

## Gender Disparity in School Textbooks in Jordan: The Case of Arabic and Social Education in Grades 4, 5, and 6

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### Abstract

Representation of females and males in language and school textbooks is a determinant factor in the perpetuation of gender socialization of children and the normalisation of their gender roles and positions. School textbooks often portray boys and girls adhering to gender stereotypes, with girls associated with housework and childcare, and boys associated with labor and leadership. This paper reports the gender disparity with reference to sexist language, content, images, and illustrations in current Jordanian school textbooks pertaining to the two subjects in contemporary Jordanian textbooks: Arabic Language and Social/Civic Education. Twelve textbooks of both subjects for Grades 4 - 6 are selected for content analysis. The research concludes that women and girls were either marginalized or symbolically annihilated in the content and language of the selected school textbooks. Content analysis of textbooks is crucial to influence gender-sensitive reform of school curricula through careful analysis of the linguistic, visual and thematic content. To this end, the paper draws attention to the existing sexist language and sexist content in school textbooks to identify areas for curricular reform advocating for gender equality.

**Keywords:** Gender Disparity; Representation; Stereotypes; Symbolic Annihilation; Marginalization; Exclusion.

### فجوة النوع الاجتماعي في الكتب المدرسية لمادتي اللغة العربية والتربية الوطنية لصفوف الرابع والخامس والسادس

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### ملخص

تمثيل النوع الاجتماعي في اللغة والكتب المدرسية له أثر كبير في تنشئة الأطفال اجتماعياً، وفي تشكيل هوياتهم الجنسانية، وغالباً ما تعكس الكتب المدرسية في ثناياها القوالب النمطية الجنسانية لكل من الفتيان والفتيات؛ فالفتيات يُربطن بالأعمال المنزلية ورعاية الأطفال؛ أما الفتيان فيرتبطون بالعمل خارج المنزل وبالقيادة. ومن هنا، فيعد تحليل الكتاب المدرسي أمراً بالغ الأهمية في التأثير على الإصلاح المرامي للنوع الاجتماعي في المناهج الدراسية بحيث تفضي المناهج بأبعادها البصرية والسمعية، إلى النتائج المرجوة. تتناول هذه الدراسة نتائج بحث في التباين بين الجنسين استناداً إلى مكونات النص، من لغة ومحتوى وصور ورسوم توضيحية، تتعلق بالنوع الاجتماعي كما هو مُمَثَّل في الكتب المدرسية الأردنية الحالية: وبالتحديد في مادة اللغة العربية، العلوم الاجتماعية، والتربية الوطنية. فقد تم اختيار اثني عشر كتاباً دراسياً في المجالين المشار إليهما للصفوف من الرابع إلى السادس، بتركيز على تحليل المحتوى، وتمثيل الشخص، بوضوح البحث أن النساء والفتيات تعرضن للتمييز الواضح، وأحياناً المحو أو الإبادة الرمزية. وتخلص الورقة إلى ضرورة التنبيه إلى استخدام اللغة بعناية فائقة، وتوظيف المحتوى بمكوناته المتعددة بحرص ودقة تجنباً للوقوع في المزالق أنفة الذكر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النوع الاجتماعي، الفروقات/التباين في التمثيل، التمييز، المحو الرمزي، تهميش، إقصاء.

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## Introduction

Jordan boasts one of the highest literacy rates in the Arab region (World Bank, 2020). In recent years, the country has taken significant steps to capitalize on its expansive human potential by investing heavily in education. Along with increasing enrollment and student transition rates to higher education, Jordan has also achieved a 90 percent parity in literacy and full parity in primary and secondary enrollment (World Bank, 2009), a result of “rigorous campaigning” for nearly three decades to boost both literacy and attendance (Al-Mahadin, 2004, p. 24).

Undeterred by strained resources, the Ministry of Education has also developed a comprehensive national curriculum for subjects including Social and Civic Education, Arabic Language, Mathematics, and Sciences. Notwithstanding the feats that have been made for education in Jordan, there are still significant obstacles regarding the state of Jordanian education, particularly when it comes to the quality and inclusivity of current educational programs. According to Jordan’s 2016 - 2025 National Strategy for Human Resources Development, the country’s educational system is in need of development. The Strategy identified several main challenges to be addressed throughout the strategy’s mandate. First, the country’s national curricula and assessment systems are outdated and should be redesigned to meet the requirements of today’s society and the changing labor market. Second, the teaching profession is unattractive to high-quality applicants and does not provide them with suitable initial or continuing teacher education. Third, the large increase in the number of students in education due to the current domestic demographics and the influx of Syrian refugees has placed a significant strain on the country’s education system, which requires investment to increase existing educational capacities, especially for lower-income and marginalized communities. Lastly, there is a lack of effective accountability and leadership throughout the educational system, both from the schools and the Ministry, as well as a lack of community and family engagement in formal and informal education. Having identified these needs, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with countless local and international bodies, has been working to strengthen its education system and programs, down to the finer details of its curricula. The Ministry of Education has been working with the National Centre for Curriculum Development (NCCD) and other bodies to focus on curriculum revision as one important part of strengthening local education systems. Within this is a need to focus on eliminating gender imbalance in school textbooks.

