

# Color Connotations in Clothes among British and Jordanian Females: A Sociolinguistic Indication

Dima Alomari

Ph.D English Language and Linguistics, Assistant Professor of Linguistics, English  
Dept. / Faculty of Arts, Alzaytoonah University, Amman, Jordan

E-mail: dimafameen8@gmail.com

Maha Jamal AL-Qadi

M.A English Language and Linguistics, Lecturer of English Language , French and  
English Dept. / Faculty of Arts, AL-Zaytoonah Private University, Amman, Jordan

E-mail: qmemo\_77@yahoo.com

Received: January 24, 2017    Accepted: January 30, 2017    Published: February 28, 2017

doi:10.5296/ijl.v9i1.10643    URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v9i1.10643>

## Abstract

Colors resemble an essential part of most females' choices in various parts of life. The present study investigates differences between British and Jordanian females' choices of colors of clothes. Ten British females and ten Jordanian females, ranging 30-45 years old, have answered a questionnaire that is divided into four sections related to: personal information, showing how and why they chose different colors for different reasons. Analysis of the data shows clear differences between the British and Jordanian females. The purpose of this study is to uncover the cultural differences between British and Jordanian females in their choices of colors.

**Keywords:** Colours, Clothes, Jordanian females, British females, Culture, Connotation

## 1. Introduction

Colors are an important part of our lives. People enjoy forming colors for different tasks in their lives like photographs, painting or even wearing their daily clothes. It is surprising how people are connected to colors even before they come to life! Blue gifts are dedicated to boys while pink is for girls. Widely spread in many cultures, females choose colors with regard to fashion or even their own state of mood. What is preferable today as a favorite color for a female could be disliked on another day! Moreover, what females consider a color of romanticism in a culture appears to be a color of anger by females in another!

## 2. Review of Literature

One color can have various meanings in different cultures. According to Mario De Bortoli & Jesus Maroto (2001), Orange in Asia is a positive, spiritually enlightened and life-affirming color, while in the US it is a color of road dangers, traffic delays and fast-food restaurants. A study was conducted by Greene (1995) that reflected the interest of women in colors on college students and the cultural effect of Nepalese females who traditionally wear more colorful clothing than men do. This study indicates that gender and cultural differences affect on color choice and the images associated with them.

With the use of technology and internet, people have learnt about other cultures and have adopted what they like from those cultures. Consequently, Western cultures have adopted some Eastern color uses and vice-versa. However, colors may symbolize different things for different people of different cultures. For example, red in the West symbolizes danger and anger while in the East it symbolizes prosperity and good fortune. (cultural-color.html). While orange symbolizes the Halloween in the West, it symbolizes spirituality and happiness in the East. More surprising is that green symbolizes jealousy in the West, but it symbolizes new life and hope in the East!(cultural-color.html).

The idea of color connotation is emphasized by (AL-Adaileh, 2012). He asserts that Arabic colors could convey different connotative meanings, in addition to their literal meanings, that are realized in linguistic expressions such as "black handed, white record and yellow leaf".

Allan(2007) states that: "the connotation of a language expression is clearly distinct from its sense, denotation and reference ". This indicates that the connotative meanings appointed to colors seem to be grounded in reality (Niemeier 1998, cited in Philip 2006: 88). What is meant by the connotative meaning is the other meaning understood of a word or expression in addition to its main meaning. Leech (1981:23) categorizes meaning into conceptual meaning and associative one. By the conceptual meaning, Leech refers to the main part of what language is in verbal communication ,i.e. the cognitive or denotative meaning. He also considers six types of associative meaning : connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative and thematic meaning. ( AL-Adaileh, 2012).

AL-Adaileh ( ibid ) defines the connotative meaning as what is communicated by virtue of what language refers to. Therefore, this kind of meaning compared to the conceptual one is not fixed and may differ according to culture, historical period and the personal experience of an individual. Cruse (1986) classifies non-prepositional meaning into expressive,

presupposed and evoked meaning. Jeffries (1998: 109-44) explains that connotation refers to the expressive and suggested meaning discussed in Cruse (1986).

### 3. Colour Connotations

Colors may develop various extended meanings depending on the cultural background of the individual. Xing (2009: 88) argues that each color term has three types of meanings: original meaning, extended meaning and abstract meaning.

Colors also interfere and affect our everyday life. They play an essential role in even choosing every day females' objects. According to (Olesen, 2017), a scientific experiment was conducted in which two study groups were each given sleeping pills; "blue pill" and "pink pill" 72% of those who took the blue pill reported sleepy compared to those who got the pink one. It could be inferred here that the color blue has inspired calmness when associated with water. Moreover, another study showed that 84.7% of the people, who shop, like to choose a product according to its color. 93% of shoppers consider its visual appearance while 6% have a look at the texture. Yellow placed in the shops of windows grabs the attention of shoppers. It also encourages conversation and activates the nervous system. Therefore, brands take color psychology into consideration in creating their products. (Olesen, 2017).

It is obvious that color psychology can elevate females' emotions and their state of mind. So, when females view colors, various psychological indications are provoked.

Due to cultural differences, Arabic and English color systems and their connotations differ. This may contradict Manav (2006) and Kaya – Crosby (2006) whose findings show that differences in color connotations are associated with the individuals' knowledge and experience.

According to the cultural context of Jordan, white and green may be viewed positively; while black, red and yellow could be considered negatively. This study will uncover the similarities and differences related to color connotations in both Jordanian and British cultures with reference to an analysis of a questionnaire filled by Jordanian and British females.

