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Male Hegemony through Education: Construction of Gendered Identities

Hazir Ullah¹ and Johar Ali²

1) Department of Sociology, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

2) Institute of Social Work, Sociology and Gender Studies, University of Peshawar, Pakistan

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Hazir Ullah
University Islamabad

Johar Ali
University of Peshawar

Abstract

The fundamental presupposition of this paper is that 'gender' is a social category, hence a social construction, which can be negotiated and left fluid instead of something fixed and eternal. To examine the gendered social order, this study focuses on how hegemonic masculinity and feminine subordination are naturalized by positioning men as physically strong and women as weak on the ground of biological differences between the sexes. The study is informed by social constructionist understandings of gender. The main focus of the paper is to highlight how gendered discourses in Pakistan inform textbooks as objective and true knowledge. The data for the study comes from 28 educationists (11 females and 17 males). The study's findings revealed that, despite prevailing claims to establishing gender equality and equity in education, educationists are active in the production of gender/sexual identities and hierarchies in a ways that reinforces hegemonic 'masculinity' and a fixed notion of 'femininity'. The paper concludes that what ends up as school knowledge arises from gendered power/knowledge relations.

Keywords: gender, hegemonic masculinity, social constructionism, discourse

Hegemonía Masculina a través de la Educación: Construcción de las Identidades de Género

Hazir Ullah
University Islamabad

Johar Ali
University of Peshawar

Abstract

El presupuesto fundamental de este artículo es que “género” es una categoría social, por lo tanto es una construcción social, que puede ser negociada y que fluye. No se trata de algo fijo y eterno. Para examinar el orden social de género, este estudio se centra en cómo la masculinidad hegemónica y la subordinación femenina se han naturalizado posicionando a los hombres como fuertes físicamente y a las mujeres como débiles sobre la base de las diferencias biológicas entre sexos. Este estudio se basa en los planteamientos del constructivismo social sobre género. El tema principal de este artículo es resaltar cómo los discursos de género en Pakistán presentan los libros de texto como objetivos y portadores del conocimiento verdadero. Los datos provienen de 28 profesionales de la educación (11 mujeres y 17 hombres). Los resultados del estudio revelan que, a pesar de existir demandas para establecer igualdad de género y equidad educativa, los profesionales de la educación generan identidades de género/sexuales y jerarquías de forma que refuerzan la “masculinidad” hegemónica y establecen de forma fija la noción de “feminidad”. Este artículo concluye que lo que acaba como conocimiento escolar surge de las relaciones de poder/conocimiento de género.

Keywords: género, masculinidad hegemónica, constructivismo social, discurso

Gender' is causally constructed social category, hence a social construction (Haslanger, 1995; Skelton et. al, 2006). However, the sex/gender debate is not so easily solved enterprise and highly contested from a variety of quarters since its inception (see (Francis, 2006; Paechter, 2007). We assume that sketching out gender theories provides a helpful starting point to the study. In ordinary discourses, men are thought as human males and women as human females. Many feminists endorse the sex/gender distinction to counter biological determinism (Mikkola, 2011). Biological determinists believe and argue that behavioral differences between girls/women and boys/men is the inevitable product of inherent, biologically programmed differences between men and women (Francis, 2006). Geddes and Thompson (1889) argued that social, psychological and behavioral traits were caused by metabolic state: women conserve energy (being anabolic) which makes them conservative, passive, lazy and least interested in the [public domain] and politics. Women therefore should not be involved in the public domain, especially in politics. Men expend their surplus energy (being katabolic) and this makes them variable, energetic, eager, dynamic, passionate, and thereby, interested in [the public sphere] and politics (quoted from Mikkola, 2011). Similarly, corpus callosum is thought to be responsible for various psychological and behavioural differences. On the basis corpus callosum it was claimed that women's thicker corpus callosums could explain what 'women's intuition' is based on and impair women's ability to perform some specialized visual-spatial skills, like reading maps (Gorman 1992). The essentialist and biological differences is argument is found across disciplines, 'including within feminism, some radical and difference feminists have supported this idea and, often maintaining that women's biological differences from men and ensuing behaviour should be celebrated' (Francis, 2006, p 8). It is argued that women/girls and men/boys are 'predestined to gendered expression of behavior, which are fixed and inevitable (Francis, 2006, p 9). Feminists take up a serious argument with biological and evolutionary psychologists' explanation of women nature on multiples grounds: the corpus callosum is a highly variable piece of anatomy; differences in adult human corpus callosums are not found in infants; this may suggest that physical brain differences

