

## **The Walls Are Talking: Gender Differences in the Thematic Content of Latrinalia in Jordanian Universities**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to explore gender differences in the thematic content of Jordanian male and female latrinalia. A total of 483 inscriptions have been collected from 24 toilets in two different Jordanian universities. 356 inscriptions are collected from the males' toilets and 127 from the females' toilets. The following themes have emerged from the data: tagging, romance, sex, degradation, alliance, philosophy, sports, complaints, and school. The data also reveals consistent gender variation in the latrinalia inscriptions collected from the toilets. The quantitative and qualitative analysis suggests that tagging and sex have been the most common themes in the males' latrinalia, whereas romance and alliance have been the most common themes in the females' latrinalia. In addition, the least common themes of the males' latrinalia are philosophy, alliance, and school, whereas the least common themes of females' latrinalia are sex, degradation, complaints and sports. Further research on this topic is recommended.

**Keywords:** Gender Differences; Thematic Content, Latrinalia; Jordanian Universities.

### **1. Introduction**

Looking at a toilet wall, one may read what can be considered nonsensical scribbles inscribed for the purpose of letting time pass. However, to psychologists, sociologists, and linguists, these scribbles offer an insight into the minds and personalities of their writers, whether males or females. Latrinalia, which is a type of graffiti that has been around for many years, is a form of gendered communication that has attracted the attention of many scholars (Cole, 1991; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin & Gebhard, 1953; Otta et al., 1996; Leong, 2014). Since gendered communication is an important feature of men's and women's language (Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1975; Coates, 1993), it is very important to study gender differences in order to explore how males and females communicate. In fact, gendered communication differ from one context into another. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore gender differences in toilet graffiti in Jordanian universities.

Despite its prevalence in the world, toilet graffiti has been neglected in the Arab setting, in general, and in the Jordanian setting, in particular. More specifically, there has also been very little research of gender variation in toilet graffiti in the Arab world. The reason behind this paucity of research may be due to the sensitivity of the topic as it contains obscene and taboo writings and drawings that are intolerable in this society. The researchers believe that graffiti, and particularly toilet graffiti, should not be ignored as it is laden with highly significant meaningful messages and content. According to Green (2003), the best way to investigate gender and graffiti is within a toilet setting since it provides males and females with the highest degrees of privacy possible. Therefore, this study investigates gender differences in the use of graffiti in Jordanian Universities. Jordanian universities were chosen because they constitute a rich source of data in different fields of study for researchers (Al Mogdad, Al Syrhan & Akorshidah, 2013)

### **2. Objective and Question of the Study**

This study is an investigation of gender differences in toilet graffiti of Jordanian university students. Specifically, it

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aims at investigating how Jordanian male and female university students differ, if they do, in the thematic content of graffiti found in university toilets. As such, the present study attempts to answer the following straightforward question: How do Jordanian male and female university students differ, if they do, in the thematic content of their toilet graffiti?

### 3. Significance of the Study

Generally, the study of graffiti is significant because it reveals a very important aspect of people's lives, as well as their societies and cultures. Abel and Buckley (1977, p.3) mention that "sometimes crude inscriptions offer some intriguing insights into the people who author them and into the society to which these people belong." In a broader sense, this indicates that we can learn a lot about a culture from the graffiti it leaves on its walls. Thus, graffiti should not be neglected because it signals the society's needs and problems. Specifically, toilet graffiti constitutes a rich source of information for those interested in the study of gender differences (Otta, et al., 1996). This study derives its significance from the researchers' assumption that the study of gender differences in toilet graffiti in a Jordanian setting is unprecedented. The study furthers our understanding of how Jordanian males and females think, communicate, and express themselves using language. In addition, toilet graffiti helps us understand the views and attitudes of men and women towards different personal, political, educational, as well as social issues. This study also emphasizes the idea that language gives its users unlimited linguistic choices that are suitable for different social settings and purposes (Al-Harahsheh & Obeidat, 2017). Examining toilet graffiti content will also increase our perception of how gender plays a role in influencing the content of our social interaction. Finally, this study contributes to the already existing literature on the question of gender differences and graffiti in toilets.

