the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

3.1. Data collection

The data of the study were mainly retrieved from Facebook (FB), where the authors collected Arabic jokes posted by public FB groups such as Nukat Arabiyyah, Nukat, and Nukat Masriyyeh and by their friends. It is worth noting that the posting privacy settings of all compiled jokes are "public," which means that all Facebook users have access to and can see what people post. This is important in two regards; first, it adds to the accessibility of the jokes and the effect they make in society, and second, for research ethics purposes. The researchers also asked their friends to send them any jokes related to the coronavirus on Whatsapp during the time of lockdown. The data were collected from March 1st, when most Arab countries imposed strict measures to fight the coronavirus pandemic, including quarantine, until May 31st, when most of the measures were lifted. The jokes were collected on a weekly basis, starting with the joking groups, followed by public groups, friends, and then WhatsApp. The total number of collected jokes was 1992. In addition to the frequency of circulation of the jokes, the researchers also used GTVH six knowledge resources as a selection criterion to strengthen the analysis and findings. Five hundred sixty-eight jokes (568) were repetitive, and therefore, they were counted only once. The final number of jokes was 1424 (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of jokes based on their sources

Source	No. of Jokes	Duplicate	Total	Percentage
Jokes Group on FB	695	88	607	43%
Public Groups	260	48	212	15%
Friends	218	66	152	11%
WhatsApp	819	366	453	32%
Total	**1992**	**568**	**1424**	**100%**

The 1424 jokes were categorized based on the themes they covered. To validate the classification of the jokes, the researchers asked a jury of three professors of linguistics from different universities in Jordan to review the categorisation. Their feedback was considered and implemented before conducting the analysis. Six themes were generated, namely gender-related jokes (564 jokes), governmental decisions (283 jokes), rule-breaking behaviours (139 jokes), the procedures of Arab Vs. non-Arab countries in fighting the virus (114 jokes), challenges of working from home (94 jokes), and others (230 jokes) as Figure 1 shows.
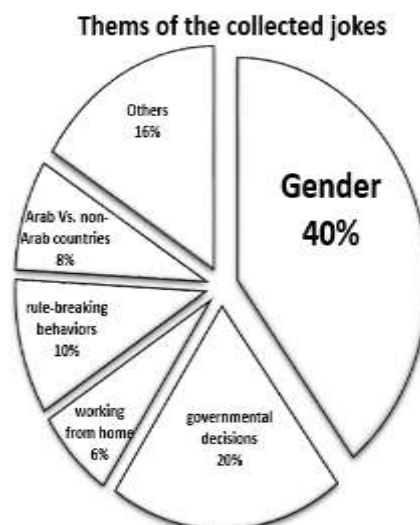

Figure 1. Themes of the collected jokes.

Since gender jokes ranked the highest, they were selected to be the primary concern of this study. Moreover, the 564 collected sexist jokes were categorised into male-and-female-focused jokes and found that the majority (508 jokes) were targeted at women, and only a small number was targeted at men (56 jokes; Figure 2).
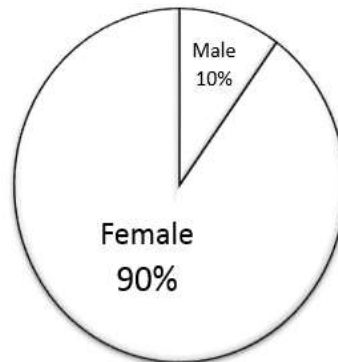

Figure 2. Percentages of jokes targeted at females and males.

3.2. General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH)

The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) was first presented in 1991 by Attardo & Raskin. It has become the most influential framework for the linguistic analysis of humour (Masaeli & Heidari-Shahreza 2016). GTVH is based on the concept of incongruity, which is described as a violation of normal mental patterns and expectations (Morreall 2014). McGhee (1979: 6-7) states that "the terms congruity and incongruity refer to the relationship between components of an object, event, idea, social expectation, and so forth," indicating that when "the arrangement of the constituent elements of an event is incompatible with the normal or expected pattern, the event is perceived as incongruous." This means that jokes first create expectations, which are then violated to elicit laughter "from nothing but the suddenly perceived incongruity between a concept and the real objects that had been thought through it in some relation" (Schopenhauer 1966: 59). It can be simply said that humour results from a contradiction between expectation and experience (Kierkegaard 2009).