actually develop as responses to differential treatment (Fausto-Sterling 2000 b); their infancy and, and no one can yet determine what impact brain differences have, or the ways in which these are manifested (Rose, 2001). de Beauvoir argues that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, and that “social discrimination produces in women moral and intellectual effects is so profound that they appear to be caused by nature” (de Beauvoir 1972 [original 1949]. Feminist also argued that the conclusions about human behaviours are made from primate behaviors because human beings control their natural and social behaviors whereas other primates lack these abilities (Levine and Hole 1973, p 173). Similarly, feminists strongly reject Sigmund Freud’s thesis of ‘pennies envoy’ (Ullah, 2006; Millett, 1970). Criticizing the biological essentialism, Levine and Hole (1973, p 172) argues that

social unequal position of women throughout the history is not the result of their biology, but rather the result of the values society has placed, at any given time on the biological differences of the sexes. These values are not natural, they are social judgments, which consign women in the name of natural interpretation of biological on scientific, moral and technological grounds.

Challenging biological and brain differences theories, feminists point out the role of social institutions in producing gendered expression of behaviour. Social learning theorists explains, rather assert, that gender identity is learned by children via social institution such as family, school, mass media, peer and so on. Many first waves feminist pointed the role of socio-economic practices and expectation embedded in the legal system and social conventions and institutions as constraining women’s lives and behaviour (Francis, 2006, p 10). This means, Beauvoir would argue, one is not born a woman or man but rather becomes a woman or man through social forces (also see Stanworth, 1981; Millet 1971). It can be argued that gender socialization turns children into feminine and masculine individuals. In other words, femininity and masculinity are the products of socialization (nurture) how individuals are brought up. Gender differences, Haslanger (1995, p 8) would argue, are *causally constructed*:

social forces either have a causal role in bringing gendered individuals into existence or (to some substantial sense) shape the way we are *qua* women and men.

Kate Millett (1971, p 28-29) argues that

gender differences are essentially cultural, rather than biological bases that result from differential treatment.

For Millett, gender is the complex whole of ‘parents’, the peers’, and the culture’s notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression. (Millett 1971, p 31). An alternative views were developed by cognitive development theorists. They (cognitive development theorists) argue that children learn gender identity (and gender stereotypes) through their mental efforts to organize their social world. This perspective ‘suggested that children’s understanding of their gender identity depended upon their stage of cognitive development (Francis, 2006, p 10). This means that children learn about gender and how to “do gender” because it is central to the way we organize society. They learn culturally appropriate ways of thinking and being as they follow routine rituals and respond to the everyday demands of the world in which they live. This means that socializing forces (family, peer and school etc) inculcate constant and forceful messages about how boys and girls should behave and act shaping us into masculine and feminine individuals.

Sex role/socialisation theories were very useful at first in second wave feminism as these offered the possibility of change. The common feature of this early work was a tendency to gender identities as fixed, and also to treat girls as a homogeneous group, as though their experiences were unified...these readings present a single version of female experience...it ultimately rely on dichotomous sex distinctions (Walkerdine and Ringrose, 2006 p 31). Believing of gender identities as fixed, girl as homogeneous category and feminine and masculine

gender-norms were/are thought problematic as such approach to the understanding of gender fits with and reinforces females' subordination: they learn to be docile, emotional, passive, ignorant (see Millett 1971). It is important to highlight that gender theory was still in process of development and the understandings of how children 'learned' gender started to shift away from socialisation theories to those where child was a more active agent. It was this development in gender theories whereby some feminists (poststructuralist) criticized sex role socialization theories for their inadequate account for change and taking individual as passive recipients of socialization (see Skelton et al, 2006).ed (see Dillabough, 2006). Similarly, it was claim that people don't all share or experience the same construction of gender (Walkerdine and Ringrose, 2006); and the discourse was evoked to gender fluidity, femininities and masculinities in plural (see Skelton et al, 2006). However, the success of this stage was that the concept 'gender' was seen as social category, distinct from 'sex'- biological characteristics that differentiate between men and women. The crux of this body of work was: gender expression of behaviour is socially produced rather than biologically inherited and determined. For detailed critique of this perspective see Connell (1987); Davis (1989); Walkerdine and Ringrose (2006). Thus, the social category of 'gender' (and also gender inequality) for social constructionists arises from interaction. However, there are many social constructionists whop see individual as biologically sexed, with consequences flowing from this bodily difference in term of the ways other interact with them. This mean that individual interact with each other with different expectation depending on the individual's apparent sex which in turn perpetuate gender differences in behaviours (Francis, 2006). There are other social constructionists who go further, seeing biological sex itself as socially constructed (Davies, 1989; Butler 1990; Paechter, 2001 are of great worth in this regard). This group of people is particularly influence by post-structuralism. For feminist poststructuralists, 'gender', 'gender inequality' and sexuality arise from discourse. The emphasis here was the relationship between discourse, subjectivity, and power. Much use of the word discourse was/is influenced by the work of the Michel Foucault, who explained the use of language and other sign systems as a means to control people's actions. Foucault's explanation of power as operating through