### 4. Analysis of the Data

#### 4.1 British Females' Choices of Colours

Section Two: Kindly tick your attitude towards the following and give a brief account of why:

Table 1. Various Attitudes for the British Females in Choosing Colors

No.	Statement	Always	Sometimes	Never	Neutral
0		10	10	10	10
1	I like bright colors.		10		
2	I like dark colors.	5	5		
3	I choose colors depending on mood.	4	4		2
4	Mood has nothing to do with my choice of		4	4	2

	colors.				
5	I choose colors according to occasions.	3	6		1
6	I wear black for formal occasions.		10		
7	I choose one color for all my stuff.	1	1	8	
8	I prefer various colors for all my stuff.	7	2	1	
9	The same color makes me feel bored.	3	5	2	
10	Various colors make me feel bored.		1	8	1

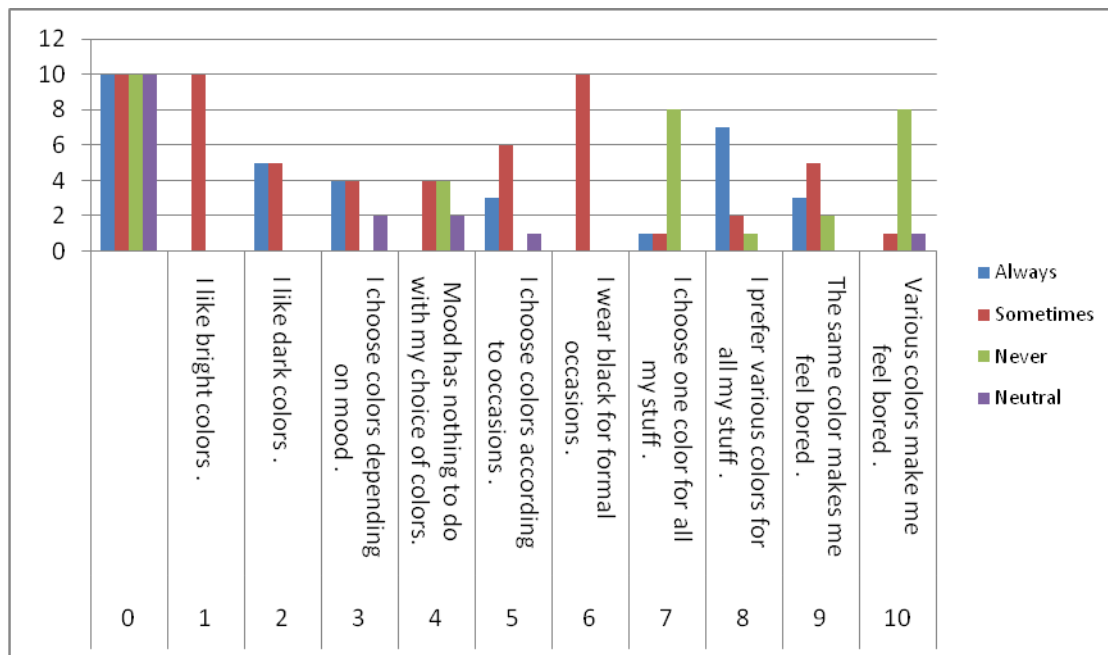
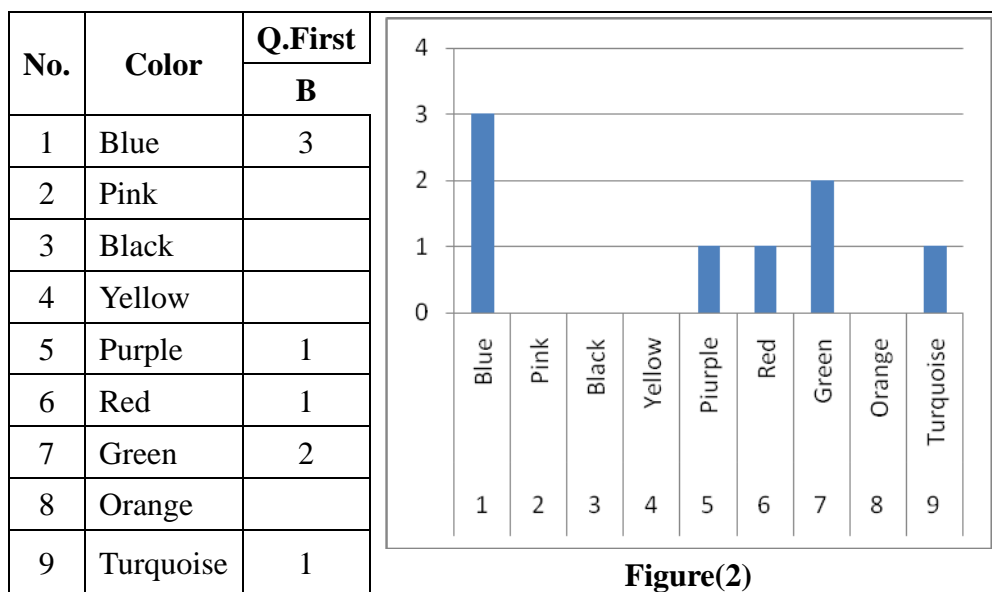


Figure 1. Various Attitudes for the British Females in Choosing Colors

Analysis of the data in the present study shows that the highest percentage goes for the British choice of (sometimes) for bright colors due to different reasons such as: happiness, calmness or activity, as shown in Table (1). Similarly, they also get the same high percentage for (sometimes) choosing black for formal occasions. The next percentage shows that they (never)choose one color for their stuff, assuming that it could be boring to see only one color all through, as it is shown in Figure (1). Moreover, similar percentage goes for their choice of (never)item number 10: Various colors make me feel bored; and this explains why they do not prefer choosing one color for all their stuff. The following percentage is for their choice of (always)in item 8: I prefer various color for all my stuff; supporting the previous idea of "never" choosing one color for all my stuff. (See Figure (1)).