Within the GTVH framework, six Knowledge Resources (KRs) are employed to account for the humorous effect of the joke. They are critical parameters in the construction of jokes (Attardo 1994: 227). The KRs proposed in this theory are defined as follows:

1. Script Opposition (SO) entails that a text is considered humorous when two scripts are overlapping and opposing one another. This includes opposite themes such as real/unreal, normal/abnormal, possible/impossible.
2. Logical Mechanism (LM) refers to the mechanism which links the different scripts in the joke so that they can evoke laughter. These include exaggeration, role exchanges, potency mapping, and faulty logic or false analogies.
3. Situation (SI) is the basic background wherein the joke is staged; it is merely the props needed to tell the story.
4. Target (TA) identifies the actors who are the butt of the joke. This labelling is usually based on stereotypes and myths about ethnic groups, professions, etc., and may help develop and solidify them.
5. Narrative strategy (NS) refers to the narrative genre of the joke that includes a simple narrative, a dialogue, or a riddle.
6. Language (LA) is responsible for the exact wording of the joke and the punch line (Attardo 1994: 222-226).

The KRs are hierarchically organised and have a determining relationship to each other based on their strength. According to Attardo (1994: 227), "parameters determine the parameters below themselves and are determined by those above themselves." This means that the higher level KRs determine the lower level KRs by limiting the number of forms they can take. For instance, some script-oppositions can only be functional through certain NSs or TAs. Moreover, the degree of similarity or difference between jokes depends on whether they vary on the higher or lower level KRs.

Although GTVH is not directly concerned with gender, analysing jokes within the framework of this theory sheds light on how gender stereotypes are incorporated in the construction of humour, especially in the analysis of the SO component. Additionally, the Target was essential to determine how gender stereotypes are solidified through the aggression included in sexist jokes.

3.3. Gendered discourse and critical discourse analysis

Discourse on gender refers to "the workings of a particular set of ideas about gender in some segment or segments of society" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2013: 42). Analysing discourse can show the extent to which spoken or written texts are gendered by looking into language use and gender representation. Women and men are usually positioned in discourse in different ways that may or may not correspond to their actual behaviours (Haider, Olimy, & Al-Abbas, 2021). Gender differences may be the most frequently invoked gendered discourse (Cameron 1998). However, women are usually the ones to be constituted unfavourably in discourse when the concepts 'Male as norm' or 'Think male' are continually stressed (Sunderland 2004: 52). In fact, women are depicted in material reality as "the second sex" (Cameron 2003: 457), and the representations of gender and language are meant to maintain gender distinctions in general. There are dominant discourses on these differences. In marriage, "women are more frequently labelled in their roles as wives and widows than men are as husbands and widowers" (Caldas-Coulthard 1995: 231). Women are seen as domestic while men are domestically incompetent. In parenthood, women are depicted as the main parent with the view that good mums stay at home with their children while fatherhood is seen as a part-time task. Regarding women's general traits, they are portrayed as privileging appearance, being jealous of other women, and emotional. Men, on the other hand, are depicted as rational and artists (Sunderland 2004).

Gendered discourse can be analysed from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective. CDA focuses on how language exercises its power in society (Haider 2019). It helps in understanding how ideology functions through language (Breeze 2011; Haider & Hussein 2020; Haider & Olimy 2019) and how language constructs identities and social relationships (Berger 2016). Such identities may not only reflect social reality but also reconstruct it from a particular ideological perspective (Al-Abbas & Haider 2020). This can reproduce or strengthen normalised language ideologies (Moody 2013). To understand how ideologies are established, it is not enough to analyse texts linguistically; the discursive practice which focuses on how these texts are interpreted and received and what social effects they have must also be considered (Fairclough & Wodak 1997).