## 4. Literature review

### 4.1 What is Graffiti?

Graffiti, or writing on walls, is a global practice that encompasses the human society. It abounds in the world in which we live (Gadsby, 1995), and it can be seen on every imaginable surface around us. According to the Economist (2004, p.1), "the practice of writing on walls is so universal that it almost qualifies as a human characteristic." That said, one may conclude that it may exist across all cultures and throughout the history of mankind.

The term graffiti is a broad term (Blume, 1985; Gadsby, 1995) derived from the Greek word "grapheon" meaning "to write" (Phillips, 1996). Abel and Buckley (1977, p.3) define graffiti as "a form of communication that is both personal and free of the everyday strains that normally prevent people from giving uninhibited reign to their thoughts."

Graffiti is an ancient practice that dates back to prehistoric cave-man wall drawings as a means of human communication (Gadsby, 1995). In modern society, the word "graffiti" includes any crude or casual inscriptions, drawings, slogans, writings, and markings that are scratched, chiseled, scribbled, written, or painted on any public or private surface.

Matthews, Speer and Ball (2012) classify graffiti into three categories: tourist graffiti (found on rocks, picnic tables, tree trunks and monuments), Inner-city graffiti (expressing writer's concerns for his/her own name, identity, and territorial gang markings which are often found on large building walls, subways, and bridges), and latrinalia (writings, pictures and paintings found in toilets). This suggests that there is a relationship between the type of graffiti and the space that holds it. That is, graffiti found on a toilet wall may be different from that found on a public wall.

### 4.2 Functions of Graffiti

Graffiti is rich in content and can provide insights into the mind of the writers. It is an outlet for ideas, thoughts, view, and attitudes. Graffiti is used by people to let their emotions and feelings come to the surface (Al Rousan, 2005; Haslam, 2012; Hanauer, 2014). For example, one may express sadness or happiness by writing on a wall, desk, car, etc. Moreover, it is regarded as a reflection of attitudes of a certain society (Stocker, Dutcher, Hangrove & Cook, 1972).

Haslam (2012) points out that graffiti is the easiest way for any person to express his opinions and/or attitudes about a certain issue and to raise voice against injustice and social alienation since it is highly accessible and free of all restrictions. According to Hanauer (2004, p. 29), graffiti serves to provide individuals “with the opportunity to express controversial contents publicly”, and also offers “marginal groups the possibility of expressing themselves publicly”.

Furthermore, graffiti is an important medium of self-expression for women. Otta et al., (1996) indicate that “through graffiti women may express concern about their power and place in society without fear.” Graffiti may also serve as a psychological safety valve for the expression of sexual impulses (Otta et al., 1996). Graffiti could accurately indicate social norms and measure the cultural and moral values of a society in which they were found (Bartolomeo & Snyder, 2004).

#### **4.3 Latrinalia (Toilet Graffiti)**

Latrinalia, a term coined by Dundes (1966) to refer to graffiti found in toilets, was used by subsequent studies to specifically investigate graffiti found in toilets. It is one of the primary categories of graffiti, which constitutes a popular forum for people who have either obvious or vague intentions. This type of graffiti allows people to transmit their feelings, emotions, concerns and opposition in private (Leong, 2014; Blume, 1985). However, it may be difficult to recognize the real motive behind writing in toilets. Some scholars point out that people write on the walls of toilets to prove their existence, to avoid boredom, to convey criticism, to express anger, and to show agreement or disagreement (Blume, 1985). For others, Latrinalia is a mere reflection of individuals' minds as well as social and cultural values. Despite their private and anonymous nature, toilets are regarded as the most widely accessible space in any public place. Haslim (2012, p. 15) states that “public bathrooms are ideal hothouses and are associated with activities that make taboo ideas and images highlight salient.”

The privacy of the toilet allows individuals to express feelings and attitudes about the world they find difficult to express in a more open space. Being anonymous and widely accessible, toilet graffiti provides students with excellent chances to vent about personal matters, university issues, study-related topics, and social and political concerns, among others. Fisher and Radtke (2014, p.70) conclude that “bathroom graffiti acts as a barometer of social change, in that the content reflects the social issues citizens are grappling with at that point in time.” The terms latrinalia and toilet graffiti will be used interchangeably throughout the present study.