discourses was able to clarify the phenomena of resistance and contradiction which had proved problematic for sex role theory [perceiving individuals as passive recipients of socialization via which social relations are reproduced (Francis, 2006, 10). Francis, citing Davies (1989), further writes:

Foucault's theorization of people as positioned in and produced by discourses can also explain the gendered nature of society as produced by gender discourses that positioned all selves as men or women, and present these categories as relational (p 11).

Taking Foucault into account, Butler (1990) argues that 'maleness' and 'femaleness' are simply produced by discourses; sex itself is socially and discursively constructed. Butler views gender (and sexuality) as performative in acts, gestures and enactments. She further argues 'that the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality' (ibid, 336). Butler describes gender and sexuality as constituted effects of performance or of discourse. According to Butler, 'it is individual actions, gestures, enactments and institutional practice which produce the category of gender, gender identity and sexuality...the political regulations and disciplinary practice produce that ostensibly coherent gender' (Butler, 1990, p, 337). Thus Butler very emphatically argued that gender is socially constructed rather than inherent, gendered traits are not tied to biological sex (Butler, 1990). Girls/ women can act and behave in 'masculine' ways. This mean that gender need to be understood how men and women are portrayed in discourse as well as in relation to existing social and cultural power structure.. In the light of the above discussion there seem a division between social constructionists and poststructuralists (i.e. in West and Zimmerman's analysis, gender lives in interaction; in Butler, gender lives in discourse). Therefore, some feminists argue that the terms 'women' (MacInnes, 1998; Francis, 2000, Whitehead, 2001 cited in Walkerdine and Ringrose, 2006, p 32). Thus poststructuralist account argues that

language is central to the development of subjectivity. Language is multiple and varied with no guarantees of the transference on intended meanings so, too, subjectivities are multiple, varied, contradictory and fluid. Defining discourse as relationship between language and its real power context, gender and discourse studies, including this study, focus on ways men and women are portrayed in discourse, analyzing how men and women are viewed in public communication (in this study textbooks discourse and educationists' views), how men and women themselves use language and so on.

Methodology and the study

The data for the paper comes from a larger study. 28 (11 female and 17 male) educationists were selected for the study through purposive sampling. The selected respondents were interviewed with the help of unstructured interview guide. It is important to make it clear that we use the concept of educationists in this study encompasses curriculum designers, working in federal ministry of education Islamabad; subject experts and textbooks authors working in the textbooks board KPK; executive education officers; and head teachers in the selected public and private schools. The selection of respondents was made in line with the [Glaser and Strauss \(1967\)](#) model of research process which stresses the selection of respondents for the study in accordance with their relevance to the research topic. So the respondents of this study were not selected to construct a statistically representative sample of the population with the aim of reducing complexity by breaking it down into variables. But the aim was to increase complexity by including context and variety of respondents in the educational bureaucracy. This decision was made with the belief in the relevance and richness of data and less fussy about representativeness of the sampling.

It is reiterated that the study is informed by social constructionist understandings of gender. In particular, the writings of feminist poststructuralists have provided some useful concepts for analysis and discussion. Concepts such as discourses, positioning, and power/knowledge relation, as used by [Foucault \(1980\)](#), [Davies and Harre \(1990\)](#) and [Walkerdine \(1990\)](#), has been engaged for interpretation and analysis of primary data collected from educationists