In CDA, "discourse constitutes society and culture and can produce ideologies" (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 258), which can be understood by analysing the texts as well as the discursive practice, which includes how the texts are interpreted and received and what social effects they have (Fairclough & Wodak 1997). Since discourse may include humour, gender, and sexism (Weatherall 2002: 81), which are the main focus of this study, CDA is used to uncover gender bias that leads to perpetuating stereotypes about women. More precisely, Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional model of CDA is employed as a research tool. This model has different kinds

of analyses that include text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation), and social analysis (explanation).

3.4. Combining GTVH and CDA to investigate gender jokes

Humour is deeply embedded in the cultural context where it is created that it becomes clearly manifested in everyday language use (Kianbakht 2020). It is closely related to the established stereotypical stances, which are already presupposed or reproduced in the community. Jokes can be analysed at the textual micro-level, where stereotypes may be strategically exploited in the discursive practice by jokes creators. Humour is not only for fun; there is always a target that is criticized to elicit laughter by not complying with the approved norms (Archakis et al. 2014). Negative attitudes towards the target can be interpreted by resorting to the macro-level, which involves the ideological effects and hegemonic practices (Blommaert 2005: 29) concerning, in the present study, women's traits.

In this study, the researchers use a combination of methods, namely the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Based on Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional model of CDA, the first dimension (description) is concerned with the linguistic features of the jokes, which were analysed in terms of the GTVH, with much focus being paid to the target of the jokes. In the second dimension (interpretation), a link between the text and its context is established, demonstrating how jokes were formed to produce or enhance stereotypes about women. In the third dimension (explanation), a reference to the historical, social, and cultural contexts is made by explaining the relationship between the content of jokes, mainly the target, and women stereotypes in the Arab societies.

4. Findings and discussion

Female targeting humour consists of 508 jokes that show how Arab females are employed in creating a humorous effect. These jokes were categorised according to the theme of ridicule. To maximise the validity of the classification of the jokes, the same jury was asked to comment on the classification of the jokes. If two out of the three professors suggested the same change, modifications are made. Four categories were generated including 'marital relations' (165 jokes), 'habits and attributes' (132 jokes), 'beauty and makeup' (118 jokes), and 'violence' (93 jokes) as Figure 3 shows.
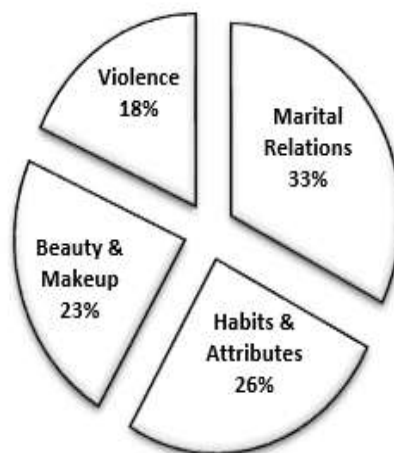

Figure 3. The major themes in the female-focused jokes.

The categories are dealt with separately below. For time and space constraints, the researchers investigated a few jokes only under each category (Table 2) (See Appendix for word-for-word English translation).

