

Negotiating Gender Roles in Dual-Income Marriages in Lebanon

A Study of Couples Seeking Counseling in Beirut

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I- Acknowledgment

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Disclaimer: During the preparation of this proposal, AI-assisted tools, specifically ChatGPT and Grammarly, were used for limited language support, such as checking grammar and lightly polishing phrasing. The conceptualization of the study, the analytical reasoning, and the arguments presented in this work remain entirely my own.

II- Abstract

Lebanon is a small country located on the eastern coastline of the Mediterranean Sea. This geographical position makes it a crossroads of the East and the West, and this is reflected in Lebanese society, which is considered a mosaic of cultures and religious beliefs. This unique context enables Western progressive ideologies to coexist with and compete against Arabic/Middle Eastern conservative beliefs.

In this environment, the institution of marriage is particularly significant as it remains the exclusive legitimate pathway to family formation. This makes it not only a key space for romantic and intimate commitment, but also a social and ideological commitment in which individuals are expected to maintain and pass on their cultural systems.

The life of a married couple within this melange of external influences and internalized social norms is highly challenging, as everyday activities might expose partners to numerous cracks where tension might rise over conflicting beliefs and views.

However, since 2005 until the date of writing this proposal, Lebanon has been undergoing a series of political, social, and financial turmoil, in addition to numerous large-scale wars and armed clashes. Under the weight of these crises, and given Lebanon's capitalist liberal economic system, the one-breadwinner family model has become unsustainable, making it necessary for both partners in a marriage to enter the labor market to sustain the needs of a household.

As women became increasingly financially independent, the gendered hierarchy between married partners became increasingly difficult to sustain. At the same time, while women became co-contributors to their households' financial survival, men did not reciprocate by becoming co-contributors to domestic labor and care work within their households. This asymmetry in the transformation of gender roles and expectations within marriages makes gender inequality more pronounced in the Lebanese context, as men remain attached to patriarchal privileges and women are left to juggle their careers, care work, and social expectations on their own.

While gender inequality in Lebanon is examined thoroughly, less attention has been given to how gendered power dynamics are renegotiated between partners and how this tension is managed within the context of marriage. This study addresses this gap as it examines how marital problems unfold in the context of couples seeking counseling. The therapeutic space holds distinct significance, as it may be able to articulate structural inequalities and rigid social norms by repackaging them in a language of emotional well-being and relational growth.

The study targets married couples aged 30 to 50 living in the Greater Beirut Area who are currently undergoing or have recently undergone counseling. It also targets therapists and counselors who will be interviewed as experts on this subject, providing professional insights into recurring patterns and dynamics observed in practice.

Data will be gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with all participants. The recruitment process will systematically target participants from different districts across the Greater Beirut Area to couples and experts with diverse backgrounds.

Although this recruitment process is designed to ensure a diverse sample, it might not reach lower social classes due to the cost of couples therapy services.

Given the sensitivity of the topic under study in this research, all interviews will be conducted in a psychology clinic to ensure high standards of confidentiality and ethical conduct.

Keywords: Gender expectations; marital conflicts; couples counseling; power dynamics; intimacy; division of labor; financially independent couples; Greater Beirut Area; Lebanon.

1. Introduction

Across almost all societies worldwide, marriage remains one of the most celebrated social occasions. According to two different market reports, the global economic size of the wedding services sector was approximately 1 trillion USD in 2025, with projections to reach 3 trillion USD in 2034 (Grand View Research, 2026; Towards Consumer Goods, 2025). The scale of this economic investment in celebrating this institution reflects the depth of its social and cultural significance.

This poses a critical question: why is marriage given such significance compared to other social occasions that are arguably equally important? This question becomes significantly more interesting when we look beyond the romanticized aspect of marriage as a product of intimacy and romance between two partners, since this concept is a relatively new social ideal in modern human history. Scholars refer to this concept as companionate marriage, in which emotional intimacy is central, and argue that this romantic view emerged only after the Industrial Revolution (Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006), whereas weddings have historically been major social celebrations. Even today, as companionate marriage is considered the norm, the intimate relationship of a couple is subject to complex societal pressures (Deeb, 2024). Thus, the significance of this institution should be understood beyond the individual romantic context, as the creation of a new social unit that contributes to the continuity and survival of a community.

For a community to survive, it is not only a matter of biological reproduction; it is also the survival of its identity through the reproduction of cultural norms (Yuval-Davis, 2003). In this reproduction, gender norms and expectations are also passed down through generations as core elements of communal identity, making them important factors that organize and shape the lives of individuals in broader society and within households.

By recognizing the centrality of gender within households and families, and how it shapes roles and dynamics while also reproducing itself, it becomes necessary to treat marital conflicts not only as individual incompatibility but also as products of environmental pressures that constantly influence relational expectations.

In the Lebanese context, the marital institution holds nuanced significance that can only be understood by recognizing the pluralism for which this country is praised. In fact, Pope St. John Paul II famously said: "Lebanon is more than a country; it is a message of freedom and an example of pluralism for East and West" (John Paul II, 1989). Despite being one of the smallest countries on the map and having endured a brutal civil war for 15 years, the Lebanese population is still considered a

colorful mosaic, especially because the Lebanese constitution recognizes 18 religious sects and protects their freedom and rights (Henley, 2016).

This romanticized pluralism, though, poses serious challenges, as each community becomes more concerned with protecting and maintaining its distinct identity and norms, fearing its dilution in the wider population. This collective anxiety leads to giving marriage greater significance, treating it as the primary means of ensuring the continuity and survival of each group (Allouche, 2019). This nuance is especially important in Lebanon, where family formation is exclusively legitimized through religious marriages.

This sectarian gateway to family formation is highly problematic because it creates a structural gender inequality that extends beyond marriages, as a unified personal status law does not exist in Lebanon. This puts a big part of civil rights under the governance of religious sectarian authorities, which significantly privileges men over women across all sects (Mikdashi, 2022).

While the structural gender hierarchy in Lebanon remains rigid, the Lebanese economic landscape has shifted significantly over the past two decades, transforming the lives of married couples and pressuring them to adopt new arrangements to sustain their households. This shift can be easily observed over the past two decades, especially since 2005, a year that sparked a series of political and economic crises that have profoundly reshaped everyday life.

One relevant example that illustrates how this transformation affected households is the rising cost of home ownership, which ballooned after the 2006 July war, with annual double-digit percentage increases between 2006 and 2010 (Nassereddine, 2014). Prior to this period, particularly before 2006, homeownership in the Greater Beirut Area (GBA) was relatively affordable compared to average income, and it was considered the norm for young men to have an apartment before proposing marriage.