#### **4.4 Related Studies**

Previous research indicated that traditional gender differences still exist in the use of toilet graffiti despite the fact that anonymity and privacy are guaranteed (Abel & Buckley, 1977; Arluke, Kutakoff & Levin, 1987; Kutakoff, 1972; Green, 2003; Leong, 2014). Past studies of toilet graffiti also revealed that males are prone to be more “erotic” than females, whereas females are prone to be more romantic than males (Green, 2003; Wales & Brewer, 1976). The majority of research concluded that politics and sexual reference are the two main gender differences in latrinalia (Arluke et al., 1987; Cole, 1991; Green, 2003; Leong, 2014). It has been shown that males make more sexual references than females (Arluke et al., 1987; Cole, 1991). For example, Arluke et al., (1987) found that female college students in the area of Boston-Cambridge produced much less sexual toilet graffiti than male college students from the same area. Females, in their toilet writings, tend to be more supportive, advisory and relationship-oriented, while males tend to be more negative, argumentative and dominating (Loewenstein, Ponticos & Paludi, 1982; Bruner & Kelso, 1980; Cole, 1991; Green, 2003; Fisher & Radtke, 2014; Leong, 2014). Females also use toilet walls to discuss issues of love, marriage, and happiness more often than their male counterparts, who used it to attack, degrade, and abuse women (Loewenstein, Ponticos & Paludi, 1982; Leong, 2014). In addition, females' toilet graffiti were more conservative and conformed to the social and moral norms more than those of males (Green, 2003; Kutakoff, 1972). Concerning frequency, previous research indicates that men practice more acts of graffiti than females (Kinsey et al., 1953; Kutakoff, 1972) although some subsequent research found the opposite (Green, 2003). Even though gender

differences are a characteristic of toilet graffiti, some scholars pointed out that it seems safe to conclude that “the gender gap is continually closing and becoming very minimal in the today’s society” (Green, 2003, p. 284). Stocker et al., (1972) posit that gender differences in graffiti may be attributed to differences in the childhood socialization of both boys and girls and the decrease of gender differences to the differential socialization of boys and girls.

## 5. METHODS

### 5.1 Data Collection

The present study used a thematic analysis approach. It is an independent approach which lies within descriptive qualitative methods and is described as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The data were collected from 12 males’ and 12 females’ toilets in two public universities in Jordan during a one-month period, particularly the first semester of the Academic year 2016-2017. The name of the universities will remain anonymous.

The researchers opted for random sampling. Two males’ and two females’ toilets were sampled in each Faculty building. The following six faculty buildings were randomly selected from the first university (henceforth University A): Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Fine Arts, Faculty of Economics, and Faculty of Physical Education. From the second University (henceforth University B), the following six faculty buildings were also randomly selected: Faculty of Science and Arts, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Computer Information Technology, Faculty of Architecture and Design, and Faculty of Nursing. The twenty four sampled males’ and females’ restrooms were always close in proximity. A considerable data were collected from the restrooms because the walls seem not to be regularly maintained.

Two male graduate students collected the data from the males’ restrooms, and two female graduate students collected the data from the females’ restrooms. The purpose of the study was explained to them, and they were assured that their participation will remain confidential. They were asked to photograph every graffiti found on the walls, doors, mirrors, sinks of the restrooms. They used the cameras in their mobile phones. The students were given instructions to visit the toilets after 3 pm in the afternoon as the number of students in the university decreases after that time. They were also instructed to make sure that the restrooms are vacant before entering them, and to halt the process of photographing if someone enters the toilet while they were in it.

Three of the students had iPhone 7 and the fourth had a Samsung Galaxy note 6. These phones have high performance cameras with excellent image quality. The photos were then imported from the students’ phones into one of the researchers’ laptop, and were then transcribed for further analysis.

Four hundred and eighty three 483 inscriptions were collected from both universities. They were distributed as follows: 312 from University A (236 from males; 76 from females), and 171 from University B (120 from males, and 51 from females). Of the 483 graffiti collected, 356 (74%) came from the males’ toilets and 127(26%) from the females’ toilets.