A large obstacle that Jordan faces with gender and education is mainstreaming gender into curricula. Elementary and pre-elementary schools obtain the power to shape and mold the gender subjectivities of their students. By doing so, the educational system reinforces the notion of the gender identity of Jordanians from a young age and perpetuates regulatory and discriminatory gender normative stereotypes, thereby undermining girls’ and women’s social status, autonomy, and impact, and correlating masculinity with power stereotypes. The elimination of gender stereotypes in educational materials is crucial to facilitate the diversification of the choices for boys and girls in pursuing their self-actualization. There is an essential need to assess the gender roles in school textbooks in order to promote gender-sensitive curricular reform. Textbooks can influence the “knowledge, attitudes, and values” of young people and “reflect and shape the beliefs and actions of the nation itself” (McCluskey, 1993, p.3) and hence their contents should be understood, improved, and vetted to ensure they promote education and society that are inclusive and equitable.

This paper addresses the gender bias with reference to sexist language, content, images, and illustrations in current Jordanian school textbooks pertaining to the two subjects in the contemporary Jordanian textbooks of Arabic Language and Social and Civic Education. In these textbooks, the gender stereotypical portrayal and representation of girls and women on the one hand and boys and men on the other is, to a large degree, similar to those in many countries, both Arab and non-Arab, which makes the findings relevant to a global readership (Alkhadra, 2017). Studies analyzing textbooks across many countries find fundamental affinities in findings in terms of the representation of gender (Blumberg, 2007).

## Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Drawing upon Butler’s (1999) work on gender, she articulates gender as a contingent and performative “doing” rather than an ontological “being” (Butler, 1999). In other words, gender is socially and culturally constructed. Gendered ontology is thus shaped through normalized gender socialization in schools which represent an apparatus for naturalizing gender imbalance via school textbooks and curricula.

The focus of gender identity formation is through individual and group interactions, which are in large part predicated on the use of language, whether spoken or written. The classroom is no exception to the rule, with the transmission of knowledge in many cases being entirely or almost entirely dependent on written and oral communication (O'Keeffe et al., 2009). As such, language as a site for gender analysis warrants an examination in developing gender-sensitive curricular reform. Saussure et al. define language as a social institution (*langue*) as “the set of linguistic habits that permit a subject to understand and to make themselves understood” (Saussure et al., 1995, p.112). For Saussure, language consists of a multitude of “linguistic signs,” each of which comprises the signifier, or the “acoustic image,” and the signified, or the “concept” (e.g. the signifier or acoustic image “tree” is tied with the signified concept of a tree) (Saussure et al. 1995, p.112). The signifier is notably arbitrary. Hence, in using language as acquired within a community, an individual accepts not only the signifier associated with each signified but also the boundaries of the signified for a given signifier. Consequently, language is not a set of words to which definitions have been assigned, but rather a means of expressing latent previously explicated significations (Dastur, 2013).

Producers of language do not dictate the significations of their words, but rather rely on an underlying body of significations specific to a linguistic community. Language, then, inherently reflects and reproduces the culture of that community. According to Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992), a linguistic or cultural outsider can only be understood through the latent discourse of linguistic signs (including the “signified”) of that culture; regardless of the implications of “man” in the speaker’s sociolinguistic community, if that signifier is produced in a different community, it will be understood according to the concept of discourse associated with it in the new community (p. 467). As a result, even mentioning the words “man” or “woman” becomes charged, since the utterances force all participants in the linguistic interaction to draw, at least subconsciously, upon pre-existing culturally-based understandings of those concepts (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). In this way, all members of a community have concepts of gender constantly imposed on them from the moment they learn to talk. For example, the word “man” within a Jordanian (as well as Islamic context in general) is almost automatically associated with the religious notions of *Qiwamah* (male authority) and *Wilayah* (male guardianship) (Mir-Hosseini et al., 2015, p. 27).

While language reflects and constantly reproduces culture, it is also an important medium by which it is transmitted and reinforced. Feminist linguist Deborah Cameron (2008) notes that “language enters into sexual politics in two main ways. On the one hand, language is the medium in which many conflicts about the nature and proper relationship of men and women are played out; on the other, it is potentially a focus for conflict in its own right” (Cameron, 2008, p.3). In other words, language as an institution can play an important part, for better or for worse, in the formation of gender identities. Building off of this formative role, Mills and Mullaney (2011) highlight language potential as an oppressive tool that can ‘normalize’ oppressive gender roles.