The increase in housing prices that started in 2006 was accompanied by an expansion of the Lebanese banking sector, which offered a bouquet of loans and long-term mortgages, which, in turn, kept pushing up prices. As a result, homeownership remained accessible primarily through mortgage loans, which required two incomes to secure approval, leading many couples to apply jointly for mortgages before their weddings. This shift marked a transformation in women's contribution to family formation, as they became co-owners and co-providers (World Bank, 2015; Abboud et al., 2022). Considering that these mortgages were long-term plans that stretched between 20 and 30 years, women's paid labor increasingly became a necessity for a household's survival.

The 2019 financial collapse once again transformed marriages and household arrangements in Lebanon. After a major financial and banking crisis caused the Lebanese Pound to lose more than 90% of its value (Baz et al., 2025), mortgages and bank loans were no longer available. Banks also resorted to informal capital controls, freezing the majority of deposits and savings accounts in foreign currencies, thereby shifting the burden of the crisis onto ordinary households, who were unable to withdraw or transfer money from their accounts (World Bank, 2020; Reuters, 2025). Facing this new reality, couples seeking marriage resorted to renting apartments as the only viable option to access housing. Compared to joint home ownership, renting is a less stable option that introduces a new form of financial anxiety into the daily lives of married couples. What is especially relevant for this study is that during this period, wages plummeted, especially in male-dominated sectors such as the armed forces, making women the primary breadwinners in numerous households. (Salti & Mezherm, 2020; Associated Press, 2022).

Although this overview of the Lebanese context is simplified, it nevertheless highlights how gender roles evolved significantly, while the structural framework and social norms remained unhinged. In this sense, the concept of the incomplete gender revolution explains how women have quickly adapted to changing economic conditions by entering and sustaining their participation in the labor market, while the general perception of men as the primary breadwinners and women as the primary caretakers remained unchanged (England, 2010).

In the same vein, Drieskens (2008) described the experience of married couples in the Middle East as living in a state of liminality, a transitional phase between two stages, belonging to neither the previous state nor the new one (van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969). This concept frames the experience of couples in this Lebanese context as one that neither fully operates within traditional arrangements nor fully transitions to more egalitarian ones. This creates a daily experience of contradictions between lived reality and the existing framework of gendered expectations, which significantly adds to the stressors posed by the volatile situation in Lebanon and becomes a significant source of frustration in marriages.

This daily challenge is further intensified by the fear of social judgment and exclusion, especially in tightly knit communities like Lebanon, where married couples avoid openly expressing these challenges, even between themselves. This social pressure pushes couples to maintain the appearance of stability and conformity, even when this façade is built on social anxiety and comes at the cost of their personal well-being. As a result, these contradictions remain mostly within the

private sphere of the relationship or the household, where they may manifest as emotional distance (Joseph, 2010; Mikdashi, 2022).

As the challenges are becoming increasingly intolerable, therapy and counseling are becoming a familiar destination that couples seek to maintain their marriages. In the nuanced context of Lebanon, therapy arguably extends beyond the therapeutic framework to serve as a space that shields couples from social pressures and enables them to articulate their concerns. From a Foucauldian perspective, therapy can be compared to a confessional space where personal experiences are given meaning in a controlled environment. (Foucault, 1978).

The significance of the therapeutic space in this sense is in its ability to treat tensions rooted in structural inequalities through a depoliticized language of healthy relational dynamics. This approach not only might enable couples to renegotiate gendered expectations, but it does so without directly addressing or naming them (Illouz, 2008). This may contribute to gradually phasing out gender hierarchy from a couple's relationship.

A substantial body of knowledge on changing gender roles and marital power dynamics already exists, but the context of Lebanon, with its rich diversity and the rapid socio-economic transformations, is particularly important to investigate.

This study focuses on married couples seeking therapy in this specific context. This analytical scope is chosen because these couples are already engaged in articulating their relational tensions and speaking out about conflicts and contradictions that often remain unspoken in other social settings and everyday life.

Examining the experiences of these couples helps this study build on the extensively researched issue of gender inequality within marriage by exploring how couples process such inequalities in the context of therapy. This goes one step further by proposing a new perspective on therapy as a possible entry point for challenging and unsettling broader gendered power structures by embracing an alternative relational model built on egalitarian values, one couple at a time.

2. Research Question

How do couples in the Greater Beirut Area negotiate and reinterpret gendered power relations within marriage in the context of shifting economic roles and therapeutic intervention?

- What forms of tension or conflict emerge from these changing roles within marital relationships?
- How do social norms and the fear of social exclusion shape the ways couples express, suppress, or manage these tensions?
- To what extent do therapeutic interventions contribute to transforming, maintaining, or reconfiguring gendered power relations?
- How do therapists themselves interpret and mediate gender-related tensions within couples?

3. Theoretical Framework

In this research adopts a feminist social constructionist approach to gender where gender norms and roles are not considered characteristics human beings. Instead, they are treated as social constructs, formed and passed on through generations, and reinforced through daily interactions. This approach is crucial because it enables this study to consider gender roles as performative actions rather than predetermined characteristics by biology (Butler, 1990), thus enabling their challenge and transformation. Within this perspective, intimate relationships are seen as one of the primary spaces where gendered power dynamics are experienced and reproduced through everyday interactions (West and Zimmerman, 1987). This approach is also reinforced with Shefer and Foster's (2001) argument that heterosexual intimacy is not a neutral private domain, but a site where power and gendered expectations are continuously reproduced and negotiated.

The study also uses the concept of the incomplete gender revolution argued by Paula England (2010), through which enables the understanding of changes in gender roles and expectations in the private sphere in relation to wider societal and structural shifts. This perspective is especially relevant for discussing the burden imposed on women by considering reproductive labor and care work their primary responsibility, even as they increasingly enter education and the labor market (Fraser, 2017; Hochschild, 1989). This asymmetry between women, on one hand, adapting to new financial responsibilities as co-providers, and men on the other hand often remaining attached to patriarchal privileges and not participating enough in care work and domestic duties, produces persistent tensions within heterosexual relationships, as traditional gender norms coexist with a new lived reality.

This study combines the concept of the incomplete gender revolution with Drieskens' (2008) work which describes the lived experience of married couples in contemporary Beirut during the process of social transformation as a state of liminality. Drieskens argues that couples in Middle Eastern urban settings increasingly find themselves positioned somewhere in between, moving away from arrangements based on traditional patriarchal ideals but not fully reaching egalitarian forms of partnership and power dynamics. This is especially relevant to this research, considering the ambiguity this condition imposes on a relationship, which might make sustaining a marriage more challenging, as both partners remain in a kind of testing phase of their relational model.

This study also examines power dynamics and hierarchy within households not only as private arrangements between partners but also as products of society-wide gender norms that naturalize men's authority (Kandiyoti, 1988; Walby, 1990). This understanding is particularly true in the Lebanese context, which is deepened by Mikdashi's (2022) concept of sextarianism. Mikdashi argues that in the case of Lebanon, sex and sect are interconnected in shaping gendered power dynamics within private households and families, as personal status codes institutionalize patriarchal privileges. Additionally, critical masculinities studies complement the understanding of gender norms and expectations by arguing that masculine identity remains closely tied to authority and by highlighting the significance of maintaining this identity in contexts of economic instability (Connell, 2005; Ghannam, 2022).