**Table 1: Data Distribution and Frequency of Gender and University**

	University A	University B	Total	
	312	171	483	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	236 (76%)	76 (24%)	120 (70%)	51 (30%)

Two hundred and seventy one (56 %) inscriptions were written in Arabic, 208 (43 %) in English and 4 (1%) in French. The French inscriptions were translated into Arabic with the help of a French instructor. Due to the unintelligibility of thirteen graffiti inscriptions, they were discarded from the data collected. All discarded inscriptions came from the males’ toilets. Therefore, the number of inscriptions used for analysis was 470 (343 of males; 127 of females). The percentages of the themes are rounded, so they are approximate.

**Table 2: Data Distribution Gender and Language**

	Arabic	English	French	Total
Male	217	139	0	356
Female	54	69	4	127
Total	271	208	4	483

## 5.2 Data Analysis

This study draws upon qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyze raw data qualitatively to generate content categories. Then, quantitative statistical procedures were applied to check frequency distribution in order to ascertain gender differences. This method of analysis agrees with Bruner and Kelso's (1980) in their study of toilet graffiti. The use of both methods will better our understanding of how males and females use toilet graffiti.

All photos of graffiti were transcribed into a Word Document spreadsheet. Each graffiti was then given an identifying number. For the purpose of the present study, each unit of analysis was a single graffiti inscribed by what believed to be one person, relying on the type of handwriting, type of writing instrument (whether pen, pencil, marker, etc.), color, and clarity as cues. This approach was used by Wales and Brewer (1976). A single word was considered a unit, and conversations were broken down into units of graffiti. That is, graffiti which constitutes remarks or answers to other graffiti were treated as distinct response units. Then, graffiti inscriptions were separated by giving them identifying numbers to indicate the beginning and the end of a graffiti. The data were then classified based on emergent themes. After that, the data were analyzed to check whether gender differences in the use of toilet graffiti exist or not. The occurrence of each theme was then calculated by numbers and percentages; theme percentages were rounded.

Noteworthy is that drawings that were found independently, i.e., not in the company of any other piece of written graffiti were excluded from the data as it was difficult to interpret their meanings or the purpose for which they were drawn such as a drawing of a car, a little girl, a clock, and a guitar, etc.

To ensure reliability, 50% of randomly selected data were checked by a third referee, who is a professor of linguistics working with the researchers in the same department. The inter-rater agreement was 94 %. Issues of differences and controversy were later resolved.

## 6. FINDINGS

This section describes the themes that have been found in the toilet graffiti of Jordanian male and female university students along with their numbers and frequent occurrences. Table 2 shows the numbers and frequencies of the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Two examples typed in bold letters are provided for each theme; their transliterations are written in italics and the translations of Arabic examples are used in parentheses. To help conceal the identity of the writer, some information related to names or phone numbers was hidden where necessary. Therefore, part of the writer's name and phone number were made invisible or replaced by symbols such as X and Y. However, nicknames were written in full.

**Table 3: Frequency and Percentage of Themes in Males' and Females' Toilet Graffiti**

Theme	Male Female		Total N	Total %
	N %	N %		
Tagging	<b>74 (22%)</b>	<b>14 (11%)</b>	88	23
Romance	34 (10%)	35 (28%)	69	38
Sex	58 (17%)	3 (2%)	61	19
Degradation	37 (11%)	5 (4%)	47	15

Alliance	24 (7%)	31 (24%)	55	31
Philosophy	17 (5%)	15 (12%)	32	32
Complaints	34 (10%)	6 (5%)	40	15
Sport	41 (12%)	8 (6%)	49	18
School	24 (7%)	10 (8%)	34	15
Total	343	127	470	

The following themes emerged from the data analysis:

### 6.1 Tagging

Tagging often contained a person's name, nickname, initials or signature. A graffitist often uses it to express his/her presence, authority, self-accentuation, and self-proclamation of status (Fisher & Radtke, 2014; Otta et al., 1996). According to Fisher and Radtke (2014), tagging first appeared in the gang culture, and then was used by regular people. The males in this study used their first names, full names, first and second initials, or family name only. However, the females only used their first names or initials except in one case where the female used her full name. Tagging sometimes appeared with the date of the writing, age of the writer, and/or a phone number. The data analysis showed that the most dominant graffiti theme in the males' toilets was tagging. 22% of the males' toilet graffiti had tagging content, whereas the females' toilet graffiti included (11%) of tagging.