However, the language’s role as such is not limited to political discourse; rather, it permeates all of our daily interactions. Bourdieu defines “habitus” as a set of behaviors an individual draws upon in social interactions to express or perform a particular identity (Bourdieu, 1990, p.55). This habitus is developed and renegotiated within “communities of practice,” traditionally defined as:

“An aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, p.464).

Individuals within a community of practice determine what is “appropriate” through daily interactions, including, crucially, the witnessed response, and shift norms through actively resisting what is generally accepted. Communities of practice can thus determine the types of acceptable language and behavior for certain members of that group, participation in which serves to perpetuate existing norms.

Linguist Jennifer Coates (2004) notes six different ways by which children are socialized to adhere to gender norms through language. First, boys and girls are explicitly told aspects of language that are appropriate for them based on their sex, including swearing, taboo language, verbosity, and politeness. Second, adults serve as models for linguistic behavior for children. Third, the ways adults talk to boys and girls and vary their linguistic behavior according to the perceived gender of the child shapes the construction of their gender identity. Adults may also have different linguistic expectations for boys and girls, such as female infants acquiring language more quickly than males. They also respond differently to the same linguistic behavior from boys and girls, such as talking assertively or interrupting. This phenomenon is particularly apparent in the classroom, where teachers have

been shown to be more accepting of disruptive and assertive linguistic behavior from boys than from girls and to generally privilege male participation in all of its forms (Coates 2004, p.198). Finally, gender-specific “sub-communities” of practice can create and reinforce gender-specific linguistic behaviors.

Beyond interpersonal interactions, gendered norms can also emerge in textual interactions. The ways in which texts replicate the above linguistic behaviors and expectations can reinforce gendered linguistic expectations, both in recorded interactions and in textual discourse. For example, Mills and Mullaney (2011) conduct a feminist critical discourse analysis of media texts to highlight the ways they feed into different gender-sensitive discourses. They reveal how framing and grammar within articles reinforce traditional discourses of patriarchy and femininity, as well as a nontraditional discourse of women “being/becoming” (i.e. gaining agency, acquiring new/multiple roles) (Mills & Mullaney, 2011, p.79-80). Such analyses are particularly informative for curricular reform, as much of the information students are expected to learn through the classroom is transmitted through text (i.e. textbooks), and students tend to trust the knowledge communicated to them through textbooks without questioning the ideas and values they receive (Baghdadi & Rezaei, 2015). Thus, any gender-sensitive reform must focus not only on content (i.e. how men and women interact with one another or typical roles for men and women), but also on the presentation of that content (i.e. how men and women in particular roles are presented, how male and female successes or heroes are presented, etc.).

Education can be a powerful tool to construct, maintain, and transmit gender roles and inequalities (Smith, 1991, cited in Masud, 2017). The integral role of language in the construction of (oppressive) gender identities has important implications for the classroom, wherein language, both written and oral, is the primary means for the transfer of knowledge. As previously described, oral linguistic student-student and student-teacher interactions are crucial to the formation of gender identities; however, this section will proceed to examine the role of textbooks and school curricula in the process, as well as the possibility of gender mainstreaming through curricular reform. Many studies have been conducted on depictions of men and women in textbooks, focusing on a variety of variables, including the gross number of female and male characters in textbooks, the order in which men and women are presented, the number of homo and hetero-social interactions, the nature of those interactions, depictions of male and female behavior, the extent to which men and women fulfill stereotypical roles, and the number and diversity of male and female heroes or role models (Ullah & Skelton, 2013; Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Yang, 2011; Lee & Collins, 2010; Salami & Ghajarieh, 2015). Based on these variables, researchers then conclude the extent to which the examined curricula can be described as gender-inclusive.

Notably absent from these studies are assessments of the extent to which these presentations of gender in textbooks actually affect students’ understanding of gender; such research relies on the assumption that depictions of gender within textbooks inform students’ real-life understandings of gender identity. In Pakistan, for example, a majority of female students participating in an interview study said that they saw textbook images as models for themselves (Mirza, 2004). The gender stereotypes are also internalized via school curricula. Aikman and Rao (2010) explain: ‘Investigating the gendered nature of the school curriculum offers insights into ways in which school knowledge and teaching and learning processes and relationships can reinforce, maintain and reproduce gender hierarchies’ (221). ‘They [girls] receive conflicting messages about their role in society from textbooks, teachers, their families, various religious “authorities” and mass popular culture’ (Adely, 2007, p.13). These hierarchies should be structurally disrupted and shaken to annul gender bias. In research that has been conducted on the relationship between gender equality in textbooks and student perceptions of gender suggests that mere textbook reform is not sufficient. As the Kenyan Ministry of Education attempted to integrate its commitment to gender equality into the national curriculum, education specialist Kim Foulds (2013) analyzed the way Kenyan students processed resulting textbook changes. Examples of such changes include putting men in the kitchen alongside or instead of women, showing that women can be the heads of households, presenting girls excelling in STEM fields, illustrating the women have the same rights as men, and balancing professions, all chiefly through pictures (Foulds 2013, p.166).