(who were working in various capacities in the educational bureaucracy. Drawing on insight from feminist poststructuralist, the paper, employing discourse analysis, explains how educational movements and reforms are political and frequently functions in favour of powerful groups (males). The study sheds light on how curriculum designers, subject experts, textbooks authors, and teachers working in the educational bureaucracy of act as agents of state/male dominated society by reproducing different and differentially located 'categories' of citizens: for example, girls as 'Other' of boys and essentializing women across space and time. With this in mind, each participant (educationist) in this research has been understood to have been constructed by, as well as constructs, her/his historical legacies (family socialization, educational and career journey, and the type of social capitals and opportunities available to her/him). They were viewed as producers of knowledge based on their experiences from which they claim the only 'real' and 'objective' knowledge. Throughout, the study attempts to highlight the belief systems and social forces which appear to operate as the basis for developing textbooks. It also considers, what are its far reaching implications? Particular attention is given to the stance adopted by female educationists with the aim of explaining how they are constructed and positioned by dominant discourses around gender; and how they act to position children as female or male within the existing male dominated social structures. The aim of highlighting females' responses is to draw attention to the fact that gender power dynamics are not simply a matter of 'males dominate and females suffer' but that some women are also involved in maintaining and naturalizing gender hierarchies so that these continue to reflect male hegemony (Gilbert, 1989a). The paper, therefore, challenges essentialist perspectives using social constructionism as a lens. We contend that 'commonsense assumptions' frequently work in favour of society's powerful groups (males). It is argued that government's attempt of establishing and introducing gender equality in textbooks and to alter the prevailing gender power knowledge relation seem to have failed due to insufficient understanding of the complexity of such relations and to gender blindness of those dealing with curriculum and textbooks. The paper concludes by opening out a space within which Pakistani government official commitment to elimination of all kind of gender bias from

curriculum and school processes may be viewed critically. Following themes emerged and are discussed in the paper.

- Females under representation in curriculum
- Gender based division of labour
- Subject choice and gender
- Women in traditional female careers
- Women and political leadership
- Gender, sports and physical activities

Females under representation in curriculum

As revealed by Hazir Ullah and Christine Skelton's study of *Gender Representation in the Public Sector Schools Textbooks of Pakistan*, male characters outnumber females throughout the public school textbooks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (see Ullah and Skelton 2012). Regarding the unequal and stereotypical *representation of males and females in textbooks*, the responses of educationists go in sharp contrast with what we referred above and discussed in the cited article.

Chairman textbook board KPK: There should be equal representation of females and males illustration in the textbooks. But you [the researcher] know there always exist tension between the actual practice and what ought to be. We should know this fact that textbooks development is not one man show but a complex activity played among curriculum wing of the federal ministry of education, provincial textbook board, partner NGOs. Each party and group has its own interest. [Not only this] social threats make it difficult to include certain stuff in textbooks that I think should be the contents of the textbooks.

An almost similar response was given by a senior female educationist from textbook board KPK.

A female subject specialist textbook board KPK: We [textbooks board] are trying to eliminate gender biases from school textbooks. You know it is not an easy task. Just to tell you one example, we

incorporated a picture showing a girl riding bicycle [pause] you know we were [advised] by the Curriculum Wing [Federal Ministry of Education Islamabad] that it is not in accordance with cultural expectation as girls don't ride bicycle in our culture. So it was removed.

Contrary to the above responses some respondents emphatically asserted that females have limited role in society and equal representation of females and males is not necessary. Some of these are quoted as under:

Female subject specialist (Urdu) textbook board KPK: I think underrepresentation of women in the textbooks does not discriminate them. You know women's roles are limited in society and where it is required (repeat and stressed) genuinely required, they are presented both in the text and illustrations.

Another female subject specialist, holding a senior position, reinforced the above views by asserting and believing in females' limited role in society.

Female subject specialist (social studies) of textbook board KPK: See textbooks represent what prevail in the wider society. If you look and count activities and works around you, women have limited roles in society. Therefore, they are lesser in number in school textbooks. I don't think their lesser number makes any difference.

It is important to highlight that for a considerable number (7) of the respondents, gender imbalance in textbooks, is unnecessary and pointless discussion. A male curriculum designer, MoE, Islamabad argued:

I think these are trivial things that you [the researcher] are pointing and discussing. Society is suffering from many other serious issues. Don't you think we need to focus on other key problems in education instead of such secondary issues? [He continued] corruption, absentees and ghost¹ schools.

A very identical view was expressed by the Principal of Higher Secondary School for Boys Peshawar city. He contemptuously said:

The West [people in the west] has reached space and trying to live there [expression of contempt] we are still wasting time in these useless issues [gender bias material in schools resources]. Can we not focus on important aspect of education?

These quotes suggest that how respondents' understanding and experience of the social world and their place in it, is constructed through discourses (Davies and Harre, 1990) and how their experiences (family socialization, schooling and interaction with the larger society) inform their approach to gender issue which, in turn, seems to support gender biases in textbooks.