Table 2. Jokes discussed in detail

Category	Joke No.	Joke / Translation
Marital Relations	*Joke 1*	زوجة تفحصت تلفون زوجها، ورأت اسم "كورونا"، فطلبت الرقم لتعرف من هي السيدة "كورونا"، فرن التلفون عندها!
		A wife checked her husband's phone and saw the name "Corona." When she called the number to know who "Lady Corona" was, her phone rang!
	Joke 2	بعد القعدة فى البيت، مرتي كل ما تمر من جنبى بتقول: ربنا يخلصنا من هالبلوة.. ما بعرف بتقصد الكورونا ولا تقصدني.
		After staying home, whenever my wife passes by me, she says: May Allah save us from this plague. I do not know if she means the coronavirus or me.
Habits and Attributes	*Joke 3*	فيروس كورونا هو أفضل شيء حدث في حياتي! زوجتي لا تريد السفر بعد الآن، ولم تعد تشتري شيئا لأنه يأتي من الصين، ولم تعد تذهب للمركز التجاري تجنبا للحشود، وتقضي كل وقتها في قناع مع إغلاق فمها! هذا ليس فيروسا وإنما نعمة.
		Coronavirus is the best thing that has ever happened in my life! My wife does not want to travel anymore, and she no longer buys anything because it comes from China. She no longer goes to the mall to avoid crowds, and she wears a mask all the time that keeps her mouth closed! This is not a virus but a blessing.
	Joke 4	حافظ على توازن العلاقة مع زوجتك اثناء وجودك بالمنزل بسبب الحظر. مرة انت غلطان ومرة هي معها الحق!
		Keep a balanced relationship with your wife while you are at home because of the quarantine. One time you are wrong, and another time she is right!
Beauty and Makeup	*Joke 5*	إذا أقفلت صالونات التجميل ، راح نشوف كائنات أخطر من فايروس كورونا
		If beauty salons are closed, we will see creatures that are more dangerous than the coronavirus.
	Joke 6	وزير الصحة يقول: النسوان ملتزمات بالحجر معاليك اللي بالسوق هن النسوان بس بدون مكياج
		Minister of Health says: women are fully committed to the quarantine. Your Excellency, the ones in the market are women but without makeup.
Violence	*Joke 7*	يتعرض الرجل للعنف هذه الفترة... فأيها القوارير رفقا بالبراميل
		Men are exposed to violence during this period (of lockdown) ... oh, Qawareer, i.e., delicate and fragile creatures (women), be kind to barrels (men)
	Joke 8	وفاة رجل إثر إصابته بطنجرة تيفال وهناك تكتم شديد من السلطات لعدم إثارة الهلع بين الرجال
		A man dies after being hit by a Tefal pot, and there is great secrecy from the authorities not to cause panic among men.

The joke selection was based on researchers' observation of the jokes that received the most likes on FB Arabic jokes pages. Besides, the researchers noticed that many friends posted these jokes on their FB pages and received them many times from different sources on Whatsapp, which indicates their heavy circularity among people.

4.1. Marital relations

Most people go into marriage with high expectations to live in tranquility and find happiness, satisfaction, stability, and emotional security. However, many marriages fail to function in this way. Conflicts seem inevitable in any marital relationship with varying degrees; some can be handled while others may tear the marriage apart. The difficulties that spouses face are usually a good theme for jokes representing a stereotypical view of marital life in a humorous way.

4.1.1. Women as despising wives

Joke 1
After staying home, whenever my wife passes by me, she says: May Allah save us from this plague. I do not know if she means the coronavirus or me.

The SOs of like/dislike, good/bad, human/nonhuman, and present/absent have been instantiated in the joke. Incongruity introduced has been resolved by using the LMs of referential ambiguity and false analogy. The coronavirus is seen as a plague that has taken a significant toll on people worldwide and plunged the economy into a global recession. It trapped people at home and restricted their freedom for months. For many women, men staying at home is a source of disturbance that messes life up and changes the daily routines that the family follows. The situation is a woman who passes by her husband and pleads for Allah to save her from the plague. The reference seems to be unclear since she might mean the coronavirus or the husband. Although men are referred to in the joke and seem to be the target, women are seen as despising wives who hate their husbands' stay at home. The joke is a simple narrative that ends with a punchline explaining the feelings women have towards their husbands by using the pun (plague literally/ a source of disturbance metaphorically) which helps in generating the humorous effect.