Despite these well-intended efforts, Foulds’ (2013) interviews with students at public schools reveal that, even when textbooks adhere to international gender equality standards, students still perceive images according to their own experiences. For example, in response to an image of a woman cleaning with the gender-neutral caption, “We use water to wash our clothes,” student’s interpreted the picture according to the figure in their family who does the laundry, with most identifying it as a mother, but one

tellingly identifying the figure as a brother since that is who performs the task in their family. Similarly, when students were asked to identify a figure clearly designed to be a female pilot (a woman with stereotypical female features stands in a pilot's uniform in front of a plane), the vast majority of them were unable to identify her as such. Most students instead identified her as a member of the police force, with some even identifying her as *baba*, or father. Unsurprisingly, students were more easily able to identify a female police officer, but still, some identified her as a teacher or nurse, with one student explaining that she was a nurse stopping cars (Foulds, 2013, p.170-172). These responses reveal that students interpret images based on their own experiences. If students are presented with an image of women in new or unfamiliar roles, they will not necessarily process the image as intended by the editor but will likely rather tie it back to what they already know. Thus, superficial gender-sensitive changes in imagery or text must be accompanied by a curriculum explicitly designed to teach gender equality (Foulds 2013, p.173). In other words, the presence of gender equality in textbooks is not enough to teach students gender equality; student perceptions of gender need to be actively engaged in the classroom to do so.

In addition to teaching gender inequality in the classroom, Coates (2004) highlights the importance of reducing gender inequities in the classroom by including content that is accessible and engaging for all students. She notes that classroom topics chosen are generally those that stereotypically appeal to boys, devaluing "feminine" interests and discouraging female participation, particularly in coeducational classrooms (Coates, 2004, p.194-195). For instance, an exaggerated focus on discussing political events in which masculine men of sorts figure greatly often alienates most female students. Even in gender-segregated classrooms, textbooks should include a diverse array of topics that can appeal equally to all students such that all students can be engaged, and masculine and feminine interests are valued without reinforcing negative gender stereotypes.

### **Gender and Curricula in Jordan**

Jordan has, by no means, escaped the recent spate of gender-sensitive textbook analyses. In fact, the lack of equal gender representation is a common issue of textbooks in Jordan across different subjects. Previous research by Alayan and Al-Khalidi (2010), Ootom (2014), Nofal and Qawar (2015), and others has identified problematic representations of women and gender in previous iterations of Jordanian governmental textbooks - indicative of existing patterns of gender bias and misrepresentation. A 2010 study by Alayan and Al-Khalidi revealed that men comprised 79.2 percent of images in Jordanian History textbooks and 64.1 percent in Jordanian social education textbooks. While men were frequently presented in powerful leadership roles, women were often restricted to family and domestic roles, with one textbook openly asserting that a woman's primary responsibilities were those of a mother, wife, or sister (albeit with full rights). When women were presented in non-stereotypical leadership roles in textbooks, they were referred to with masculine pronouns, implying that their roles were primarily intended for men. Also, when students were given assignments to conduct research on historical and scientific figures, they were only given male options, despite the existence of prominent female examples. Overall, these findings suggest that, even with some female exceptions, leadership roles are largely for men. Still, these textbooks did show promise in showing women outside of strictly family roles and referring to some civic roles traditionally occupied by men with gender-neutral nouns like *afrad* (individuals). Similarly, Ootom (2014) studied Jordanian Arabic Language textbooks for elementary levels and found that men appeared much more frequently than women in the textbooks, often in roles such as pharmacists, doctors, and soldiers, whereas women who rarely appeared were often associated with family care. Also, he noted that while men were associated with attributes such as strength and leadership, women were associated with values such as care and compassion. Nofal and Qawar (2015) studied Jordanian English language textbooks and found that men were represented much more often than women, both linguistically and visually.

The existing limitations of the textbooks at hand are concerning and raise questions about whether teachers are willing or able to take up conversations about gender in the classroom. Hasan (2015) studied the attitudes of 30 Jordanian teachers concerning gender in the classroom, and reports that the teachers interviewed agreed that gender was important but believed that school was not an appropriate space for discussing gender roles. Hasan explains that the teachers believed such controversial issues should be avoided in schools. Rather, the teachers saw themselves merely as a channel for transmitting the information contained in textbooks. Furthermore, despite the aforementioned stereotypical depictions of gender, all teachers interviewed said that the textbooks they used did not involve gender-related issues and depicted both sexes neutrally (Hasan, 2015). This insensitivity to,

and discomfort with, gender in the classroom is an obstacle that must be addressed in gender-sensitive curricular reforms, as well as in teacher training, and reinforces the need for such reform to go beyond imagery and rhetoric, and involve actual engagement with the idea of gender and gender roles.