In addition to the concepts and theories adopted by this study, special attention is given to the cultural pressure to protect a household and family's privacy. This nuance is particularly significant, as it explains how maintaining a certain image and reputation discourages the open expression of private and intimate conflict and pushes it behind an artificial façade of a healthy relationship. As a result, this study carefully unpacks the discourse and experiences shared by participants, since gendered tensions may be expressed indirectly through relational issues such as emotional distance.

This research extends its theoretical reasoning by approaching therapy and counseling through the Foucauldian concept of confessional spaces. From this perspective, therapeutic settings can be understood as structured environments where couples are encouraged to articulate and discuss tensions rooted in gender inequality. But this discussion is enabled only through a depoliticized filter that translates it into a language of emotional well-being and relational growth.

One final central theoretical approach this study relies on is Haraway's concept of situated knowledges. Using this concept, the accounts of participants and the interpretations of the research

are understood to be shaped by their own social standing and lived experiences. Hence, this study does not claim or seek to produce neutral or detached findings, but rather values each shared experience from interviewees along with the researcher's reflexivity to produce a nuanced addition to the body of knowledge.

By bridging these frameworks and concepts, the study aims to examine the experiences of couples who have sought therapy to address their marital tensions, and to explore how much these tensions can be traced to gender norms and expectations. Additionally, this study investigates how therapy might advance social transformation towards gender equality by nurturing egalitarian values and practices at the level of households and nuclear families.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Gender Roles, Power, and Marriage

“We are all born naked and the rest is drag,” RuPaul’s famous quote perfectly captures the first theme explored in this literature review. It is crucial to challenge the normalization and naturalization of gender roles and to treat them as neither natural nor fixed, but rather socially constructed through everyday practices (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1990). Being socially constructed norms, gender norms are sustained and passed on primarily through the process of social reproduction. This understanding puts the marital institution at the center of reproducing gender hierarchy, since it is the primary pathway to family formation, especially in Middle Eastern contexts (Lorber, 1994; Joseph, 2010). In the Lebanese context, this is especially relevant, as even marriages based on personal choice remain heavily influenced by social pressures around religious belonging and gender norms (Deeb, 2024).

As household arrangements developed and changed over history, the last century naturalized and normalized one particular model across most societies. In this model, individual responsibilities are organized along clear gender lines, positioning men as providers and protectors, while women as caregivers responsible for domestic and emotional labor (Lindsey, 2015; Eagly & Wood, 2012). This arrangement became normalized and naturalized through overlapping systems of patriarchal power embedded in institutions and social norms. Colonialism also played a major role in spreading and legitimizing this model across different societies, as colonial powers imposed it on colonized societies, framing it as a universal ideal of civilization (Lugones, 2007). Although this arrangement created a clear gender hierarchy, functionalist scholars presented this inequality as a necessary compromise that serves the well-being of the nuclear family (Parsons & Bales, 1955).

Despite being established as the default household structure, Feminist scholars challenged this narrative and argued that such roles are not simply functional but are built on unequal distributions of power that privilege men's authority and enable the exploitation of women's unpaid labor by framing it as a natural extension of female biology rather than work that must be recognized and valued (Walby, 1990; Lorber, 1994).

As these gendered arrangements are passed on through generations, the feminization of unpaid domestic labor and caregiving not only became naturalized but also romanticized as a core characteristic of womanhood and motherhood (Federici, 2012; Fraser, 2017). This belief persisted even as women entered the labor market and increasingly contributed to their families' financial well-being (Bianchi et al., 2012). In this sense, Hochschild's (1989) concept of the "second shift" remains highly relevant, especially as men did not reciprocate by participating in care work and domestic labor, leaving women to juggle between career responsibilities and care work on their own.

The second shift or the double burden, is a major challenge for women in Lebanon, where they continue to be treated as the primary bearers of unpaid care work despite the necessity of their earnings for household survival (Abi Akl, 2023). Time-use surveys highlight this unequal division of household responsibilities in the context of Lebanon, as women reportedly perform 94 percent of all childcare responsibilities, while 56 percent of unemployed women identify childcare responsibilities as a reason for their unemployment (ESCWA, 2024; Charmes, 2019).

In *The Prophet* (1923), Gibran Khalil Gibran wrote, "Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself." He continues, "You may give them your love but not your thoughts, / For they have their own thoughts." Although written a century ago, Gibran's reflection on the role parents play in shaping their children's worldviews remains relevant, especially in showing how gender roles are passed down to the next generation. These roles are not necessarily exclusive to parenthood, but rather extend to all household members, socializing girls from an early age to provide care for their brothers and other family members, while boys are more likely to enjoy the privilege of simply being children, or even given the authority and responsibility to supervise their sisters. A similar pattern is evident in emotional labor and affection, as women and girls are expected to maintain harmony and preserve the household's emotional well-being by being more understanding and emotionally available (Tronto, 1993, 2016).

Although feminist gender scholarship began as a discipline mainly concerned with women and women's issues, particularly in response to a long tradition of knowledge production shaped by men and for men, it has since expanded beyond an exclusive focus on women to encompass all

gender identities, including men and masculinities. This is reflected in the development of Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (CSMM), a field that unpacks masculine identities rather than treating men as a monolithic category. As Hearn and Howson (2024) argue, the field has increasingly moved toward a more postcolonial and transnational approach, paying closer attention to how masculinities are shaped by migration and armed conflict. This is especially relevant to the present study, as it allows masculine identity in Lebanon to be understood not as a natural extension of being a man, nor as universal or fixed, but as socially produced through beliefs and practices closely tied to power and hierarchy. Connell's (2005) work remains central in this area, particularly in showing how masculine identity is often tied to authority and how hegemonic forms of masculinity derive legitimacy through broader social consent rather than force alone.

This approach is important for understanding that gendered power relations within marriage cannot be reduced to private arrangements between individuals, but are shaped by cultural beliefs that naturalize men's authority and women's service. In Middle Eastern contexts, literature shows that men are also pressured to conform to these expectations and may face severe social judgment if they fail to do so (El Feki et al., 2017; Ghannam, 2022). In Lebanon, men who do not conform to the dominant image of masculinity are ridiculed by referring to them in terms like "jawz el set," which translates roughly to "the husband of the lady," and "broom pilot" which is especially used when a man participates in domestic labor. These expressions are drawn from the researcher's lived experience and are used here to illustrate the social pressures exerted on men, when their behaviors are mostly egalitarian and respectful, but therefore seen as challenging the patriarchal superiority ideal.

In Middle Eastern contexts, studies have shown that masculinity is often strongly tied to productivity, which can be a challenging role to fulfill in the context of economic instability (Ghannam, 2013, 2022). The concept of proletarian masculinity becomes especially relevant in this environment, as it emphasizes that the loss of a man's earnings or employment is not only an economic loss for a household but also a major threat to his manhood, as his self-image is constructed around productivity (Ramaswamy, 2006).