Example 1:

وأقطع X X

*Cut and x x*

(X X, the only)

The first x in this examples stands for the writer's first name and the second x for his family name.

Example 2:

**Fadi X (079xxxxxx)**

The X in this example stands for the writer's family name, and the rest of the phone number is concealed for purposes of anonymity.

### 6.2 Romance

The data analysis revealed that romance was the most prominent theme in the females' toilets, but it occupied the fifth place in the males' toilets graffiti. Of the 127 inscriptions found in the females' toilets, 28% was about romance, whereas only 10% percent of the inscriptions found in the males' toilets was about the same theme. The most common forms of romantic expressions that appeared in both genders' inscriptions were through the expressions of (X being in love) and (X expressing feelings about Y), and (X willingness to spend the rest of life with Y). In addition, there was a common use of nicknames in the romance theme, especially by the females. The Romance language also included love symbols and signs that were used in the inscriptions such as (the heart shape, the plus sign, the kiss shape, etc.). There was a frequent use of the heart shape either drawn around the names inscribed or placed between the two names (x love shape Y). Some instances of poetry and proverbs commenting on love were found in the data.

Example 1:

بِمَهِ الْحُبِّ بِمَهِ

*Oh mother love oh mother*

(Love is beautiful.)

Example 2:

**2gthr 4ever Ali +Tamara**

In this example, the writer used numbers instead of letters. The number '2' in the word (2gethr) stands for 'to', and the number '4' in the word (4ever) stands for 'for'. Besides, the word (together) was reduced.

### 6.3 Sex

The second most prominently inscribed graffiti of the males was sex. Many graffiti inscriptions that express sexual desires, describe sexual body parts, and make general statements about sex were found in the males' toilets (17%) compared to very few graffiti inscribed by their female counterparts (2%). This theme included the use of obscene words as well as some drawings of sensitive body parts. Very disturbing and taboo expressions were used in this theme; therefore, examples would not be provided.

### 6.4 Degradation

This theme included negative remarks about other people's personalities, appearances, sex, beliefs, and behaviors. It also included explicit and implicit derogatory content about other's regions, ethnicities, families, companions, etc. Males contributed (11%) of the total 343 graffiti, whereas females contributed only (4%) of the 127 graffiti. Offensive language that expresses hostility, resentment, and disgust was commonly used by the males and females. The use of swear and taboo content was also prevalent. For example, a male would curse at another and calls all kinds of bad names and expressions.

Example 1:

كل الشباب خاينين

*Cheaters young men all*

(All young men are cheaters)

Example 2:

يلعن ابو المليح به الجامعه

*University the this in good father damn*

(I curse the father of the best person in this university.)

### 6.5 School

School graffiti inscriptions came in the form of positive and negative remarks about courses, exams, teachers, and about the institution in general. However, the negative remarks surpassed the positive ones. The inscriptions under this theme expressed the students' dissatisfaction about services rendered at the university such as infrastructure and facilities. For example, they groaned about classrooms having no proper seats, air-conditioning, or lights, etc. They also wrote about the lack of clean classrooms, toilets, cafeterias, and high prices, among others. This theme also contained remarks about the real purpose of education and coming to school. Moreover, the students expressed their feelings and attitudes about ill-mannered students, unfair teachers and injustice at the institution in general. In contrast, a few graffiti inscriptions praised a teacher, a class, or a person in charge of that institution. 7% of the males' data collected for this study was about school compared to 8% of the females' data.

Example 1:

**I hate Mathematics**

Example 2:

دكتور X احلى دكتور بالقسم

*Department the in nicest doctor x doctor*

(Doctor X is the nicest doctor in this department.)

## 6.6 Alliance

The second most prominent graffiti theme in the females' toilets was alliance (24 %), whereas, only (7%) of the overall males' toilet graffiti was about alliance. This theme included statements of encouragement, support, motivation, and advice. It also included reference to friendship, usually between two females or two males. Some of these inscriptions were replies to other students' inscriptions, for example, those complaining about a certain issue, or those feeling frustrated at something, or those writing improper graffiti. Therefore, the students provided feedback to these writings to motivate and encourage others, and make them feel better. The inscriptions of this category consisted of general advisory comments about school, relationships, and life in general.