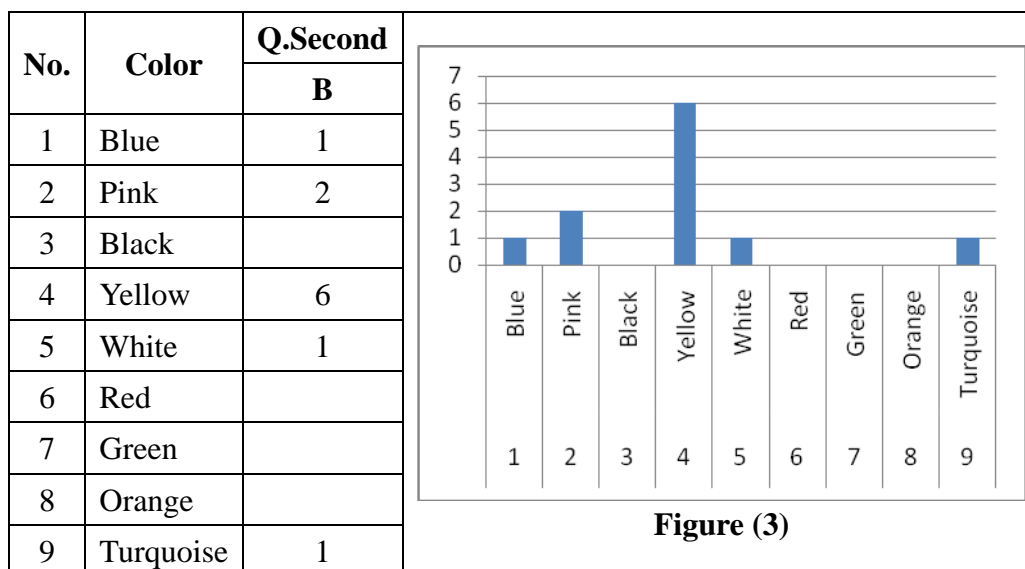
The other section of the questionnaire is to answer five questions related to color association with different life concept as follows:

**Q.First: What is your favorite color?**



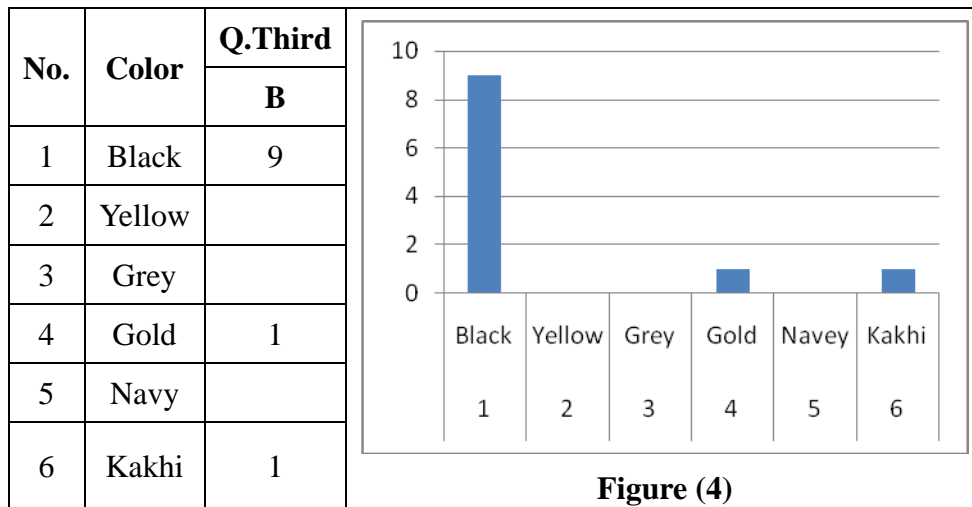
Data analysis for the results of Question 1: What is your favorite color? indicates that Blue receives the highest percentage for British females, as they associate Blue with: calmness, quietness and brightness according to the index. The lowest percentage goes for three colors: Purple, Red and Turquoise.