At the same time, masculine identity may also be linked to caring for and nurturing loved ones, alongside breadwinning and the expectation to provide protection when needed (Ghannam, 2013; Naguib, 2015). What further complicates masculinity is that these traits are only socially valued when men appropriately balance them across different social settings, rather than embodying them at once. The tension caused by these norms and expectations is important for the present study

because it shows that men too experience pressure and instability in trying to inhabit socially valued forms of masculinity, especially under volatile social and economic conditions. (Farahani & Thapar-Björkert, 2020).

The Lebanese context adds another layer to this discourse, where religion and religious norms reinforce expectations of femininity around sacrifice and caregiving, while continuing to privilege masculinity through provision and decision-making (Thomas, 2013; Ghannam, 2022). The complexity is not simply in the presence of religious influence, but in the plurality of sectarian frameworks. In this sense, different sects have distinct power structures, creating distinct lived realities for couples who face similar challenges but belong to different sects (Joseph, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Mikdashi, 2022).

4.2 Changing Gender Roles and the Incomplete Gender Revolution

The first section of this literature review argues that gender roles are socially constructed and that conforming to gendered expectations is not a one-dimensional task, but a complex and contextual process. This section adds another layer of complexity by arguing that these roles are also rapidly shifting under the pressure of socio-economic transformations, and that the challenge of adapting to such changes may itself become an additional source of tension within marriages and nuclear families.

Numerous factors are pressuring households to adopt new arrangements, and in many cases this transformation is seen a transition toward a more egalitarian gender dynamic (Goldscheider et al., 2015). An important nuance should be emphasized here though, the problem is not the transformations themselves, but the asymmetrical impact they have on men and women. For example, economic pressures have made women's paid labor increasingly necessary for household survival, while social and gender norms that consider a woman's primary responsibility to be the unpaid domestic labor and care work have often remained unchanged. This resulted in doubling the burden on women, while men have to a certain extent, remained attached to patriarchal privilege, despite not being the sole provider of their families. As a result, what was presented as a functional division of labor within the household becomes disrupted, while the unequal compromises that made this model work remained in place.

England (2010) conceptualizes this transformation as the incomplete gender revolution. This concept acknowledges the importance of women's increased participation in education and paid labor in reshaping gendered power dynamics, while also emphasizing that inequality will persist as long as men do not transition into equal partners in the unpaid labor and care work that sustain their

households, in particular, and social reproduction in general. Scholars argue that although women gained greater financial independence, but since they are still considered as the default provider of care-work and domestic labor, these gains often remained partial and did not fully materialize into egalitarian partnerships within households (Goldscheider et al., 2015; Hochschild, 1989).

Couples experiencing this rift between lived reality and societal pressures may be described as living in a state of liminality, stuck in the transitional phase between what could become a new household structure and the resistance to fully realizing this change (van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969; Drieskens, 2008). Although both partners can be affected by the uncertainties of this liminal state, they do not experience it equally. For women, this hybrid condition is often more demanding and less rewarding, as they carry multiple burdens without necessarily gaining equal recognition or authority within the households. Men, by contrast, may experience pressure and a sense of threatened identity (Ghannam, 2022), yet patriarchal social norms and institutional regulations, especially in Middle Eastern contexts, continue to privilege them, without necessarily imposing additional burdens (Fraser, 2017; Joseph, 2010; Mikdashi, 2022).

Consequently, married couples may continue to maintain an unequal division of labor and responsibilities in their daily lives, while changes remain confined to a few symbolic aspects like verbal recognition. This leads women to feel stuck between the potential to establish egalitarian partnerships without actually reaching it, which often generates new forms of tensions (England, 2010). The gap between aspiring to achieve a meaningful relational transformation on the one hand and unfair practices influenced by social pressures to conform on the other becomes a central site of conflict, since gender roles are not always explicitly communicated between partners but instead they are shaped by deeply internalized norms within heterosexual intimacy (Shefer & Foster, 2001).

In the Lebanese context, this analysis becomes particularly significant because of the speed at which these changes unfolded. Since 2005, the country has experienced consecutive crises, beginning with the assassination of the Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and the subsequent reshaping of the political landscape (International Monetary Fund, 2006). The destabilization expanded beyond the political status quo, transforming Lebanon's socio-economic landscape. A simple comparison between average income and average housing costs in the mid-2000s and the present reflects the magnitude of this transformation, especially in urban areas where real estate prices have sharply increased, rendering housing increasingly unaffordable (World Bank, 2016; UN-Habitat, 2022). These crises gradually intensified, peaking from 2019 onward, after the financial collapse of the government and the banking sector, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Beirut port explosion, and most

recently, the armed conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, which resulted in the displacement of more than one million residents (Reuters, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

While these events continued to unfold like a chain reaction, reshaping the socio-economic context of Lebanon, the legal, sectarian, and cultural frameworks remained relatively static, unable to accommodate changing gender roles, and therefore leaving marriages and family life under the governance of religious and institutional patriarchal power structures (Joseph, 2010; Thomas, 2013; Mikdashi, 2022). In Beirut specifically, Drieskens (2008) shows that while household arrangements changed, the social perception of marriage and gender hierarchy remained rooted in older norms. This mismatch between the lived reality and the normalized beliefs is central to this study, since couples live in conditions that require renegotiating responsibilities, yet the collective normative view of marriage continues to be primarily shaped by inherited gendered frameworks.

The scholarship reviewed in this section suggests that tensions within heterosexual intimacy are not rooted solely in individual incompatibility and emotional variables, but are also situated in a wider discourse of structural inequalities and incomplete social transformation. Therefore, this study examines participants' experiences of coping with this volatile environment and the anxiety caused by the lack of stability through a gendered lens that places gendered power dynamics at the center of the analysis.

4.3 Therapy as a Site of Renegotiating Power

The framework developed in the two previous sections argues how marital intimate conflicts might be rooted in structural gender hierarchy and cultural beliefs and norms on the one hand, especially during rapid changes in the socio-economic landscape. And explained the relevance of this approach within the context of Lebanon, and how the last two decades have transformed the lived experience of married couples and made inherited norms increasingly incompatible with reality. This sequence leads to a central question: where and how are these tensions expressed, negotiated, or contained?

In this area, couples therapy and counseling are increasingly sought as possible spaces for addressing relational tensions. Although these settings receive more attention in the psychology literature than in feminist gender scholarship, they hold particular value for this study because they provide a distinct safe space that encourages couples to articulate and discuss their conflicts and make sense of the contradictions they experience. From a critical gender perspective, therapeutic spaces offer a rich material for examination, as gender expectations are brought into a relatively controlled environment where they can be negotiated.