While there are many factors involved in the formation of gender identities, including the negotiation of multiple potentially-conflicting identities, language, and social interactions play a central role. By interacting with each other and with texts, and by navigating and negotiating pre-existing systems, individuals produce and constantly reproduce their gender identity. In general, gender identities are restricted to masculine and feminine, for men and women respectively, and are maintained through linguistic and behavioral expectations, codified or not; differential treatment; and homosocial sub-communities of practice. While gender inequality certainly also manifests itself in classroom textbooks, its superficial presence is merely a symptom of larger societal inequality rather than the cause; gendered reform of imagery and rhetoric in textbooks is not sufficient for altering student perceptions of gender. This limitation is particularly relevant for Jordan as, despite evident gender discrimination within textbooks that inform the national curriculum, interviewed teachers have claimed to remain unaware of the problem and seem uncomfortable with the idea of incorporating gender roles into the classroom.

### Methodology

This paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the ratio of female to male characters in the school textbooks?
2. To what extent are women and men portrayed in social settings, and how?
3. To what extent are women and men depicted in domestic roles, and how?
4. How are men and women visually represented?
5. What linguistic generic constructions are used for both sexes?
6. How are men and women articulated within the body-object articulation?

First, content analysis is used as a research method to identify gender-specific patterns in specific school textbooks, whether they were visual or linguistic (Hesse-Biber et al., 2011). Content analysis in this paper is both quantitative (counting and measuring) and qualitative (interpreting and analyzing). It is used to quantify the occurrence of certain linguistic words, nouns, subjects, objects concepts in a set of public school textbooks. The qualitative inferences are examined by analyzing the meaning and semantic relationship of words and concepts to identify correlations and patterns in how concepts correlate to some objects and subjects.

To this end, twelve textbooks of Arabic Language in addition to Social and Civic Education for Grades 4 - 6 were selected. Each Grade has two books for each subject, one for the first academic semester and one for the second. All books were published in Jordan in 2016 and were in use at the time of the study. These books are intended for Arabic speakers in public schools at the primary level. All chapters from the books were selected for content analysis. A systematic analysis was made of the characters and depiction of men, boys, women, and girls in written and visual forms. The semantic relationship of words and concepts is also analyzed by employing the concept of images by Foucault's body-object articulation. Body-object articulation that defines each of the relationships between the body and the object it utilizes (Foucault 1995, p.153).

First, the linguistic analysis focuses on sexism as reflected in language use, in particular with respect to the following:

1. Nouns and proper nouns for both sexes.
2. How nouns identify female and male characters.
3. The ratio of subjects and objects for both sexes.
4. The chain of association emerging from the semantic relationship of words and concepts.

Second, the study tallied the number of male and female characters in images and illustrations; male and female depiction and references in sentences, scripts, and stories; male and female social roles (e.g.: engineer, secretary, coach); male and female domestic roles (e.g.: mother, father, brother, sister); and sequence of appearance of male and female characters within the body-object correlation/articulation. The assignment of a social role to a character did not preclude the assignment of a domestic role as well. Hence, an individual who was both a mother and manager was entered in both the 'domestic role' and 'social role' categories. Illustrations, which were designed to enhance students' understanding and learning interests, were also examined in this study. The

focus of the picture investigation was on the number and proportion of men and women in the pictures.

## Analysis and Discussion

### *Linguistic Representation*

One problematic issue related to women's role and agency in society has been that of 'sexist' or gender-biased language. Critics of gender-biased language regarded it as contributing to women's subalternity and marginalization, and argued that linguistic reform was an important step in promoting gender-related equality (Coates 2004; Durrani 2008). Furthermore, they argued that gender bias in textbooks can have a direct impact on the cognitive and behavioral development of young learners (Britton & Lumpkin 1977).

To this end, in this study, the first component of this assessment of Jordanian 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks of Arabic Language and Social and Civic Education was an analysis of the types of language used in association with men and women. Mills and Mullaney (2011) highlight language potential as an oppressive tool, working to 'normalize' oppressive gender roles. The study of language is not an assessment of word meanings per se (i.e. woman as mother, man as fireman), but rather the grammar and poetics of gender. This portion focused on methods of identification, syntactic functions, types of verbs used, and the ways the book engages the gender roles and visual representation to readers. Through such examinations, we can understand how these textbooks provide students with a linguistic structural framework that not only genderizes them within the classroom but also encourages them to reinforce the process of genderization within all other interactions and socialization contexts. Feminist linguist Deborah Cameron (2008) notes that language enters into sexual politics in two main ways: more than simply being the means by which individuals negotiate and communicate gender, language as an institution can play an important part, in the formation of gender identities.