**Q.Second: Which color do you associate with happiness?**



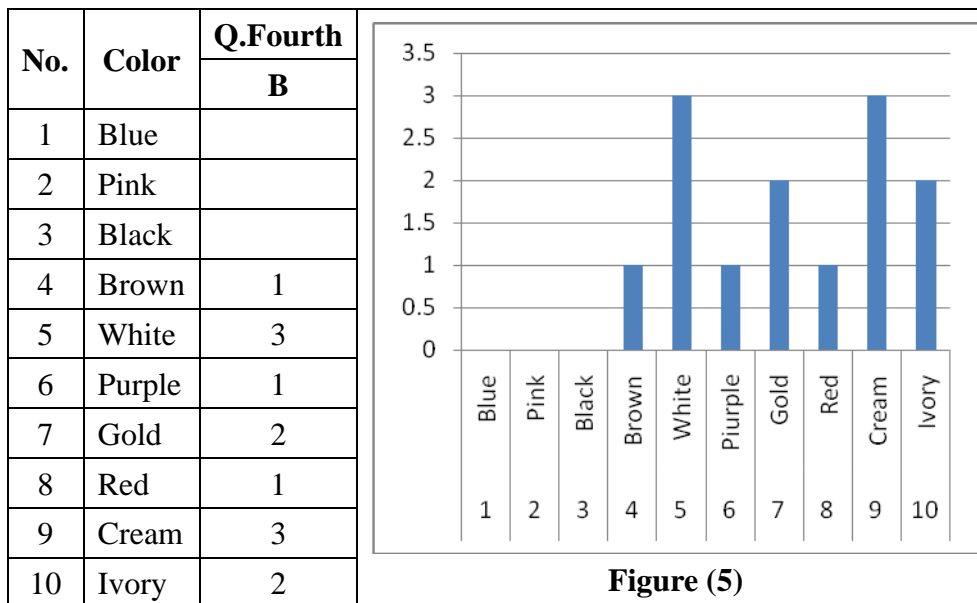
Analysis of question Two: Which color do you associate with happiness? shows that Yellow has the highest percentage for British females, since it reflects: summer, happiness and fun according to the index. The lowest percentage goes for three colors: Blue, White and Turquoise.

**Q.Third: Which color do you associate with sorrow ?**



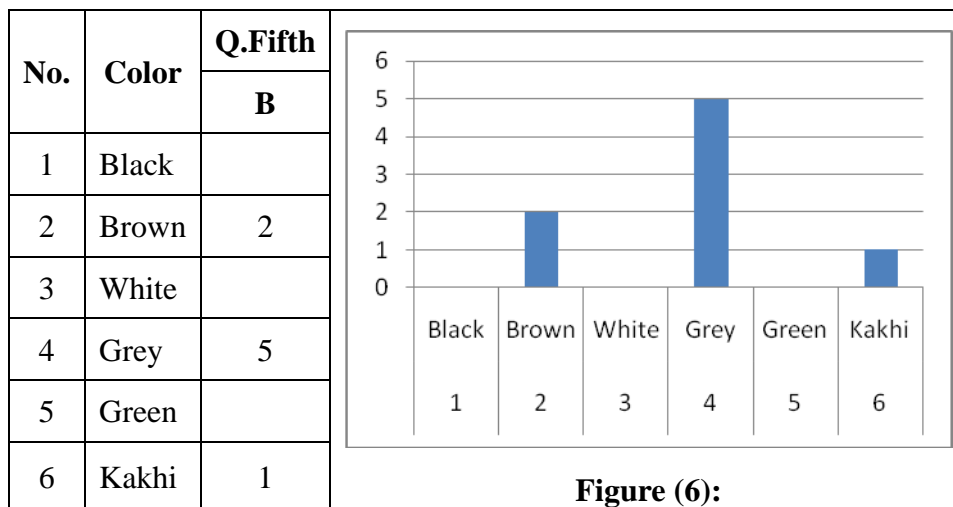
Data analysis for the results of question Three: Which color do you associate with sorrow?, indicates that Black receives the highest percentage for the British females, as they consider it attractive, formal and glamour as it is shown in the index. The lowest percentage goes for two colors: Gold and Kakhi.

**Q.Fourth: Which color do you associate with luxury?**



Analysis of question Four: Which color do you associate with luxury? shows that White receives the highest percentage for British females while the lowest percentage goes for 3 colors: Brown, Purple and Red. See (Figure(5))

**Q.Fifth: Which color do you associate with poverty?**



Data analysis for the results of question Five: Which color do you associate with poverty?, indicates that Grey has the highest percentage for British females, while Kakhi has the lowest percentage. See (Figure(6)).

*4.2 Jordanian Females' Choices of Colours*

**Section Two: Kindly tick your attitude towards the following and give a brief account of why:**

Table 2. Various Attitudes for the Jordanian Females in Choosing Colors

No.	Statement	Always	Sometimes	Never	Neutral
0		10	10	10	10
1	I like bright colors.	6	4		
2	I like dark colors.	4	2	2	2
3	I choose colors depending on mood.	4	4	1	1
4	Mood has nothing to do with my choice of colors.	1	4	4	1
5	I choose colors according to occasions.	6	4		
6	I wear black for formal occasions.	1	8		1
7	I choose one color for all my stuff.	1		8	1
8	I prefer various colors for all my stuff.	5	2	3	
9	The same color makes me feel bored.	5	3	1	1
10	Various colors make me feel bored.		1	9	