A very significant finding emerged when the questions regarding equal representation of females and males in the textbooks was asked to a female executive education officer. She argued that:

I don't think it is not important to focus on how many of women exist in the texts and illustrations, what is significant are: in which roles and positions women are depicted. If there are more women than men but all of them are shown in the traditional stereotypical role of housewives, or depicted busy in domestic chores, it is more discriminatory than their less number against men.

Executive District
Education Officer (female)

The argument then is that balancing up the gender character, names, nouns and pronouns in textbooks, but portraying them in the traditional gender roles will not solve the problem. Rather the stress should be what role they (females) are presented in. This is exactly the argument put forward by post-structuralists feminists (see Walkerdine, 1990; Skelton, 1997).

Gender based division of labour

On inquiry about whether men and women should be assigned different social roles (male in public domain and women in the private domain) due to their differential biology, a range of opinion and responses were expressed by the study respondents. Majority of both men and women viewed gendered social order as natural and inevitable. They believed that behavioral differences in females and males as the result of biological differences between the sexes. For them biology is destiny.

A male curriculum designers MoE curriculum Wing, Islamabad argued:

I think and believe that men are more suitable for the work in the public domain because of their stronger bodies, physical strength and rough and aggressive nature; whereas women are more suitable for the private domain of home because women find it difficult to keep up with the long and odds hours that public domain demand.

An almost similar stance to the above question was taken by few women educationists. For example:

Female subject specialist textbook board KPK: “God had created women inferior to men in term of their physiological and biological composition structures (pause); therefore, it is men duty to earn and spend on their women. Gender based division of labour in society seems natural and real division of labour. Nevertheless, there can be cross participation (women in the selected fields in the public domain and men in the private domain) on need basis.

Another senior female educationist viewed that women's participation in different fields of public sphere as a potential threat to the moral fabric of society. She argued:

Female subject specialist textbook board, KPK: Women's participation in all fields of public domain has given birth to too many moral evils in our society. I think it is better that they should be encouraged to develop liking for career in selected fields such as teaching and medicine.

Patriarchal societies, Skeggs (2002) would argue, give women the responsibility for the maintenance of social order and safeguarding human races through their virtues. Some of the female educationists were quite critical about domestic ideology.

Principal Girls' High Schools Peshawar City: Domestic chores are not women's natural roles. These are assigned to females by society. However, these are socially created and deeply ingrained in our culture which is difficult to escape. How can wives force their husbands to share domestic chores or say them you work at home and I am earning, *ohhh* (expression of helplessness).

Executive education office (female) Peshawar city argued that:

Involving one's husband in domestic chores belittles the husband status in his social circle and no woman wishes that her husband be labeled negatively. The family goes smoothly when the wives/women sacrifice, remain submissive and subordinate to their husbands

The following extract from female educationists' responses shows that women in two paycheck families feel strongly overburden due to second shift.

We want our men to help us in household chores as we feel overburdened after a daylong work in the public domain and also looking after the children and kitchen. We have to manage job and domestic chores for many reasons: a) it saves the family, otherwise it may lead to marital maladjustment; b) we don't force husbands to share domestic chores as people around us will talk about our husbands in bad terms; c) wives love to serve and care their husbands; and d) it positions a woman as a respectable and good wife when she sacrifices, remains submissive and subordinate to her husband.

(Extract from the majority opinion)

One female respondent very forcefully and emphatically argued that men's involvements in domestic activities are not compatible with our culture. She argued:

See we are not living in western society to ask men to carry out domestic activities. Rather, as you know, we live in a culture where it is considered bad to ask men to do household chores. I think it cements marital relation. To be good in domestic chores actually elevate female's position.

(Female subject specialist,
textbook board KPK)

Most of these discourses seem unidirectional: justification of domestic chores as women's responsibility. It is evident from these discourses that women use their feminine capital (domestic services and submissiveness) as 'bartering agent' for the acceptability and family security. The responses of the few (three female and two male) participants, who disagreed with sex based division of labour as natural but accepted it as cultural imperative, Fairclough would argue,

are so profoundly naturalized within a particular culture that people are not only quite unaware of these most of the time, but find it extremely difficult, even when their attention is drawn to them, to escape from them in their course, thinking and action. (Fairclough, 1995, p 195).