In the Arab societies, families do not spend a lot of time together because men usually stay long at work since they are responsible for earning money and sustaining household needs. Some women work too, but the majority stay at home for childcare and domestic work. Nevertheless, when most countries went into full coronavirus lockdown, families were forced to spend all day together and work from home wherever possible. This was not a typical situation and brought dismay and anxiety to Arab wives who usually report that their freedom is undermined in their husbands' presence at home. Most women consider their houses the sphere where they rule, and any threat to this dominance is unfavoured. This draws attention not only to the feelings women have towards their husbands but also to the distribution of roles in the society. Men are believed to have the overall control in most aspects of life, and the domestic part is the only part left for women.

4.1.2. Women as annoying life partners

Joke 2
A wife checked her husband's phone and saw the name "Corona." When she called the number to know who "Lady Corona" was, her phone rang!

The SOs of aware/ignorant, annoying/non-annoying, and skeptic/non-skeptic have been used in the joke. The LMs of analogy and inferring consequences have been employed to resolve the incongruity introduced in the SO. As in most marriages, spouses at some point are likely to end their honeymoon, and over time, some may become entrenched in negative feelings towards each other. Some husbands feel annoyed with their wives for different reasons, and this feeling is compared to the irritation caused by the repercussions of the coronavirus spread. Secondly, the consequence has been inferred that, if a phone number is saved with a nickname by a

husband, then it must belong to a lady. This points to one trait that is usually associated with women, which is emotional jealousy. The situation can be assumed that a wife found the name "Corona" saved in her husband's phone. Suspecting that the name refers to a lady, the wife called the number to find that she is the one referred to as "Lady Corona." The joke is targeted at women who are depicted as being a source of annoyance. It is a simple narrative ending with a punchline that clears the doubts that the wife had and establishes the link between her and the coronavirus, both being a source of troubles.

This joke stresses that women are not the only ones to consider their husbands a source of discomfort; the opposite is true as well. More importantly, it highlights a trait that is stereotypically attached to women, being jealous of other women, which goes in line with (Sunderland 2004). This is reflected in what women usually do when they suspect the infidelity of their husbands. They start looking for ways to prove their doubts right or wrong. Although both men and women may be unfaithful to their partners, women are usually portrayed as having the delusion of infidelity. According to Al-Abbas et al. (2020), men are not condemned as much as women for being disloyal in the Arab world, and some people may blame the wife for being unable to keep her husband.

4.2. Habits and attributes

People can be similar or dissimilar, depending on each person's unique characteristics. However, some general traits seem to be attached to men and women all over the world.

4.2.1. Women as talkative, hodophile, and shopaholic

Among the stereotypical attributes of women are that they are talkative and like shopping and travelling, as emphasised in Joke 3.

> **Joke 3**
> *Coronavirus is the best thing that has ever happened in my life! My wife does not want to travel anymore, and she no longer buys anything because it comes from China. She no longer goes to the mall to avoid crowds, and she wears a mask all the time that keeps her mouth closed! This is not a virus but a blessing.*

The SOs of blessing/curse, good/bad, talkative/nontalkative, and love/hate have been employed in this joke. The LMs of false analogy, inferring consequences, and exaggeration were used. Many industries were negatively affected by the evolving humanitarian crisis, and no one can view this as a good happening except for men. It can be inferred that the spread of the coronavirus disease was a good chance for men to reduce household expenses since travelling was banned, and shopping malls were closed in many countries.

Moreover, most countries made face masks compulsory for people to wear in public as a precautionary measure to help prevent the risk of disease transmission. However, wearing a mask does not prevent someone from talking, as suggested by the joke since its primary function is to prevent the coronavirus. This may promote the image of women being talkative, and wearing a mask is considered a useful way to hinder their ability to talk. The situation is not clearly mentioned, but it can be deduced that a man is oddly praising the coronavirus, whose follow-up measures prevented women from spending a lot of money shopping and travelling and reduced their talk. This joke is a simple narrative that ends in a punch line containing two contradicting words, namely blessing, and virus to form the resolution phase.