### Example 1:

*Manal + Reem friends 4ever*

### Example 2:

لاستلمی یابنتی .. واجهیه

*My daughter oh you give up not...Face him you*

(My dear, face him! Do not give up!)

## 6.7 Sport

The seventh theme revealed from the data analysis was sport. In this category, reference was made by both genders about a favorite club or player. It also included challenging statements to others about an upcoming game or event. Some of the males' toilet graffiti inscriptions expressed the fanatic attitudes of some students about their favorite teams and contained insulting remarks about other teams and players. The students also boasted about the titles their team had achieved. In some cases, they expressed anger about a team's management, accusing them of corruption, or taking the club to bad ranking. The data collected revealed that there are gender differences with respect to this category. The males contributed (12%) of the overall data collected from their toilets, whereas females contributed (6%) of the data collected from their toilets.

### Example 1:

الفیصلی الزعیم

### *Chief the X the*

(Al Faisali club is the master of all.)

### Example 2:

*Wehdat...belong like it or not ours cup-the*

(We will win the cup, by hook or crook...Wehdat)

## 6.8 Philosophy

In this theme the students' wrote about their attitudes, experience, viewpoints, and feelings about the world in general, and about a specific domain of life, in particular. The graffiti inscriptions of this category expressed the students' attitudes negatively and positively. This category included famous quotations, poetry, proverbs, and sayings that deal with life-pressing matters and issues. The female students wrote more philosophical statements (12%) than the male students did (5%).

### Example1:

انما الام الاخلاق مابقيت

*Stay-as far as morals nations indeed*

(Nations are judged by their morals)

Example 2:

الحياة قصيره والشاطر اللي بعيشها صح

*Correctly live-it who the smart and short life-the*

(Life is short, and the smart who lives it rightly)

## 6.9 Complaints

The inscriptions in this category presented the students' resentment, dissatisfaction, despair, hopelessness, mistrust, and anger about an issue or person in the world. The males and females were different in this particular category. 10% of the 343 graffiti found in the males' toilets was complaints, whereas 5% of the 127 graffiti found in the females' toilets had the same content. It is important to note that complaints made about school issues were not included under this category. Instead, they were included under the school theme because they were related to school content. For example, questions about one's existence or use was found in the data.

Example 1:

الموت اريح من هالحياة

*Life-this from better death*

(Death is better than this life)

Example 2:

ان حظي كدقق قمح فوق شوك نثروه ثم قالو لحفة يوم ريح اجمعواه

*It-collect wind day barefoot to said then scattered thorns on wheat flour luck-my indeed*

(My luck is as much as wheat flour they scattered on thorns and then asked barefoot people in a windy day to collect it.)

## 7. Discussion

The main objective of this study was to explore gender differences in the thematic content of graffiti found in the toilets of Jordanian universities. Comparing the thematic content of the males' and females' toilet graffiti, the data revealed some gender variation in the students' toilet graffiti.

It was shown that the females committed far less acts of graffiti than the males. This may be due to the fact that women are more influenced by the social norms in the Jordanian society as they are in most societies of the world (Holmes, 1995). Even when privacy and anonymity were guaranteed, the female students still wrote less on the toilet walls than the male students did. This finding is in line with the findings of (Kinsey et al., 1953; Kutakoff, 1972). Kinsey et al., (1953), for example, postulated that women write less graffiti because they are constrained by the social norms and values, especially those associated with women. This finding also agrees with Coates (1993) and Tannen (1990) who suggested that men are more "verbose" than women. Another interpretation is that women view graffiti as a futile practice that causes damage to properties and, therefore, should be prevented because, according to them, graffiti reflects one's bad parental care and poor education.