Although couples may seek counseling to address dissatisfaction and emotional disconnection, the therapeutic process often begins by tracing inherited relational patterns that shape a patient's cognitive understanding of marital norms and roles (Bowen, 1978; Johnson, 2004). At the same time, structural inequality is also a central theme in therapy, as Real (2007) argues that intimacy demands democracy and that patriarchal power dynamics are incompatible with this relational system. This nuance is especially significant to the present study, since companionate marriage is based on an intimate choice and increasingly relies on emotional intimacy as a key force holding the relationship together, particularly in contexts where both partners have some degree of financial independence. In such cases, marriage is less likely to be sustained solely through material dependency, which makes tensions around equality more central to the relationship and less likely to be quietly tolerated.

When examined from a sociological angle, therapeutic interventions are not only spaces for dealing with emotional pain, but also frameworks through which people make sense of their lived experiences (Illouz, 2008). This is similar to Foucault's concept of a confessional space, where it becomes socially acceptable to articulate and negotiate issues that would be difficult to name in other settings (Foucault, 1978). In this sense, tensions rooted in structural inequalities, gender hierarchies, and patriarchal power dynamics can be brought into therapy precisely because they are reframed in a depoliticized language of emotions, communication, and relational distress. The end goal is then expressed as emotional well-being and relational growth, rather than as a direct challenge to patriarchal structures.

In other words, by interpreting structural and cultural inequalities through emotional and relational language, therapy may depoliticize gendered tension between partners. Yet this process can also create a small crack in the status quo surrounding rigid patriarchal norms and beliefs, serving as an entry point for challenging inherited assumptions about gender roles (Foucault, 1978; Illouz, 2008; Real, 2007). By doing so, normalized inequality within marriage becomes visible and can be addressed through a language of mutual growth and household well-being, rather than explicitly adopting a rebellious stance against social conformity and cultural norms.

In this sense, the therapeutic approach may reduce the risk of patriarchal resistance, especially since it is confined to a private space that is relatively shielded from social scrutiny. At the same time, emotional attachment may also serve as leverage to bring men to the negotiation table, as romantic interdependence can increase men's perspective-taking on gender inequality (Cross et al., 2025). This approach does not remove the structural nature of gender inequality; instead, it

creates a less confrontational pathway for renegotiating gendered expectations and power dynamics within the nuclear family.

This framework is especially significant in the context of Lebanon, given the rigid social norms surrounding household privacy and family reputation that often discourage public articulation of private issues (Joseph, 2010; Thomas, 2013). An important nuance to emphasize here is that these norms not only affect parents within a given household but are also transmitted to children, often even more strictly. The gendered socialization that starts from early childhood can produce an internalized sense of shame that persists into adulthood, when individuals begin to question the legitimacy of the relational model they inherited from their parents. Therapy may therefore become one of the few socially approved spaces where many of these interconnected structural tensions ultimately funnel. In this sense, examining the experiences of couples seeking therapeutic intervention becomes an exercise in retracing and mapping individual and relational challenges back to inherited broader structural and social inequalities, while also observing whether an egalitarian model is emerging along the way.

4.4 Research Gap and Contribution

The literature reviewed in this study offers valuable insight into the social construction and reproduction of gendered power dynamics within marriage and the nuclear family, and into how these dynamics sustain inequality across generations. It also highlights the tensions and contradictions that married couples face as rapidly shifting socio-economic realities collide with relatively static structural and cultural gender hierarchies. At the same time, the literature on therapy suggests that therapeutic settings occupy a valuable position from which such tensions can be articulated, interpreted, and potentially renegotiated. By bringing these three areas together, this study aims to move beyond understanding therapy solely as a space for interpersonal well-being and instead examine it as a possible entry point for nurturing more egalitarian values that challenge inherited gendered expectations that manifest in the intimate relational life, particularly in a non-Western setting such as Lebanon.

To do so, the study investigates couples who have undergone therapy or are currently in therapy, as their experience is considered a particularly revealing site for examining gendered tensions and relationship conflict. This research also focuses on how gender hierarchy is articulated and verbalized within heterosexual intimacy, how inherited gendered expectations are reworked in practice, and whether therapy may create the conditions for a broader cognitive and political shift toward more egalitarian gender power dynamics.

5. Research Design and Methodology:

5.1 Geographical Context

The geographical context selected for this study is the Greater Beirut Area (GBA), Lebanon's largest and most densely populated urban region, which offers multiple analytical advantages as the country's primary economic center. Located almost in the middle of the Lebanese coastal front, the GBA includes Beirut and its adjacent municipalities in Mount Lebanon Governorate, extending from the Damour River in the south to Nahr al-Kalb in the north, and encompassing parts of the districts of Aley, Baabda, and Metn. Its high population density and social diversity make it a particularly valuable site for this research, as it brings together residents from diverse sectarian, socioeconomic, and regional backgrounds, offering a rich setting for observing social transformation and evolving family dynamics.

Considering that this study focuses on dual-income households, GBA is especially suitable, since this arrangement is most likely to be found there than in other urban regions in Lebanon. As the country's primary economic and administrative center, it attracts a large share of the population seeking employment, education, and business opportunities. Although dual-income households have not historically been a characteristic of this population, this model has increased significantly over the past 20 years due to economic pressures and rising living costs.

At the same time, the focus on the GBA does not imply that women's paid labor is confined to urban areas in the Lebanese context. On the contrary, women in rural areas are also engaged in multiple forms of paid and unpaid labor that contribute to their household survival and financial well-being. This focus on urban settings is instead related to specific concerns of this study, as women in the GBA are more likely to be engaged in formal employment, which adds a nuanced distinction that serves this study when considering working hours and lifestyle choices. Additionally, the contrast between traditional gender norms and the lived experience is more pronounced in urban settings, especially in the GBA.

In the same vein, the GBA offers greater access to counseling and therapeutic services than other regions in Lebanon, where such services remain limited or socially stigmatized. Consequently, this study does not treat the explored dynamic as exclusive to the GBA. Rather, it approaches the area as a site where wider social transformations and gendered tensions are more concentrated and more likely to be voiced. As such, the GBA provides a critical setting for examining the tensions created by the collision of changing socio-economic conditions with persistent gender norms, and

the outcomes of negotiating these tensions within therapeutic spaces in shaping contemporary marital relationships.

5.2 Data Sources and Targeted Respondents:

The study targets two participant groups, which are both central to the research objectives. The first group consists of married couples who are currently undergoing couples therapy or who have recently sought therapeutic intervention. The second group consists of couples' clinical therapists, whose professional insights help identify common themes that might not be visible when examining couples' experiences alone.

Married couples:

The first group includes married couples in which both partners have income and who are seeking or have recently sought couples therapy. This group is not limited to couples who found therapy beneficial for their marriage; it also includes couples for whom therapy did not resolve the conflict. This criterion is important because these participants have already recognized a problem in their intimate life and value their relationship's well-being enough to seek outside help. Therefore, examining their journey into therapy and how they reflect on their experience is particularly valuable.