Subject choice and gender

Sex of the children has decisive effect on their choice of subjects (see Page and Jha, 2009). Boys and girls, for example, do not pursue the same subject as the dominant ideology pushes them to study subjects which would best prepare them for their natural roles (argument of the essentialist and innate differences theorists). When choosing subjects boys and girls may be influenced by what they have learned about femininity and masculinity in early socialization (Sharpe 1976, 1994, Skelton et, al. 2006). On inquiry about *which subject are more suitable for girls to pursue as an academic career*, mixed but almost balance feelings and reactions were shared by the study's respondents. Almost half of the respondents expressed beliefs which strongly bind male and female role in society with biological differences between the sexes. Extract of some of these responses are:

Female subject specialist Textbook board KPK: girls, if they can, should study medicine or social science.

The above position was reinforced with a more detailed answer to the question by another senior female curriculum designer. She argued that:

(...) girls should study medicine as females are better doctors than males. However, all girls cannot and don't qualify for the medical college; therefore, the best fields for girls [after medicine] are psychology and home economics [giving the reasons] ultimately females have to look after the family and socialize children. You know well, these subjects help them in homemaking and child rearing in the best manner.

(Female subject specialist (Urdu)
textbook board KPK)

Similarly, principal government higher secondary school for boys Peshawar city opined.

Boys and girls hear differently, boys like cooler colour, girls like brighter colour, boys take risk, girls avoid risk [he argued] there is biological differences and we cannot equate males and females. [Similarly] boys are good in natural sciences as compared to girls. [Therefore] I believe that social sciences suits girl more than natural sciences.

An opposing point of view was held by an almost equal number (12) of respondents, consisting both genders, claimed that academic discipline should not be gendered as boys and girls can pursue any subject they wish in line with their aptitudes.

A senior curriculum expert, Ministry of Education: (...) gender makes no difference and I believe that no subject is masculine or feminine. Girls and boys can be equally good in a subject depending on their aptitude. But if females intend to pursue career, you know, there are many cultural issues for them which clearly affect females' choices of subject selection.

The above extract indicates how patriarchal structure of society constitute a framed whereby power is exercised through norms, hidden social threats which channel females to limited academic and job options without officially promulgated rules, prohibition and oppression. An almost the same position was held by another respondents.

Male subject specialist (English) textbook board KPK: "...[A]ll fields are appropriate for girls if the patriarchal structure of society allows females to join any job they wish. Since society does not encourage to females to enter any jobs they wish due to restricted mobility, *purda*, therefore, parents and other social forces compel females to study subjects which either help them in running the family or guarantee a job in medicine, nursing and teaching etc.

Executive education officer female, criticizing cultural bias, argued:

Girls can study all subjects if our society [patriarchal social structure] provides them opportunities for employment. I think cultural factors and some time lack of science laboratory and teachers in the neighboring School compel girls to study selected subjects [arts and humanities] and pursue education whatever is available.

Both these groups of respondents shared different opinion about the effect of children's sex on their choice of subject. The second category of responses is superficially not gender discriminatory and apparently very progressive. However, these, when critically analyzed, are not different but equally gendered by depriving children from their decision power on the ground of biological differences, cultural and structural factors such as purda, restriction on females' mobility to avail education away from their homes, and lack of educational facilities in female schools.

Women in traditional female careers

The study unpacked a very traditional mind set when the question regarding best profession for women was asked to the respondents. High majority, irrespective of their gender, agreed that the best professions for women are school teaching and medicine.

Principal Girl high School: Teaching is the best profession for women as it has more and more vacations which give women the edge to look after household management.

Teaching suit women as it is a job between breakfast and lunch time which does not affect women mothering role and she can easily manage domestic chores after school time. School teaching is best for women as it gives them an opportunity to educate and socialize their children in the best way.

Extract from interview

School teaching needs pyar (love) not mar (beating) and women are very kind hearted and, therefore, very fit for teaching profession.

Extract from interviews

Principal Peshawar Cambridge (a private school): Teaching at school level involves less interaction with male members; therefore, it keeps the parda intact. Therefore, I believe teaching is the best for women.

These responses justify the appropriateness of female as school teacher on grounds common in other society such as ‘women being kindhearted, women are the best for teaching children (Solomon 1985; Foster, 1993), it is in consonance with cultural norms (Joncich,1991), women needed income, they were anxious not to marry, they wanted to be more independent, and they were interested in fostering social, political and spiritual change (see Drudy, 2008; Smulyan, 2006, p 471; Hilton and Hirsch, 2000; Hoffman, 2003 cited in Francis, 2006, p 47)

However, in addition to the exhaustive and multiple explanations coming from the western scholarship, this study’s findings add additional reasons and justification for school teaching as women’s job in the context of KPK, or may be generalized to the entire Pakistani society. These are: ‘more vacations’ and ‘a job between breakfast and lunch time’, both of which don’t affect the ‘domestic ideology’ thesis. This is because of these gendered beliefs that textbooks are embedded with messages applauding school teaching for women with the attached messages that women in teaching also carry out all domestic chores (Ullah and Skelton 2012).