The data also showed that gender differences do exist with regards to tagging. Tagging, which simply aims to leave a trace behind, was mainly done by the males for the purpose of indicating presence, control, and competition. This is supported by Abel and Buckley (1977) who posit that individuals leave their graffiti markings as "an announcement of one's identity, a kind of personal testimonial of one's existence...for the purpose of leaving one's mark." The data

showed that the highest proportion of the males' toilet graffiti was tagging. Jordanian males, in general, are usually proud of their tribes, families, and themselves a well, which they express by writing, carving, or painting it on the walls of public and private spaces. The data revealed males' devotion, commitment, and loyalty to the group. In contrast, females are more cooperative than competitive, reflecting their humble and shy personalities as well as their lack of power (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1990). Contrary to women who usually look for relationships, solidarity and togetherness, it is in men's nature to try to achieve power, control and status (Coates, 1993; Tannen, 1990; Holmes, 1995).

As far as romance is concerned, the findings of this study support previous studies which concluded that women are more interested in emotional status than men (Tannen, 1990; Coates, 1993). They tend to express their feelings and emotions more than men do by using language. Therefore, toilets provided them with the suitable environment in which they can express their love to someone or passion about something since their identities will remain anonymous. To put it differently, toilet graffiti constitutes what may be considered a perfect medium for them to reveal their inner feelings and emotions, which are difficult or improper to express publicly. This finding is also consistent with (Green, 2003; Wales and Brewer, 1976) who found that women wrote more romantic toilet graffiti expressions than men.

The finding that women inscribed more alliance graffiti than men did may be ascribed to the assumption that women are more cooperative and more caring about others, and also more interested in talking about relationships than men. Females tend to motivate, support, and encourage others more than men do. This theme was the second most frequent in the females' toilet graffiti, which indicates that females are more prone to develop relationships and solidarity with others more than men do. This is in line with the findings of Loewenstein, Ponticos & Paludi, 1982, Coles' (1991) and Leong's (2014). This finding also agrees with Tannen's (1990) and Coates' (1993) who claim that unlike men, who are more concerned with status and independence in their communication with others, women are more concerned with relationships, closeness and support. The finding also agrees with the social expectation of how a female should be.

Consistent with previous studies of toilet graffiti (Arluke et al., 1987; Cole, 1991; Leong, 2014), this study showed a high proportion of men's sexual graffiti inscriptions compared to that of women's. The males were more engaged in sexual remarks than the females. The Jordanian females' commitment to the norms of the Jordanian society, which may be regarded as a conservative one, may be the reason behind their paucity of writing such sexual remarks. In addition, sexuality is taboo in the Jordanian society, and females' misbehavior is not tolerated as women are viewed as the "guardian of society" (Holmes, 1995). Society expects females to be polite and supportive, in general. On the other hand, the private nature of the space may have been a factor that helped the males leave such a high proportion of sexual inscriptions behind them in the toilets. Males are not as sensitive to the social norms of a society as women are. For males, sexual graffiti is a way to express their masculinity and machismo. Kinsey et al.,(1953, p. 17) suggests that women are "socialized to be polite, respectful and sexually submissive and uninterested", and that "the social norms surrounding gender and sexuality operated even in the private space of the bathroom."

In addition, males' passion about sports was also shown in their toilet graffiti in this study. They inscribed more graffiti related to their favorite clubs and players than females' did. This agrees with the study of Fisher and Radtke (2014) and Otta et al., (1996). It is apparent that both genders differ in their interests. Sport in the Jordanians society is male-oriented even though females have started to show some desire and love to sports in Jordan lately. This can be seen in sport coffee shops and stadiums that witness considerable female crowd in Jordan. Unlike females, Jordanian males can be sport fanatic. They are zealous and express enthusiasm, pride and loyalty for their favorite teams and players.

The data, further, showed gender differences in the degradation theme. The males' toilets yielded more degrading and insulting graffiti inscriptions than the females'. In addition, there was a common use of offensive and taboo language by the males more than the females. This may be attributed to the males' aggressive nature and insensitivity to the social norms (Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1975). This finding supports Leong's study (2014), who claimed that males

used more insulting expressions in their toilet graffiti. The use of taboo and offensive language is regarded as one aspects of men's speech that help them show machismo and manliness. This may also be ascribed to the females' commitment to politeness. Females are considered more polite, sensitive and considerate than males. Much of this may be related to the social assumption that women are inferior to men, subordinate and more status conscious (Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1975). According to Holmes (1995), females tend to be more polite, are ready to soften their speech, and are not as critical of others as men are. To this end, they use more polite linguistic forms and avoid taboo and offensive language than men, who usually use direct, insulting, and competitive language (Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1995). This was also emphasized by Tannen (1990) who argues that men, since their childhood, tend to use a rough and aggressive language, whereas women tend to use a soft and gentle language.