There is a stark lack of representation of women linguistically in the textbooks. A linguistic analysis focusing on the use of nouns and proper nouns throughout all the textbooks shows that for every 42 proper nouns referring to men, there is just one proper noun referring to women. Language is almost totally masculine, and addresses intended masculine audiences and readers.

The use of dynamic and stative verbs throughout the textbooks is also worth noting from a gender perspective. Figures in the books highlight the representation of men and women across the textbooks grammatically, using dynamic or stative verbs. Discussions with male subjects overwhelmingly employ dynamic verbs like run, flew, fight, drive, build, lead, etc. whereas discussions with female subjects overwhelmingly employ stative verbs, such as 'getting bored' (*Malet and Sa'emat*) ملت وسأمت, 'tired', 'mesmerized', 'lost' (*Faqadet*) فقت, etc. Women are frequently conceptualized as passive objects, capable only of receiving actions rather than initiating or owning them.

One of the most striking drivers of genderization (i.e. formation of gender identities) in the textbooks, for example, is the difference in the identification of men and women. Throughout, men are identified by their proper names, by their roles, and by their professions in society. For example, male characters are defined nationalistically, through their relationship to the state: citizens '*Muwatenin*', sons of Jordan '*Abna' Al-Urdun*', good citizens '*Al-Muwatenin Al-Salehin*', the knights of Jordan '*Fursan Al-Urdun*', etc. They are also described in relation to their military services and guardianship roles within the country and the state. They are colonels, lieutenants, generals, valiant, and martyrs. Moreover, men are depicted through their leadership status and roles. They are the king, sultan, prince, governor, mayor, caliph, etc. Men are identified as productive and with a professional agency; they are farmers, painters, bakers, physicians, businessmen, writers, translators, engineers, architects, shepherds, etc. They are also associated with judicial roles (judges, heads of the Supreme Court, chief judges) and have religious authority: Muftis, Imams, Sahabeh (the Prophet's companions). Also, there is a trend of constant association between males on the one hand and science and technology on the other, which is clearly stated in the male-prescribed roles and professions for example Ulama' (scientists), inventors, and entrepreneurs. This feeds into analyses conducted on how "masculinities are constructed within the institutional space of the school, which is located in a discourse of education" (Shirazi 2016).

Conversely, women are almost exclusively identified in terms of their relationship to men, marital status, and familial positions. The woman is, for example, a wife, a sister, a mother, an aunt, a grandmother, etc. Moreover, she is associated with caregiving roles: she is the angel of mercy, the nurse, and the teacher. Women fulfill roles that are typically "female." When women are placed in *relational* positions to men, they are obviously given a minor, marginal (most importantly dependent) status. They cannot be

independent, and they cannot be themselves. Whereas men are independent and play active roles in society, women are secondary and accessory. Mills and Mulaney (2011) reveal how framing and grammar within texts reinforce traditional discourses of patriarchy and femininity. Femininity in those texts correlate to exclusion or marginalization.

This negation of women's individual agency is further reflected in the use of nouns and proper nouns. For every 42 proper nouns referring to men, there is only 1 referring to women, and for the 176 male profession-nouns (such as fireman, lawyer, engineer, scientist, farmer, policeman, judge, carpenter, poet, etc.), there are only 5 female profession-nouns (a teacher, a nurse, a traffic- warden and a doctor). On the other hand, pronouns referring to women, which largely denote anonymity, far outnumber pronouns referring to men. Whereas a woman is "she," a man can be an astronaut, teacher, lawyer, policeman, etc. This gender disparity is further reflected in the types of verbs associated with men and women. While men are associated with action and doing verbs as mentioned above (including run, throw, crawl, kneel, organized, won, fight, fly, participated, sped up, remembered, imagined, researched, wrote, commanded, woke up, invented, thought, jumped, etc.), women are associated with largely passive and stative verbs, such as 'wondered, retracted, withdrew, leaned on, bored'. This distinction is also seen in the disproportionately high number of men as grammatical *subjects* and the correspondingly high number of women as grammatical *objects*, as highlighted in the findings earlier. Women are conceptualized as passive objects, capable only of receiving, or responding to, actions rather than initiating or owning them. This passivity, in conjunction with the erasure of unique female identities, runs in stark contrast to the numerous active identities offered to Jordanian boys and men.

The language of Jordanian textbooks glorifies male positioning in context at the expense of the female. It elevates males by conveying and representing them in dynamic and active verbs, diversifying their location within a holistic trajectory of male roles; while women are limited to caregiving. Women's actions and words are placed either in the passive form or in static-verb constructs. Defining women through their only work of caregiving and excluding all other important roles performed by them 'narrate' them through discrimination and fragmentation.