Although this study seeks to recruit a diversified sample that reflects different social backgrounds, it does so by focusing exclusively on heterosexual monogamous marriages. Since in the Lebanese context, same-sex relationships remain legally problematic. This adds ethical and social risks that fall outside the capacity of this study, especially at this early stage. Similarly, in the case of polygamy, although it is legally recognized among several Muslim sects, this marriage arrangement introduces complex variables that would complicate comparisons across cases. Accordingly, while this study excludes these relationship models from the research scope, it acknowledges the importance of examining these experiences in the future with greater time and resources

The study narrows its focus to participants aged 30 to 50. This twenty-year range increases the possibility of recruiting couples at different stages of marriage, while also ensuring enough comparability across cases to conduct a meaningful analysis.

Therapists and Experts:

The second participant group consists of licensed clinical psychologists who provide couples counseling services. The importance of their participation is not in discussing particular cases, but in identifying recurring patterns and therapeutic entry points. These experts might also have nuanced observations that they do not necessarily share with their clients, but can be particularly significant

for this study. By combining the experiences and insights of both therapists and clients, this study builds a better understanding of how gendered marital conflicts are interpreted.

5.3 Sampling and Recruitment:

The first stage of sampling involves contacting couples' therapists to explain the study's scope and to invite them to participate. This can be done by calling their professional lines or by email. The aim in this phase is to recruit 3 or 4 experts who operate in different areas of the GBA region. The data gathered from these experts will determine whether this sample is sufficient to establish a comparative basis or whether more participants are needed to reach a baseline of comparable experiences.

Recruiting couples who have sought therapy will require a different approach. Rather than contacting potential participants, ads will be posted on social media with a brief description of this study, and couples interested in participating will have access to contact the researcher. This approach is less intrusive than directly reaching out to potential participants and is necessary in this study, given the sensitivity of the topic and the importance of maintaining ethical conduct. Like the first group of participants, the goal is to continue interviewing until thematic saturation is reached rather than aiming for a predetermined number of participants. It is also important to factor in the time constraints and limited resources; thus, the aim is not to uncover all aspects of marital tensions and conflicts, but to establish a baseline understanding that sets the direction for future studies. In this sense, the number of interviewed couples is projected to be no more than 12 to ensure that the data analysis remains within the researcher's capability.

To ensure diversity, recruitment posts on social media will target various regions in the GBA, including, but not limited to, Choueifat, Baabda, Jdeideh, Dahye, Chiyah, Dbaye, and Ras-Beirut. This regional selection might increase the sample's diversity, reflecting, to a certain degree, the social pluralism and diversity in the GBA population. Although this recruitment strategy can increase the possibility of having participants from diverse religious and social backgrounds, the sample will be limited in terms of class diversification, as lower classes might not be able to afford therapeutic services, which are relatively costly in Lebanon, and can put additional financial strains on lower-income households, especially as this process could be lengthy, spanning over months and sometimes years.

5.4 Data Collection:

This study will use semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect data from both participant groups. Each group, though, will have a different approach and different settings to ensure the ethical

conduct of this research process. During both sets of interviews, participants will be asked for permission to manually take notes and to use a digital voice recorder, with assurances that these recordings will be used confidentially during the research data analysis and will be completely discarded after this stage. This process is discussed further in Section 8.

Group 1: Experts

Since this group mainly comprises clinical psychologists, the ideal location for conducting interviews with them would be their own clinics. This option will respect their time and convenience, and keep this conversation confined to a professional and private space. Unless they have another preference, their clinics will be suggested as the primary location when scheduling their interviews; otherwise, interviews will be held at a location of their choosing, provided the location they suggest respects the subject's privacy. These interviews will explore recurring issues observed in couples, the extent to which experts encounter conflicts tied to gender expectations and how couples typically decide to seek therapy. Although these will be the main focus areas, the aim is to allow the conversation to flow naturally and to learn from the nuanced insights of these experts, rather than trying to steer it in one specific area.

Group 2: Couples

For the second set of interviews, which will be conducted with couples receiving or who have received therapy, they will be given the option to be interviewed individually or as a couple, as each option may offer valuable nuances. In the case of being interviewed as a couple, the couple's dynamic will offer an additional layer of analysis to the experience they are sharing, as verbal and non-verbal cues might offer unique indicators that should be factored in during analysis. Similarly, if they decide to be interviewed separately, participants might feel more open to express aspects of their experience that they might otherwise censor in the presence of their partners. This whole approach depends on the individual character of the interviewees, and with the level of trust the researcher will be able to establish with them. But in both cases, the outcome can hold significant value, and offering participants a choice might be the first step in making them feel comfortable in the interview settings.

The location selected for conducting this set of interviews is a reputable clinical psychologist's office in the Sin El Fil suburb. Sin El Fil, is located conveniently almost in the middle of GBA, which offers a relatively easy access to participants from other suburbs and areas. Additionally, engaging in these conversations in a psychological clinic adds a layer of professionalism that comforts participants, especially in reassuring them of the privacy and confidentiality of this interaction.

This set of interviews will explore participants' journeys that led them to seek therapy, as well as their experiences during and after the therapeutic process. The main themes in these interviews will focus on their expectations of their partners, whether these expectations changed or remained the same, and how they perceive their roles in their households, how they shape their power dynamics, how they perceive emotional connection and intimacy, and their understandings of what constitutes a "healthy" or "ideal" relationship. Additionally, these interviews will explore how they reflect on and understand these experiences. This aspect might enable this study to assess the depth of these transformations and whether they remain at a behavioral level or lead to political change toward egalitarian gender dynamics.

5.5 Data analysis

The data gathered from both sets of interviews will be analyzed thematically by coding and categorizing patterns, recurring beliefs, and emotional responses. Codes are expected to capture themes such as financial contribution, decision-making, household labor, emotional support, conflict triggers, perceptions of fairness, family and social pressure, and gender expectations. Codes from interviews with experts will be compared with those from individuals to trace similarities and differences and to triangulate the findings.

The technical aspect that ensures the ethical storage and use of the gathered data is discussed in Section 8.

6. Positionality:

I approach this research as an insider, since I share a similar experience in dealing with marital tensions that stem from internalized gender norms, roles, and expectations. I have been in a place where I embraced a form of proletarian masculinity, and I have been blinded to the high cost this belief was inflicting on the well-being of my marriage. Even though my wife and I haven't resorted to couples therapy, we have been through this process independently, and the therapeutic intervention was the main factor in patching things up in our relationship. Nevertheless, we have participated in numerous relational training sessions and conferences, which have enabled us to reflect on our experience and journey as a couple, not only as individuals.