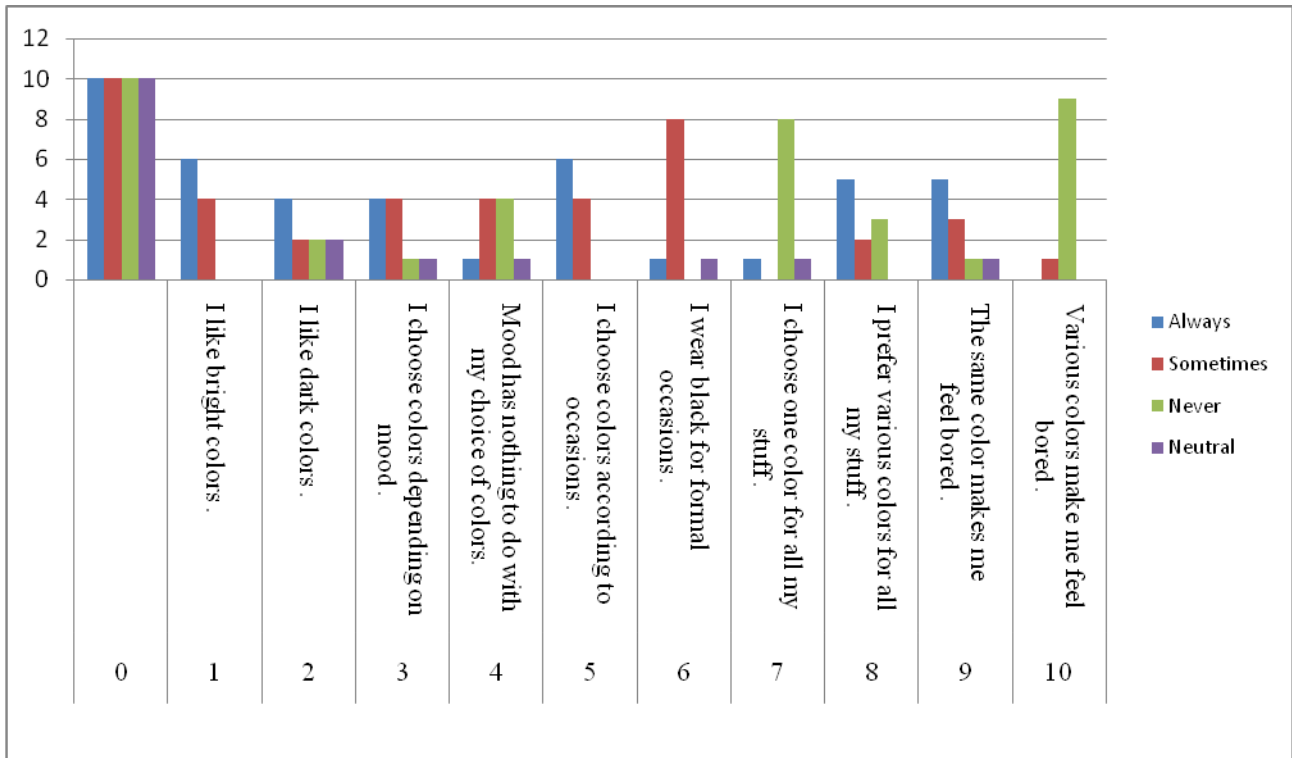


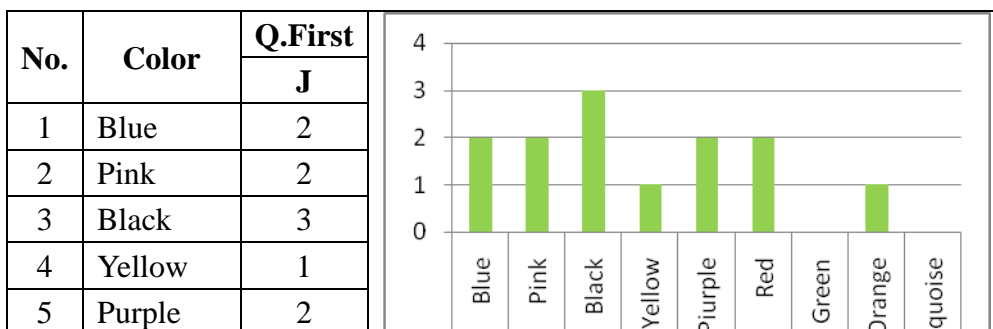
Figure 7. Various Attitudes for the Jordanian Females in Choosing Colors

It is clear in the analysis of the data in this study that the highest percentage goes for the Jordanian females choice of (never)for various colors make them feel bored as shown in Table(2). They get another high percentage of (sometimes) for wearing Black for formal occasions as it is shown in Figure(7). This is justified according to the index in which Jordanian females consider Black a symbol of "Death and Sorrow ". The following percentage is for their choice of (always) in item number 2: I like bright colors. The same percentage is also for their choice of (always)in item number 5: I choose colors according to occasions. (See Figure(7)).

The other section of the questionnaire is to answer five questions related to color association with different life concept as follows:

**Section Three: Please answer the following questions.**

**Q.First: What is your favorite color?**



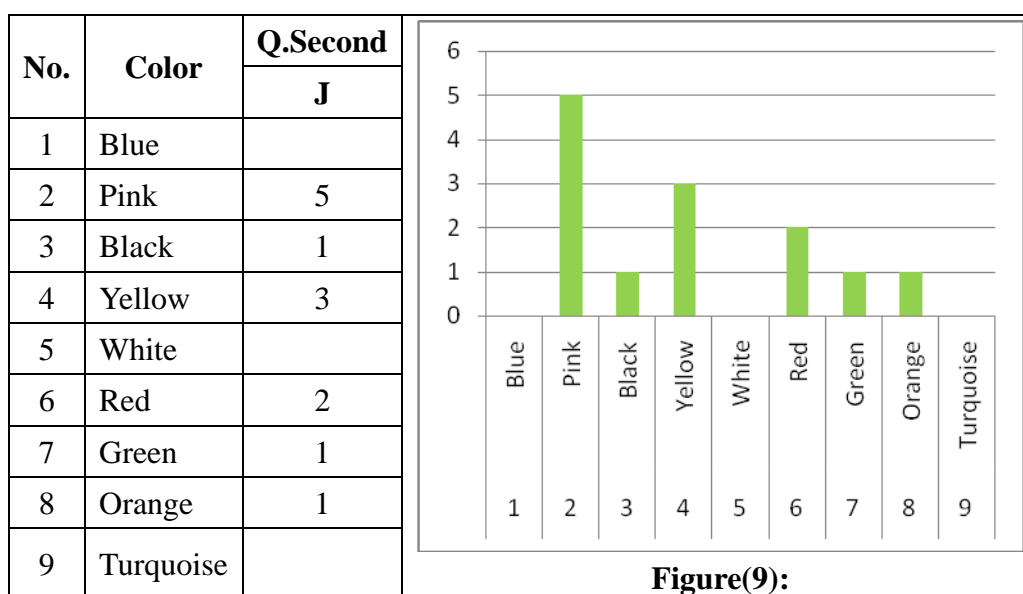


6	Red	2
7	Green	
8	Orange	1
9	Turquoise	

**Figure(8):**

Data analysis for the results of question One: What is your favorite color? shows that Black has the highest percentage for Jordanian females, as it symbolizes luxury, high class and prestige according to the index, while the lowest percentage goes for two colors: Yellow and Orange, as they are associated with: bad choice, garbage, illness, jealousy and sorrow which are all clearly negative.

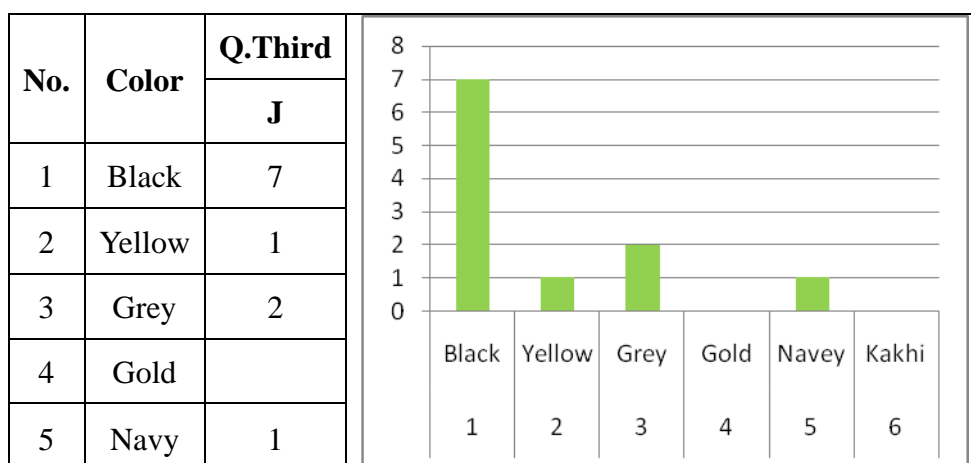
**Q.Second: Which color do you associate with happiness?**



**Figure(9):**

Figure(9) Analysis of question Two : which color do you associate with happiness?, indicates that Pink has the highest percentage for Jordanian females. This is reflected in the index, as Pink symbolizes: livelihood, calmness and femininity for Jordanian females. The lowest percentage goes for: Green, Black and Orange.

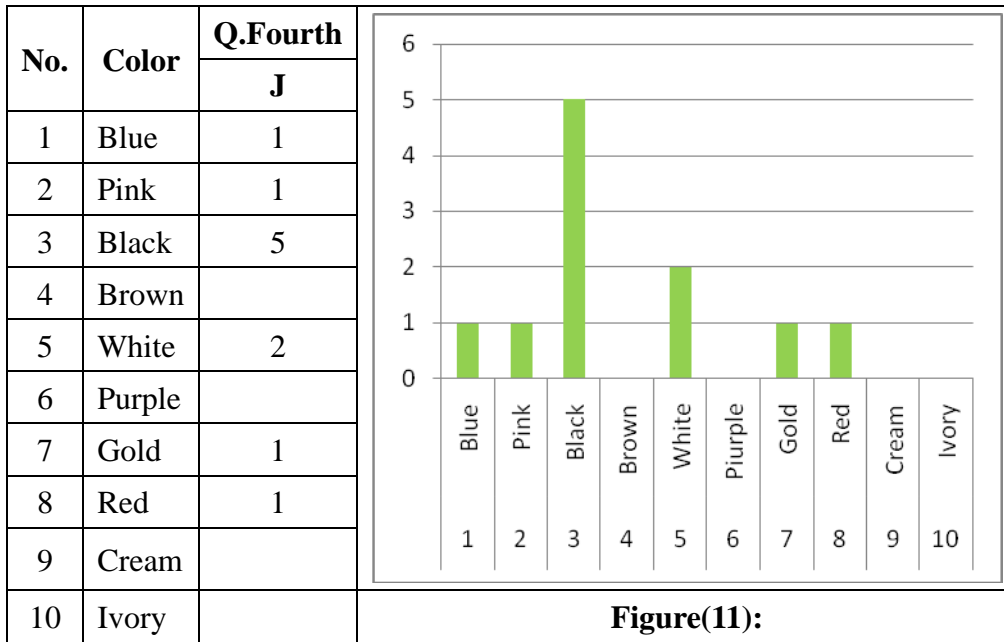
**Q.Third: Which color do you associate with sorrow?**