### ***Visual Representations***

Similar to the initial findings related to the linguistic representation of women, the visual representation of women is lacking. Of all pictures and illustrations throughout the textbooks, just 22 percent are of women and girls, while the overwhelming majority are of men and boys. Illustrations in the Arabic Language and in Social and Civic Education textbooks speak for themselves – even numerically and statistically. In grade 4's textbook, part 1, there are 10 pictures for males, and 3 for females. In grade 4's textbook, part 2, there are 22 for men and 6 for women and girls. In grade five's textbook, part 1, there are 25 male characters to 8 females. In grade 5, part 2, there are 18 males to 3 females. In the 6<sup>th</sup> grade book, part 1, there are 20 male to 6 female characters. In part 2, there are 9 males to 2 females. Furthermore, the higher the grade is, the more illustrations of young girls replace illustrations of women. This is also a phenomenon worth studying.

**Table 1. Tally of Visual Representations of Women/Girls and Men/Boys Across the Textbooks**

|                | <b>Visual Representations of<br/>Women / Girls</b> | <b>Visual Representations of Men /<br/>Boys</b> |
|----------------|--|---|
| Grade 4 Part 1 | 3  | 10  |
| Grade 4 Part 2 | 6  | 22  |
| Grade 5 Part 1 | 8  | 25  |
| Grade 5 Part 2 | 3  | 18  |
| Grade 6 Part 1 | 6  | 20  |
| Grade 6 Part 2 | 2  | 9   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>28</b>  | <b>104</b>                                      |

The study also focused on the depictions of men and women in their action/activity settings to understand the gendered representations to which students are exposed. As for the settings in which men and women appear, men pervade both history and public space. Their strong, dominating presence is emphasized throughout Islamic history, in particular, all throughout the history



of the Arab Revolt and contemporary Jordan. The depiction of this strong, dominating presence is both constant and consistent. By contrast, women have fleeting appearances throughout historical narratives and remain largely absent from contemporary public space. Their presence is largely perceived in terms of absence. A critical analysis of such absence is revealing about the status of women, but also about the patriarchal exclusive mindset that lies behind such depiction.

The study of images of fragmentation and absence was based on Foucault's body-object articulation, the means whereby a person learns "the relations the body must have with the object that it manipulates." (Foucault 1995, p.153). Throughout the texts, men were associated with lofty actions in the highly celebrated domains or in macho settings: war, knowledge, writing, engineering, architecture, law, science, medicine, technology, aviation, history, patriotism, nationhood, public spaces, battlefields, nature, desert, countryside, the city, flags. Conversely, women were associated with what is reductively viewed as the "domestic" and the "mundane": households, utensils, gardens, schools. In the realms of science, technology, and even literature, they are almost entirely absent. Thus, while men are perceived to construct, invent, experiment, govern, and fight for their country, women are largely perceived as restricted to the house. When they enter the public sphere, it is only as an extension of the private caretaking role, either as teachers or nurses.

### ***Thematic Representation***

Beyond exploring the visual and linguistic representations of women in the textbooks, it is important to explore the overall thematic discussion surrounding these representations of women. The use of stories, dialogue, historical accounts, and more that can either highlight or further hide representations of women are important to analyze.

Firstly, in the Arabic Language textbooks, all 31 poets studied were men, and within the stories in the "Selection from Our Beautiful Language", all protagonists were men; and female characters are either minor or antagonists. A variety of themes were addressed in the stories, including intelligence, wit, heroism, altruism, martyrdom, leadership, security, heritage, progress, morality, invention, strength, unity, and courage. All of these themes, without variation, are associated with male figures. Whereas men become champions of progress and national values, women lurk in their shadow and in the background, playing only a supporting or minor role. The problem here does not only lie in women not being tied to any one of these values, but also in their exclusion from any leading roles. Not only is their poetry absent from that presented as worthy of study, but there is no depiction of women as worthy of admiration for school children in the included stories. Children are taught to expect worthy literature only from men, who are the only protagonists and role models worthy of attention. This discrepancy in content serves only to solidify the restrictions on female agency developed throughout the texts and "naturalize" the symbolic annihilation of women in our literature and literary discourse.

Another alarming pattern of representation of men and women is epitomized in the story of Earle Dickson in the Grade 4 Part 2 Arabic textbook, narrated to show how the injury of his wife in the kitchen was a driving force for him to invent the Band-Aid. The representation of women as patients in hospitals or clinics has been repeated many times in these textbooks. This pattern of binary opposites that position women as patients and weak and men as doctors and healers perpetuate the victimization and vulnerabilities of women, and – naturally – patriarchy and stereotyping.