Few respondents (5 males and 3 females) believed that biological differences between the sexes should not affect females’ choices of career.

Women can enter any field and do any job except those that are physically strenuous and involve long hours.

One of the male respondents asserted that

There are many qualities that women are bestowed with by nature and many they adopt from the environment which enable them to flourish and prove their worth in any sphere of social and professional life provided they receive conducive environment.

Subject expert (English) textbook board KPK: Women can be the best in any field of the public domain if they are given opportunities by the male dominated culture.

One of the female respondent argued: women are better than men in doing any job as they always remain clear with and dedicated to their goals as compared to men. However, men don't let them to join all fields because they fear that women will threaten their supremacy by outperforming them.

These responses seem very encouraging coming from men as well as some women educationists. However, both categories have an implicit message which positions women in the subordinate positions in the society. As many believed that women are not capable of performing jobs that are 'physically strenuous' and involve 'long hours'; it also believes that 'women are bestowed with some natural qualities' which give them superiority over men. Both these positions are very essentialists. These support the thesis of psychological and biological differences between the sexes which, in turn, give men the space to argue that women are best fit for selected fields in the public domain like teaching and medicines which are not physically demanding and need the caring nature of women. Moreover, this position on the issue negates the fluid nature of the 'gender' as a temporality which is embedded in the power of language (Davies, 1989; Butler, 1990). It also reaffirms the crude gender (sexual) division of labour with little reference to the social complexity underlying the formation of ideas and beliefs about 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in family, schools, media, peer interaction and state (see Connell 1987, and Walkerdine 1990). Similarly, some of these responses stress a universal womanhood and its celebration. It links women's subordinate positions to patriarchy without

giving attention to particularity of context and the manner in which gender identities are shaped by social institutions and children response to their socializations (Measor and Skies, 1992). Essentialists thinking are embedded in the claim-male dominated culture-which asserts that all men are oppressors and all women oppressed. In both categories there seems an implicit politics-avoiding or pretending to understand and challenge the root causes of 'gender codes' and 'gender order'.

Women and political leadership

There is a dramatic shift and evolution in women's entry to politics around the world. Nevertheless, women's inclusion and exclusion as political actors depends on a combination of economic, cultural, social, political and religious reasons. To find out the reasons of women's invisibility in the position of political leaders in the textbooks (see Ullah 2006), opinion of the educationists were sought on the question 'can/should women be political leaders? Mixed responses were received from respondents which are transcribed and presented into two broad categories: *women shouldn't and cannot be political leaders*.

Secondly, they can and should be. Response of each participant was sorted into the relevant categories irrespective of his/her gender and a general extract has been derived from these responses. Majority (11 out of 17) male and (7 out of 11) females respondents opined that women cannot be effective political leaders and therefore they should not try to be political leaders. Their responses are presented in the following quotes:

How can we talk about women to be leader in society in which men of characters and good reputation are afraid to participate in the dirty Pakistani politics?

Executive Education Officer (female) Peshawar: She particularly argued that-women cannot be an efficient political leader as they cannot keep secret and top political positions require politicians to keep state secrets. She further added that it is in women nature and psychology to share their stock of information with other and they enjoy telling 'half baked' stories".

Why we should talk about things which are useless, women are not allowed by the religion Islam to be political leader". A belief held by 3 male and 4 female respondents.

There were few (6 males and 4 females) respondents who believed and supported women's role in politics.

Male subject expert (English) textbook board KPK: Women can be better political leader than men if they were provided opportunity and were allowed by men to participate in politics. They referred to Benazir Bhutto as the most efficient political leader after her father Zul-fiqar Ali Bhutto.

They can be efficient political leaders provided they get conducive cultural environment to demonstrate their leadership talent. Nevertheless, society's elites don't want their wives to be political leaders as they are afraid their women may threaten their authority. If women of the elite class cannot be part of the politics how can we talk about the rest of women in Pakistan?

Some of them even pointed out Benazir Bhutto, Hina Rabi and even Hillary Clinton to have gain political prominence through their families, benefiting from their family connections. These belief are so deeply established and held that curriculum and textbooks are not only silent about women role in politics but the role of the few prominent political figures (i.e. Fatima Jinnah) have been masked and highlighted with their feminine characteristics such as loving, sacrificing and kind instead of their political activities (see Ullah and Skelton, 2012).