6	Kakhi		<b>Figure(10):</b>
---	-------	--	--------------------

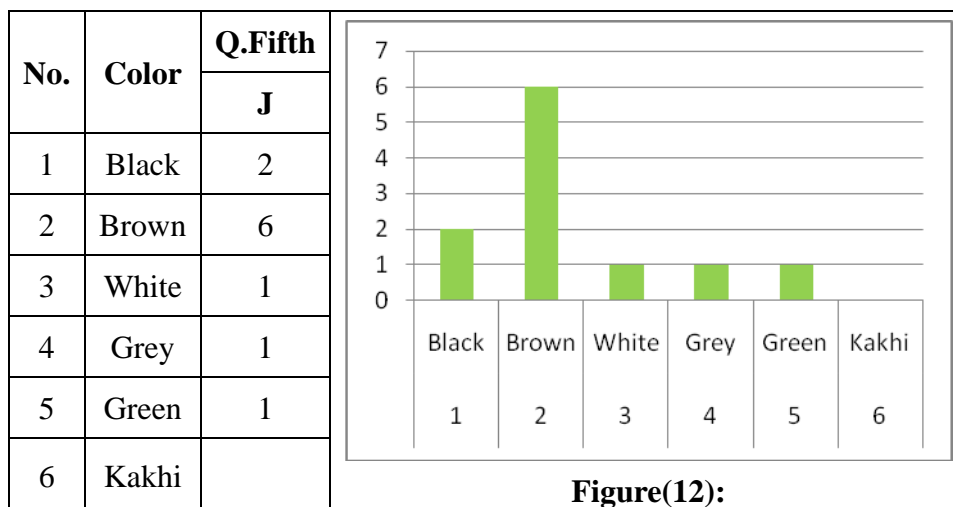
Data analysis for the results of question Three: Which color do you associate with sorrow?, indicates that Black receives the highest percentage for the Jordanian females. While the lowest percentage goes for two colors: Yellow and Navy.

**Q.Fourth: Which color do you associate with luxury?**



Analysis of question Four: Which color do you associate with luxury? shows that Black receives the highest percentage for Jordanian females, while the lowest percentage goes for four colors : Blue, Pink, Gold and Red. See (Figure(11))

**Q.Fifth: Which color do you associate with poverty?**



Data analysis for the results of question Five: Which color do you associate with poverty? indicates that Brown has the highest percentage for Jordanian females, while the lowest percentage goes for three colors : White, Grey and Green. See (Figure(12)).

### 5. Conclusion

Analysis of the data shows some differences between British females' choices and Jordanian choices. See (Figure(12)).

Table 3. Various Attitudes for the British and Jordanian Females in Choosing Colors

No.	Statement	Always		Sometimes		Never		Neutral	
		B	J	B	J	B	J	B	J
0		10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
1	I like bright colors.		6	10	4				
2	I like dark colors.	5	4	5	2		2		2
3	I choose colors depending on mood.	4	4	4	4		1	2	1
4	Mood has nothing to do with my choice of colors.		1	4	4	4	4	2	1
5	I choose colors according to occasions.	3	6	6	4			1	
6	I wear black for formal occasions.		1	10	8				1
7	I choose one color for all my stuff.	1	1	1		8	8		1
8	I prefer various colors for all my stuff.	7	5	2	2	1	3		
9	The same color makes me feel bored.	3	5	5	3	2	1		1
10	Various colors make me feel bored.			1	1	8	9	1	