This joke enhances some stereotypes about women being talkative, spendthrifts, and like travelling. Female talkativeness is deeply ingrained in most cultures, although some studies provided evidence to the contrary (Holmes 1992; Talbot 1998). Furthermore, women's drive for

shopping is based on the concept that they consider it a leisure activity (Woodruffe 1997) and a way of self-expression, fantasy, and a little self-indulgence (Buttle 1992). Regarding travelling, men and women may be similar in their tendencies towards having new experiences, but it has been found that most travel decisions are made by women (Collins & Tisdell 2002; Marzuki et al. 2012). This may be due to different reasons, among which is the gendered division of work in households, where women often have multiple tasks and activities. Therefore, travelling may give them an opportunity to have a break from domestic chores.

4.2.2. Women as irrational and never admit wrongs

Joke 4
Keep a balanced relationship with your wife while you are at home because of the quarantine. One time you are wrong, and another time she is right!

The SOs in Joke 4 can be traced as right/wrong and rational/irrational, and the LM of parallelism has been used to partially resolve the incongruity. To maintain a good relationship with wife, men are advised to act as if they are never right since women are so averse to the notion of being wrong. This indicates not only women's defensive personality traits but also irrationality to which the best reaction would be allowing them to win no matter what. For men, such a reaction would form a prosocial outlet that keeps the relationship working well. The situation that can be inferred from the context is that a man is advising his male fellows on how to maintain a good relationship with their wives by proving them right all the time. The joke is targeted at women in the form of a simple narrative. It ends in a punch line that contains two different clauses that are supposed to be opposites but are used with the same meaning. For a balanced relation, it is expected that one be sometimes right and other times wrong. But using "one time you are wrong" and "another time she is right" leads to one consequence: women are always right, which creates a humorous effect.

 This joke points to another trait attached to women that can be frustrating to their spouses, namely, they are always right and never wrong. However, refusal to admit wrongdoing is not particular to any gender. The issue of seeing one's self as being above errors and never making mistakes is found in both men and women. Psychologically speaking, people who have a fragile ego or brittle self-esteem can never accept they were wrong (Sherman & Cohen 2006). Their defence mechanisms are activated to protect their fragile ego by changing the very facts in their mind. Women in the Arab World have always been treated as inferior to men (Ghoussoub 1987), which may justify this stance.

4.3. Beauty and makeup

Stereotypically, women like to be attractive and try to improve their appearance by using cosmetics and visiting beauty salons. This notion of outer beauty may turn into an obsession that some women find themselves unattractive and unconfident if they are not wearing makeup.

4.3.1. Women as ugly without makeup

Joke 5
If beauty salons are closed, we will see creatures that are more dangerous than the coronavirus.

Different opposing scripts are present in this joke, namely, dangerous/non-dangerous and beautiful/ugly. Women without makeup are depicted as harmful creatures, although they are not

in reality. Incongruity introduced in the SO has been partially resolved by using the LM of inferring consequences. It has been suggested that if women do not visit beauty salons, they will look unattractive. Exaggeration was also employed as a logical mechanism suggesting that women without makeup can be even more dangerous than the coronavirus, which claimed the lives of thousands in a few months. Women are also referred to as "creatures" to point to how different women are when they do not wear makeup that they look less similar to human beings. This hints at the artificial beauty of women that is only improved by the use of cosmetics. The situation is not mentioned, but it can be inferred from the context that men have concerns over the possibility of closing beauty salons as a precautious measure after the outbreak of the coronavirus. The joke is targeted at women using a simple statement that ends in a punch line, which contains a superlative adjective 'more dangerous' to form a resolution phase. Linguistically, it is a conditional sentence, which means that if one condition is (not) there, one should infer its logical consequence.

4.3.2. *Women as less feminine without makeup*

Joke 6
Minister of Health says: Women are fully committed to the quarantine.
Your Excellency, the ones in the market are women but without makeup.