Gender, sports and physical activities

When asked about ‘whether boys and girls should play the same games? Majority of the respondents, irrespective of their gender, expressed that they should not play the same games. They shared various reasons and explanation for their beliefs. After constant comparison of the explanations and positions that the respondents had on the issue of gender and sports, following extracts were obtained which was common among the majority respondents.

Some sports which involve more physical strength like cricket, hockey, football etc don't suit girls due to their physiology. Therefore, females should not play these.

Extract from interviews

Subject expert textbook board KPK: Girls are not created with the capacity of running and jumping. One can remain healthy even without playing any sport.

Plying sports may break girls' hymen which can create future social complication for girls at the time of marriage. Keeping the hymen intact and saving it from breaking is what ensures her virginity at the time of marriage.

Extract from interviews

Sports and games don't have gender and these should not be engendered. There is neither male sport nor female sport. Girls and boys can play any sport they wish. However, in the existing cultural environment women don't have the opportunity to play any game. We have to change the culture first.

Extract from interviews

The essentialist and biological imperative argument seem to have limited and continues to limit females' participation in sports and physical activities. Lumpkin (1984) argued that [historically] women were not provided equal opportunities because of the perceived physiological differences between the sexes (cited in Everhart, Pemberton and winter 2001). Analyzing the above illustration with Foucault's (1980, p 39) notion of 'power as circulating, existing in the individuals' action... touching their bodies, inserting into their attitudes ...and everyday life' make good sense. The 'hymen myth' is equally restricting women participation in sport. The prevalence of hymen belief among majority male and female participants alludes to what Foucault called surveillance and or the ways Foucault (1980) and Walkerdine (1990) came to understand power as something beyond the power of the state which is visible and invisible, manifest and hidden and that exist everywhere. Here the power is invisible but exist in every site to control females' sexuality and maintain their modesty. The shift from manifest textual discourses to verbal discourses is actual a shift from visible to invisible apparatus of regulation and power relation (Walkerdine 1988). Taking into account the 'hymen myth' is the sole marker of female virginity and modesty is irrational and ideologically embedded discourse which serves the interest of male domination. Modesty is demanded in the religion Islam from both males and females.

Conclusion

This study explored the contradiction that educationists have regarding the issue of gender and education, especially with reference to the gender equality efforts in textbooks. The findings reveal that, on the surface level, there seem a tiny group of educationists who understand the notion of gender equality but their understanding of gender equality is in term of balanced number of male and female illustrations rather than in a way that would explicitly challenge gender stereotypes. Majority of female educationists, not all, were found more conformists in protecting and promoting the dominant notion of femininity and masculinity. They firmly believed in the essentialist dichotomies of each gender. On the whole, educationists see 'gender' issue as 'sex' issue

where boys/men and girls/women are seen as separate entities-abiological perspective that reduces 'gender' to the essentialists views of males and females. This male-female binary confounds any meaningful discourse on 'gender'; we will say block thinking and discourse of the varieties of 'femininities' and 'masculinities' that exist out there (see [Connell, 2006](#)). To be more robust in the claim, we argue that the study findings suggest educationists' beliefs (which inform school textbooks and school process) clearly underpin and support gender biases and stereotypes in school textbooks. Hegemonic masculinity and feminine subordination is naturalized and legitimized through the powerful discourses of 'social role conformity on biological differences between the sexes', 'institutional responses to females participation in education and the work world', women as the custodians and bunkers of morality'. To ensure gender equality in and through education, a comprehensive gender awareness training of educationists cannot be ignored and taken lightly. Female can think out of the traditional gender roles when they come across multiples role models. Thus presenting children with a 'wider range of experience' ([Walkerdine, 1990](#), p 89) [options, roles, and positions] may change children's view of themselves and possible course of actions ([Skelton, 1997](#), p 43).

Notes

¹ Schools that exists only on paper and are functional in the government's record but teachers and students do not come for teaching learning.

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Hazir Ullah is Lecturer at the Department of Sociology, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan. **Johar Ali** is Professor at the Department of Gender Studies and Director of the Institute of Social Work, Sociology and Gender Studies University of Peshawar, Pakistan.

Contact Address: Direct correspondence to Hazir Ullah. Lecturer Department of Sociology, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan. E-mail address: hazir.ullah@iiu.edu.pk or h.ullah@bham.ac.uk