It is no secret that life is laden with troubles and challenges. This was evident in the students' toilets graffiti inscriptions. The students complained about different aspects of life, from lack of peace and happiness to lack of luck and excitement. However, the males had more negative attitudes about the world more than their female counterparts. The data showed that the male students were more of complainers than the females. In their graffiti, the students complained about some of the miserable situations they live in or problems facing them in life. They found the toilets a perfect venue to share their misery with others so that they may feel more relaxed. They also expressed their concerns about the future, especially under the serious unstable conditions the region is going through. They even questioned the purpose of education where it seems extremely difficult for graduates to obtain a job nowadays. This study does not agree with the stereotype that women complain more than men.

Another gender difference observed in the data is concerned with the theme philosophy. Noteworthy is the fact that universities help shape students' beliefs, values, knowledge, and attitudes directly or indirectly (Al-Momani, 2008). There was a significant gender difference for this theme. It is revealed that the females were more willing to share their attitudes and experience in life with others than men were. Again this may be due to the stereotype that women are more affiliative and cooperative than males (Tannen, 1990; Holmes, 1995).

Finally, the findings showed that the males and the females had similar frequencies of school theme. They talked about the same issues and discussed the same concerns in their toilet graffiti inscriptions. It is an issue that is equally important for both as they are part of the same academic institution and educational process.

## **8. Conclusion**

In toilet graffiti where anonymity and privacy are completely protected, common sense is that gender differences will be greatly decreased. However, this study revealed that gender differences in Jordanian toilet graffiti still persist. It can be gleaned that there are some factors such as social norms and gender roles that played a role in preserving this gender variation. This study has ascertained some of the major gender differences in the toilet graffiti and introduced answers for the study's research questions. The males' toilet graffiti exhibited high rates of tagging and sexuality, whereas the females' toilet graffiti exhibited high rates of romance and alliance. Conversely, the males' graffiti inscriptions contained low frequency of alliance and philosophy, and the females' inscriptions low frequency of sexuality and complaints. This study may be considered a unique and daring attempt to explore the writings of Jordanian males and females on the walls of toilets. However, more research may be needed to analyze the linguistic forms used by both genders in their toilet graffiti as well as people's' attitudes towards this significant phenomenon. A study of cross-cultural toilet graffiti is also needed to further our understanding of this interesting topic.

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## الجدران تتكلم: الاختلافات بين الجنسين في المحتوى الموضوعي للكتابة على جدران دورات المياه في الجامعات الأردنية

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### ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى استكشاف الاختلافات بين الذكور والإناث في المحتوى الموضوعي للكتابة على جدران دورات المياه في الجامعات الأردنية. تم جمع 483 نفشا من 24 دوره مياه في جامعتين أردنيتين مختلفتين، حيث تم حصر 356 نفشا من دورات المياه الخاصة بالذكور و 127 نفشا من دورات المياه الخاصة بالإناث. وقد ظهرت المواضيع التالية في البيانات التي تم جمعها: الوسم، والرومانسية، والجنس، والتحفير، والتعاضد، والشكوى، والرياضية، والتعليم. وقد كشفت البيانات عن تباين واضح بين الجنسين في الكتابات التي تم جمعها من دورات المياه. كما أشار التحليل الكمي والتوعي للبيانات إلى أن الوسم والجنس هما أكثر المواضيع شيوعا في كتابات الذكور، في حين أن الرومانسية والتعاضد هما أكثر المواضيع شيوعا في كتابات الإناث. بالإضافة الى ذلك، كانت المواضيع الأقل شيوعا عند الذكور هي الفلسفة والتحالف والتعليم، بينما كانت مواضيع الجنس، والتحفير، والشكوى، والرياضية هي الأقل شيوعا عند الإناث. توصي هذه الدراسة بإجراء المزيد من البحوث حول هذا الموضوع.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الفروق بين الجنسين، المحتوى الموضوعي، الكتابة على جدران دورات المياه، الجامعات الأردنية.

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