In Joke 6, the SO is feminine/masculine. An additional SO is committed/non-committed. Incongruity introduced in the SO is resolved in the LM, which is faulty reasoning where the Minister of Health fails to recognise that women were not committed to the quarantine imposed by the country during the time of the coronavirus pandemic. The situation is that Minister wrongly thought that women succeeded in locking themselves up in their homes while they were actually out in the market. He simply mistook them for men because they were not wearing makeup. This gives the implication that women with no makeup are more likely to have masculine faces. The joke is targeted at women in a dialogue format, which ends in a punch line clarifying the false belief held by the Minister.

Jokes 5 and 6 point to a stereotype usually associated with women; that is, they highly value appearance. Women's magazines about fashion, hair and makeup, beauty contests, and fashion parades, in addition to the proportion of women who opt for cosmetic surgeries, may help strengthen this stereotype (Sunderland 2004). Some women may use makeup excessively to enhance their beauty, and once they remove it, they look so different. In Arab societies, this difference sometimes leads men to throw mocking comments about women without makeup since all skin problems clearly show, and the overall look is less feminine. What is also noticeable is that women's obsession with makeup is the result of their intrinsic interest in beauty and the need to secure a husband if they are unmarried and maintain their husbands if they are married (Al-Abbas et al. 2020). Sometimes women just like to attract the attention of their families, friends, and others to be complimented for their style and to maintain a certain image about their appearance.

4.4. Violence

4.4.1. *Women as violent partners in their domestic sphere*

Joke 7
Men are exposed to violence during this period (of lockdown)... oh, Qawareer, i.e., delicate and fragile creatures (women), be kind to barrels (men).

Joke 7 triggers SOs, namely violent/gentle and delicate/harsh. Women, who are described as *Qawareer*, literally meaning crystal glass being a symbol of delicateness and kindness, and men are portrayed as barrels being a symbol of harshness. The LM in this joke is represented in role reversals, where men are usually the ones recommended to show kindness, delicateness, and appreciation when dealing with women. However, in this joke, women are depicted to be the violent party who needs to take gentle care of their husbands in their sphere of being home. The situation is inferred that women are advised to be gentler to their husbands. The joke is targeted mainly at women who are reported to be violent and partially at men in the form of a simple narrative. Furthermore, the Language component of GTVH seems at work in the second part of the joke, where the punchline contains two words with opposite features, namely *Qawareer* (delicate and fragile) and *Barameel* (strong and harsh). The first term is quoted from Prophet Mohammad's saying where men are advised to be gentle to women who are described as a crystal glass. Similarly, men are described as barrels to show their harshness and strength.

4.4.2. *Women as harmful beings*

Joke 8
A man dies after being hit by a Tefal pot, and there is great secrecy from the authorities not to cause panic among men.

The SOs were instantiated as violent/gentle, harmful/harmless, dead/alive, and revealed/hidden. The incongruity was resolved through the use of the LM of faulty reasoning and exaggeration. Arab women have always belonged to the private space of the house to take care of the household, while men are the ones responsible for all public activities. This created a sense for the Arab woman that her house is her own belonging that was infringed upon by the prolonged presence of her husband during the lockdown. Being annoyed by the intruding husband, women started acting so violently that they could even harm. This reasoning is not only faulty, but it exaggerates the extent of violence women possess. This enhances the stereotype that women's domain is confined to the house. The situation is about a man who is reported to be killed by his wife using a Tefal pot, and the news was kept hidden not to cause panic among men. This is another aspect where exaggeration was employed since cookers are not expected to be harmful tools that may lead to death. But using this utensil in particular stresses that women's sphere is restricted to the house, and more precisely, to the kitchen. Moreover, women are considered, in reality, harmless creatures that cannot scare men, especially when considering the physical strength of each gender. Men usually try not to show fear over potential dangers to prove their masculinity, but the call to keep the news of murder by a Tefal pot as a secret is used to create the humorous effect. The joke is targeted at women who are reported to be violent when their space is threatened in the form of a simple narrative. The language used is simple and loaded with words that help create a stronger impact in the final statement.