Although our journey in therapy resulted in fostering egalitarian power dynamics in our marriage, the approach was never framed in terms of gender equality or challenging the patriarchal heritage. I was only able to connect the therapeutic process to gender equality values after I started my graduate program in gender studies. As I became familiar with feminist frameworks, I understood

how therapy helped me transform my gendered expectations and beliefs, without explicitly saying so. Also, my lived reality today is very different from mainstream gender norms. My wife is the breadwinner in our household, supporting me financially while I complete my studies.

Following Haraway's (1988) feminist approach to situated knowledges, I believe that my standpoint is not something to be apologetic about or try to hide in the name of objectivity. It rather constitutes a valuable addition to the body of knowledge, especially since my primary aim as a researcher is not to reach a neutral objective truth but to learn about each participant's experience. With their unique nuances, I use my own understanding to unpack and analyze the data gathered from the conducted interviews. Through this process, this study does not aim to generalize findings but to open the door for a deeper understanding on how gendered systems might be experienced and managed within the intimate relationship of a married couple.

During the interviews, I may also share parts of my story if this helps participants feel more comfortable and more willing to speak openly, since knowing that the researcher has lived through similar challenges may reduce the sense of being judged. At the same time, I remain fully aware of the risk of influencing participants to share a specific point of view. I will make this risk clear at the beginning of each interview by emphasizing that the value of the research lies in their own honest words. This is especially important when a participant's perspective contradicts mine, as such differences add depth rather than weakness to the study.

In this sense, I bear the responsibility of continuously reflecting on the influence of my own experience throughout the research process to ensure that participants' voices remain at the center of the work. This is especially important since I adopt the feminist framework of reflexivity, which stresses that the researcher's location does not simply add personal context to a study, but actively shapes the production of knowledge itself (England, 1994; Rose, 1997). From this understanding, reflexivity is treated in this study as a continuous methodological practice rather than reduced to a simple statement of my personal position or limited to acknowledging my personal opinions and biases. It requires me to maintain ongoing attention to how my lived experience shapes the questions I ask, the dynamics I build with participants, the meanings I identify as significant, and the interpretations I develop from the data.

7. Project Limitations:

This study approaches marital conflicts and tensions from a narrow scope, focusing on a specific niche of couples who are invested in addressing their conflicts through therapy. This scope

excludes a very large portion of couples who have similar challenges but are not seeking therapy, especially couples who cannot afford these services. It is important though to restate that the aim of this study is not to produce general findings that can be statistically representative of the targeted population. Rather, this study explores whether and how expectations about gender roles affect married couples living in urban settings and facing relationship problems, and whether renegotiating gender power dynamics is part of the struggles these couples face. Combined with the rich diversity in the GBA, which increases the likelihood of exploring experiences from diverse backgrounds, this study might open the door for future studies that can cover larger sample sizes in narrower areas. This study also aims to bring to light a silent/taboo issue that can be affecting the well-being of a society, at the level of couples and nuclear families, and at the level of individual well-being and mental health.

Another limitation that can be argued is the nature of the topic, as it is private and hard to access participants willing to talk freely and openly about this matter, and some may hide crucial information to save face or out of discomfort. To address this issue from the position of both the researcher and the interviewer, I will balance between using probes and keeping participants comfortable. Also, I will make sure to explain to them the full intention and goal of this study, and to provide a detailed rationale for this research, which can help them feel more engaged and invested in this process. I will also use an oblique approach to investigate key points, and through the analysis of the data, I will use specific codes, for example, participating in household chores, to assess if their experience conforms to traditional gender roles.

8. Ethical Considerations and Data Storage:

As stated in previous parts, this study deals with a very sensitive and private topic that should be handled with care to ensure ethical and professional conduct. This study has received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Lebanese American University (IRB #: LAU.SAS.ZS1.2/Feb/2026). The following are the main points and approaches this study implements to ensure proper conduct:

- Data management: Data will be stored on one device and backed up to one location only. Even handwritten notes will be scanned and stored digitally, and the hard copies will be properly discarded.

- After the research is submitted, the data will be stored for the minimum period required by the University, then permanently deleted from all storage locations. Participants can also choose to be notified when the data is discarded.
- Participants' Consent: The consent form will be explained to participants, and if needed, it will be offered in different languages. More importantly, before each interview, as the interviewer, I will inform participants of all their rights, give them time to ask any questions and raise any concerns, and ensure they are willing to start the interview.
- Interview settings: Interviews will be conducted in a licensed clinic, which is required by law to respect the privacy of visitors. This will be an added insurance for participants.
- Participants' rights: At the beginning of each interview session, participants will be informed of their right to retrieve their data and to withdraw from the study at any time before publication.
- Anonymity: Participants' identities will remain hidden. During interviews, they will be referred to by pseudonyms, and their voices will be altered if they approve of audio recording.
- Dealing with distress: If participants feel distressed, as the interviewer, I will immediately pause the interview, give them time to feel comfortable again, and then ask whether they would like to continue. In addition, I will prepare a list of counseling services and support organizations to which I can refer these participants. Also, I will consult with research, mental health, and gender experts to review and refine these measures, identify additional concerns, and develop recommendations.

9. Appendix: Instruments used in this Research:

9.1 Expert Interviews Protocol/Guide:

As the interviewer, I will begin interviews with experts with an introduction and an overview of the research. I will then ask for their general feedback on the research.

After I make sure they have shared everything they want to share on the general theme of the research, I will proceed with the research protocol. First, I will ask them whether they still want to proceed with the interview. Second, I will give them the consent form and proceed with their chosen method of data collection, audio recording, note-taking, or none of these.

The main topics I will cover in these interviews can be summarized by the following questions:

- Do you find a similar pattern in the problems facing couples you work with? If yes, what are these patterns?
- Are these patterns/problems influenced by gender role expectations?
- How do you think societal and cultural pressures are affecting the private relationship of your clients?
- When couples decide to go through therapy, is it usually a mutual decision? Or is one partner usually pushing for this step? And is there a pattern here?
- Through your sessions, do you notice a tendency to discuss gender roles and social norms?
- In general, when working with individuals or couples, do you notice any connection between the pressure to conform to gender norms and mental health symptoms?

The phrasing and order of these questions are not relevant; it is more of a checklist for the interviewer to keep track of the subject matter.

9.2 Participants In-depth Interviews Protocol/Guide:

As the interviewer, I will start each interview by introducing myself and the research topic, and by asking for their initial feedback on it. After that, I will ask again if they still intend to participate and proceed with this interview. If so, I will present them with a consent form and go over it point by point. In addition, I will explain that this consent form is not binding for them; it's only to protect them, so they can still forfeit their data any time before the analysis process (which I will set a date for), and they can stop the interview anytime they want. In addition to their chosen recording method (Audio or note-taking).

The main topics I am looking to cover in these interviews can be summarized with the following questions:

- At what point did you consider seeking therapy?
- Is there a common theme recurring in your fights with your partner?
- What are your expectations of your partner? Does your partner meet some of these expectations?
- What do you think the expectations of your partner are of you? Do you think they are fair? Do you meet them?
- How do you deal with household decisions?
- What are the changes you would like to see in your relationship?
- How do you see your future with your partner?
- How often do you communicate your relationship issues with your partner?