The aim of themes and content as prevalent in the Social and Civic Education textbooks is to build civic engagement, a value system, a strong country, and state literacy. This task has been executed in an exclusive context in relation to women. State literacy building is a process of marginalization of women and masculinization. For example, the learning about state institutions and organizations, about the state's various sectors and resources, and the state's processes of democratization and modernization has been narrated in a masculine language and within a masculine context, marginalizing women and capitalizing on men's visibility and impact. Issues like citizenship, democracy, civic engagement, and social work are almost always associated with men, men being the "protectors" of both the family and the country. The students learn about the important, noble theme of civic engagement, through reinforcement of social work, voluntary community service, environmental ethics, human rights, and civic values. However, this has been conveyed to students on a misogynistic and patriarchal platform. The marginalization of women and the foregrounding of men is an all-pervading theme. Social and state institutions – the family, the school, the neighborhood, the community, the government – are all led, guarded, protected, and "owned" by men. The resources, natural and material, are portrayed as possessed by men. As stated earlier, man is the good citizen, the farmer, the carpenter, the shepherd, the pilot, the

architect, the engineer, the king, the mayor, the traffic warden, the civil engineer, the soldier, the policeman, etc. He is the owner or provider. Males are burdened with layers of power positioning and patriotism.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Gender portrayal in textbooks and educational materials affects social values, behavior, and recall of material, and gendered messages conveyed in textbooks have the potential to influence the development of students' self-esteem and their attitudes towards the two sexes at an impressionable age. This study found that throughout the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>-grade textbooks in Arabic Language and Social and Civic Education, women are constantly depicted as absent, marginalized, or passive – at best with restricted roles in society – whereas men are portrayed with full ownership of resources and spaces. Moreover, male characters are depicted in a holistic and diversified landscape -- positioning themselves in all spheres, spaces, status, professions, and roles. The male is an active and progressive figure capable of taking on a number of roles and professions in society.

It is difficult to underscore the gravity of such inequality in representation and imbalance in gender roles, especially when children in these classes are subjected to, and immersed in, such depictions on a daily basis. One cannot only conclude that it is largely in the context of interactions with these textbooks and around such curricula that children develop a sense of what gender is and what roles are permitted for each gender. Genderization becomes discriminatory when it portrays women, unjustifiably, as men's binary opposite to validate and naturalize the supremacy of men over women, and when it empowers male's possibility of being and doing at the expense of female's possibility of being and doing, thereby creating an agential imbalance. Fixing curricula along the lines suggested may not, admittedly, solve the problem entirely, as children are naturally affected, in their conception of gender, by stereotypes prevalent in society at large. Nevertheless, the change of curricula is a must, and it could be the place to start for effecting bigger changes.

Urgent action must be taken to ensure that holistic and balanced representations of both men and women are implemented in textbooks in order to change the status quo as well as encourage equitable genderization in schools and, subsequently, equal access and equity in society and life at large: First, women and girls should be narrated in language and portrayed in pictures and illustrations as proactive agents in history, literature, culture, science, technology, society, and other spaces: private and public. The roles intended for both females and males should be executed in ways that manifest equal appearance and resist any hierarchy of privileges, status, and temperament. Second, the language used in school textbooks should take into account the basic premise that males and females alike are the intended readers. Third, language should, semantically and syntactically, reflect gender neutrality and be free of any discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion. Fourth, activities in the textbooks should be tailored to instill equal and equitable values through role-playing, simulation, problem-solving exercises, case studies, etc. Fifth, any status or role assigned to females and males must be, as a general principle, gender-sensitive and responsive. To address these points, it is advised to leverage field experts who would be able to develop and / or revise curricula to ensure comprehensive adoption of these principals. Sixth, a teacher's manual needs to be produced to enable teachers to play an active and constructive role in bringing about gender equity. Such a manual is to provide them with the necessary concepts, tools, strategies, tactics, and procedures that help create a learning environment that is gender-sensitive. It is important to note that while this analysis explored the representation of gender, focusing on women and girls, in the textbooks, each teacher has a different background and will transfer the knowledge from the textbooks in their own ways. Lastly, rigorous and ongoing training should be planned and implemented to enhance teachers' gender sensitivity, consciousness, and skills. There must be a standard of training for teachers before they enter the classroom, one that trains teachers by giving them a preparation course on teaching mechanisms as well as knowledge about gender (including gender equality and gender representation). It is also important to foster opportunities for schools to serve as platforms for discussions around gender equity and identity rather than for them to remain passive social reproducers (Adely, 2007). Parallel to this, advocacy efforts should be made on a policy level by engaging with the government and the policymakers with a discourse of interest that reflects benefits both for gender reform and for the national economy and society as a whole. Future efforts at reform need to be content-based with specific goals that address not only gender biases in the curriculum but also teacher's lack of awareness of, or discomfort with, gender issues, and that provide relevant, sustainable, and contextually appropriate outputs.

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