In jokes 7 & 8, women are portrayed as being violent and harmful. However, in reality, violence is usually recorded against women in the Arab world, and it is increasing year by year that at least one out of three women is beaten by her husband, according to surveys in Egypt, Palestine, and Tunisia show (Douki et al. 2003). The image is reversed here, and women's violence against husbands was a significant theme in 20% of the jokes. In fact, the humorous effect is achieved by the low possibility of these acts happening in real life, as women are stereotypically known to be delicate beings who are unlikely to harm. From another perspective, women's violence may be related to the concept mentioned earlier in the analysis that having men at home may threaten the space where women dominate. This again reinforces that women are domestic, which goes in line with the earlier findings of Sunderland (2004).

5. Conclusion

The coronavirus pandemic and its various effects have strongly impacted all aspects of our life including mental health and psychological well-being (Haider & Al-Salman 2020), language motivated coinages and neologisms (Al-Salman & Haider 2021a), translation (Almahasees & Jaccomard 2020), the teaching learning paradigm (Al-Salman & Haider 2021b), to mention a few. This study brings forth how social media jokes can play a role in promoting gender stereotypes during the coronavirus crisis. Arab women were the butt of 90% of the gender jokes created during the coronavirus crisis, while men were limitedly targeted at 10%. Such jokes are found to indirectly support the patriarchal ideology and create a poor social environment for women. Moreover, these jokes portrayed gender stereotypes that have been previously explored in the literature. Women were stereotyped as being ugly creatures whose appearance is improved with cosmetics. They even look less feminine when they do not wear makeup. This focus on outer appearances reinforces the notion of female beauty standards, whose absence is considered a deviation from the norm. This is consistent with the previous findings of some research articles (Weitz, 2004; Bemiller & Schneider 2010; Heidari-Shahreza 2019).

Additionally, many jokes stereotype women as being annoying wives who can cause their husbands a lot of disturbance. They are portrayed as jealous partners who do not trust or like their spouses. Other stereotypes about women's attributes, such as being talkative, materialistic, and in love with travel and shopping, and never admit wrongs, were also observed in the jokes. The same findings of women being talkative were also discussed by some researchers (see Nayef & El-Nashar 2015; Rashad & Azher 2018; Cendra et al. 2019). Women were also stereotyped as being irrational which confirms the previous findings of some scholars (see Bemiller & Schneider 2010; Rashad & Azher 2018; Heidari-Shahreza 2019). Furthermore, some jokes seem to portray women as practicing violence against their husbands at home, which contrasts reality. Women are usually the ones victimised domestically, but this opposite image was intended to create a humorous effect. Women as domineering and intimidating life partners were also discussed by Rashad & Azher (2018). There were also implications that women's violence resulted from infringing upon their private sphere being home. This notion of women as homemakers goes in line with the findings of some studies (Bemiller & Schneider 2010; Nayef & El-Nashar 2015; Cendra et al. 2019).

Although these jokes were created to elicit laughter during hard times, it must be noted that such type of discourse may unintentionally produce and reinforce negative stereotypes that circulate fast in the virtual world. The stereotypes indicated in the body of the jokes created during the coronavirus were not different from those created in other periods. The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies stressing that these jokes are meant to enhance the already established stereotypes about women. What may be significant about this period is the high productivity and circularity of gender jokes. During the lockdown period, people had nothing to do but to spend most of their time on social media websites, and this, in turn, may have its contribution in (further) consolidating these stereotypes in people's minds.

This paper points to the role gender jokes may have regarding existing stereotypes and ideologies. Gender jokes are based on taken-for-granted ideas shared in a community, and this may draw attention to the gender biases that are established and disseminated on the internet. Therefore, social media users need to be aware of the pejorative and exaggerative nature of the stereotypes entailed in the online sexist jokes that spread widely and quickly.

This study focused on gender jokes that stereotype Arab women. Future research may investigate jokes related to a certain social group or geographical region in a different period to demonstrate the stereotype they propagate. A contrastive study may be conducted to reveal differences between stereotypes related to Arab and non-Arab women.

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