- How do your family and close friends see your relationship? How does this view compare to how you view their relationships?
- Do you think love and intimacy are essential factors for your relationship to survive?

The phrasing and the order of these questions are not relevant; it is more of a checklist for the researcher to keep track of the subject matter.

9.3 Coding and processing the interviews:

As a researcher, to analyze the data gathered in these interviews, I will use a thematic approach by coding and categorizing key points. The following are examples of these key-points/characteristics:

- Commitment to egalitarian principles, including equal decision-making and shared responsibilities.
- A dynamic where both partners contribute to the household income and maintain a level of financial independence.
- Prioritization of emotional intimacy, open communication, and mutual support.
- Commitment to a long-term relationship, that may or may not include traditional marriage.
- Couples that actively create life plans together.

According to the literature review, these characteristics reflect a romantic commitment that is based on egalitarian gender principles. And identifying the attitude of participants towards these themes through analyzing their interviews is a key to assessing the nature and the power dynamic of their relationships, whether they conform to traditional gender norms and patriarchy or not. While some participants may identify themselves as “Traditional”, or “Modern and support Gender Equality”, the analysis of their conversations and interviews through key points like these may show otherwise, and this is why the oblique approach adopted in conducting these interviews is extremely important.

In addition to these key points, I will also code statements that reflect religious views, environmental pressures and influences, personal beliefs, and other topics that I might find relevant or recurring during my collected data. Combining these factors with the key points mentioned earlier during analysis helps me explore the forces and the settings that influence the participant’s experience.

9.4 Expected Findings:

Considering the existing literature, the theoretical framework, and my personal reasoning as the researcher behind this study, I expect participants to report experiencing tensions in their marital life, especially when responsibilities increase significantly. This increase could be the result of various factors, such as having children, being financially affected by one of the crises Lebanon went through, or even a personal hardship. In particular, it is anticipated that many couples will share that these experiences triggered a sense of inequality and unfairness in their relationship arrangements. Potentially, they started feeling frustrated as one of them would feel participating more in sustaining the marriage; most probably, this will be the experience of women when they reflect on the experience of being burdened with care work and social responsibilities in addition to their employment.

It is expected that men will share experiences of feeling that their masculine identity is threatened as their partners gain increased agency within the household. This model might contradict the ingrained family structure that has been observed to be growing and trigger feelings of unworthiness, especially if they are going through financial hardships and their partners are the main breadwinner. This will also be combined with feeling pressured by society to reclaim his status as the patriarch of the household, resulting in behaviors that harm the intimate and emotional connection between the couple.

It is also expected that couples will share that, despite all the internal struggles and pressure they experienced, they couldn't communicate their concerns to their partners. This is especially true because this step is accompanied by a sense of vulnerability, and it takes a level of maturity to do so without feeling insecure about the relationship status. The cultural image of masculinity adds another layer of complexity to this issue, as men are not supposed to connect with their emotions, and especially not to share or show them, because it is considered a sign of weakness.

All these experiences might also be accompanied by doubts about the partner's fidelity, especially given that cultural norms in Lebanon celebrate men's active sexuality and tolerate extramarital relationships to a certain degree, but only for men. In this sense, women might feel increasingly insecure, especially as they continue to shoulder the double burden of career and care work.

Finally, it is expected that couples have experienced living a double life, or, in other words, putting on a performance in public environments that does not resemble the true state of their

private life and daily experience. Which might be something they couldn't articulate, give meaning to it without the process of therapy and the guidance of experts.

9.5 Consent Form:

(On The Following Page)

Consent to participate in an Interview

Exploring the Influence of Changing Gendered Expectations on Marriages in the Case of Couples Seeking Counseling in Greater Beirut Area.

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project by completing an interview. (I am a student at the Lebanese American University, and I am completing this research project as part of my interdisciplinary gender studies MA program). The purpose of this interview is to investigate how expectations about traditional gender roles might affect intimacy and commitments among financially independent couples seeking counseling or therapy. It will involve asking you questions about your relationship, your expectations regarding gender roles, how these expectations are met or differ, and how this influences your commitment and intimacy.

There are no known risks, harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. The information you provide will be used to enhance and improve academic understanding about relationship problems with respect to traditional gender roles. You will not directly benefit from participation in this study. The study will involve (15 couples) participants. Completing the interview will take 60 – 90 minutes of your time.

By continuing with the interview, you agree with the following statements:

- 1. I have been given sufficient information about this research project.*
- 2. I understand that my answers will not be released to anyone, and my identity will remain anonymous. My name will not be written on the questionnaire nor be kept in any other records.*
- 3. When the results of the study are reported, I will not be identified by name or any other information that could be used to infer my identity. Only researchers will have access to view any data collected during this research however data cannot be linked to me.**
- 4. I understand that I may withdraw from this research any time I wish and that I have the right to skip any question I don't want to answer.*
- 5. I understand that I have the right to withdraw my interview data, and everything related to it before the publication of this research.**
- 6. I will be notified when all the collected data related to this study are discarded.**
- 7. I understand that my consent allows the research's team to use my interview data for this research only and my identity will remain anonymous to all other members of this team.**
- 8. I understand that my refusal to participate will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which I otherwise am entitled to.*
- 9. I have been informed that the research abides by all commonly acknowledged ethical codes and that the research project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Lebanese American University*
- 10. I understand that if I have any additional questions, I can ask the research team listed below.*
- 11. I have read and understood all statements on this form.*
- 12. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research project by completing the following interview.*

CONSENT TO ALLOW AUDIO RECORDING DURING INTERVIEW

I freely give my consent to allow the research team to record my interview. All of my questions regarding the recordings have been answered to my satisfaction. I know that I may refuse to allow my input today to be recorded in any way and that I may withdraw from the session at any time. **I freely give my consent to allow my input to be recorded through audio recordings.**

I agree to have my interview audio recorded

☐

I do NOT agree to recording, and request note-taking only

☐

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY

I have carefully read the above information about this study. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. **I know that I may refuse to take part in or withdraw from the study at any time before publication. I freely approve the content of this form and give my consent to take part in this study.** I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in the study. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date (dated by the participant)

STATEMENT OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

I certify that I have fully explained to the person taking part in the study the nature of the above research study, the potential risks and benefits and I have offered to answer any question that he/she may have.

Signature of Principal Investigator/Designate

Date

Name of Principal Investigator/Designate

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact:

Name (PI)	Phone number	Email address
Georgio AlChidiac	70917508	Georgio.alchidiac@lau.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or you want to talk to someone outside the research, please contact the:

*Institutional Review Board Office,
Lebanese American University
3rd Floor, Dorm A, Byblos Campus
Tel: 00 961 1 786456 ext. (2546)
irb@lau.edu.lb*

** End of Consent Form **

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