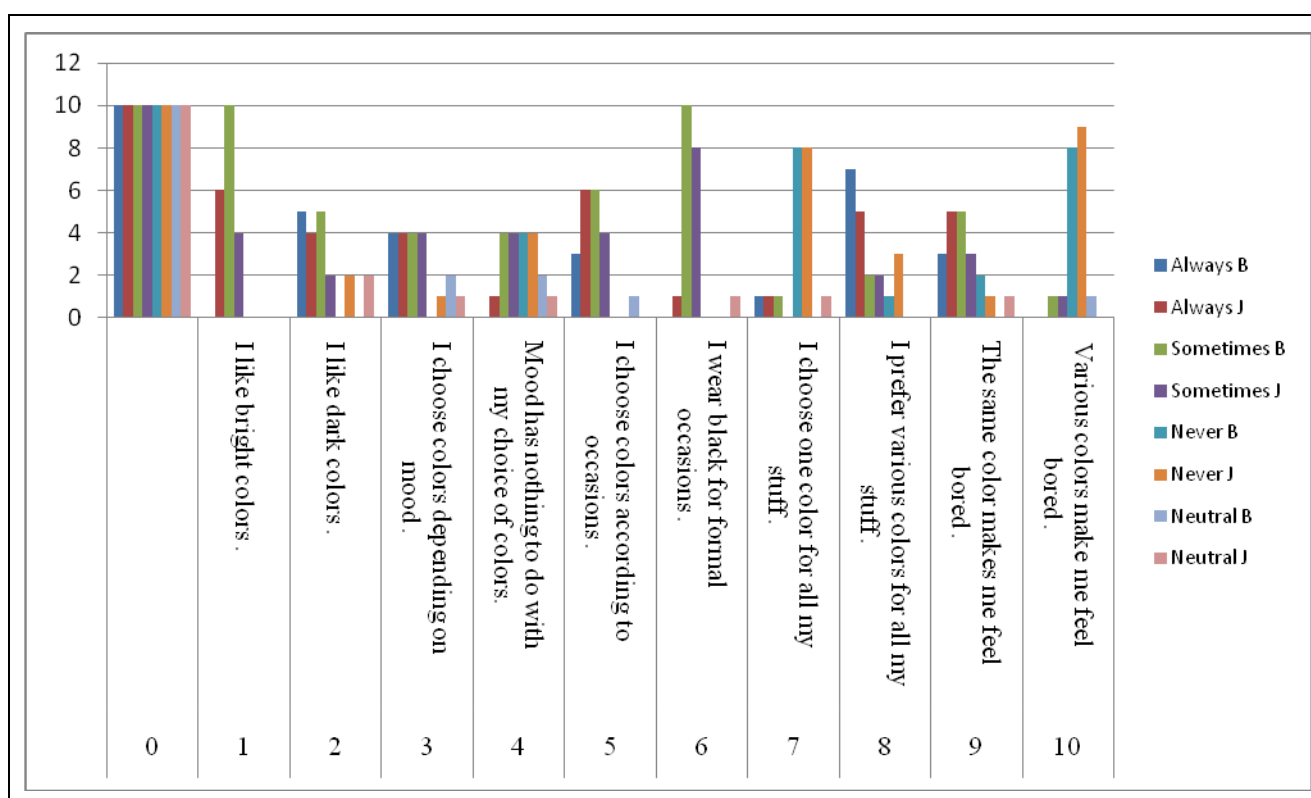


Figure 13. Various Attitudes for the British and Jordanian Females in Choosing Colors

All British females agree that they (sometimes) like bright colors (Item 1: Table (3)) that indicates : happiness, calmness and activity. See (Table (3)) whereas only 4 of Jordanian females chose the same item (sometimes) which indicates: sorrow, anger and illness.

Almost half of the Jordanian females chose (always) as an answer for item number (5): I choose colors according to occasions whereas only three of British females chose (always) for same item. See (Figure (13)).

Equally, most of the British and Jordanian females chose (never) for item number (7): I choose one color for all my stuff which reflects the moody nature of females in more than one culture. See (Table (3)).

Colors have clear influence on females' choices in terms of mood and fashion. Psychologically, bright colors are expected to be preferred among females ranging 30 – 45, however surprisingly the study proves this as a distinguished feature for British females only whereas Jordanian females prove to prefer darker colors.

## **6. Recommendations for Further Research**

For further studies, the researcher suggests the following ideas:

1. Investigating color choices among males in both cultures; British & Jordanian is recommended.
2. Different color connotations among males and females in both Jordanian and British could be for a further study too.

## **References**

- AL-Adaileh & Bilal, A. (2012). *The Connotations of Arabic Color Terms*. Linguistic ONLINE.
- Allan, K. (2007). The Pragmatics of Connotations . *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39, 1047-57.
- Bortoli, Mario, & Maroto, J. (2001). *Colors Across Cultures: Translating Colors in Interactive Marketing Communications*. University of Paisley.
- Cruse, D. A. (1986). *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Greene, K. S., & Malcolm, D. G. (1995). Blue versus Periwinkle: Color Identification and Gender. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 80, 27-32.
- Jeffries, L. (1998). *Meaning in English: An Introduction to Language Study*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Kaya, Naz – Crosby, Melanie. (2006). Colour associations with different building types: An experimental study on American college students. *Colour Research & Application*, 31, 67–71.
- Leech, G. N. (1981). *Semantics: The Study of Meaning*. Penguin: Harmondsworth. (2 ed).
- Manav, B. (2006). Colour-emotion associations and colour preferences: A case study for

residences. *Colour Research & Application*, 32,144–50.

Niemeier, S. (1998). Colourless green ideas metonymise furiously. *Kognitive Lexikologie und Syntax* (Rostocker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft 5) (ed. Friedrich Unge- rer), 119–46. Rostock: Universität Rostock.

Olesen, J. (2017). Color-Meanings.com.

Philip, G. (2006). Connotative meaning in English and Italian colour-word metaphors. *Metaphorik*, 10, 59–93.

Xing, J. Zh. (2009). Semantics and Pragmatics of Colour Terms in Chinese. *Studies of Chinese Linguistics: Functional Approaches* (ed. Xing, Janet Zhiqun), 87–102. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

[www.colormatters.com/color-symbolism/gender-differences](http://www.colormatters.com/color-symbolism/gender-differences).

[www.blog.teamtreehouse.com/how-color-communicates-meaning](http://www.blog.teamtreehouse.com/how-color-communicates-meaning).

[www.empower-yourself-with-color-psychology.com/cultural-color.html](http://www.empower-yourself-with-color-psychology.com/cultural-color.html).

## Index (A)

Section Four: What comes to your mind when you see somebody wearing the color?

Color	British Meaning	Jordanian Meaning
<b>Black</b>		Dark, mysterious
	attractive	Death
	Depends: mourning, chic, glamour, office, conservative	High class
	either mourning or a formal occasion	High class, formal occasion
	Formal	Luxury
	Formality	Poverty
	Funeral	Prestigious, sorrow, death
	funeral	Sorrow
<b>Blue</b>	bright	Calm
	Casual	Happiness
	masculine	Nature, sea, sky
	Calm	Optimistic
	Quite ordinary	Peaceful
	Smart	Relaxation
	Smart	Sea Sky
	the sky or ocean	Sky

Color	British Meaning	Jordanian Meaning
<b>Brown</b>	Carefree	Adulthood, logic
	chocolate	Croak
	dirty	desert, soil
	Drab	Formal situation
	Natural	Land
	nature	Old
	off duty, sensible, autumnal	Sad
	Vintage	Soil
<b>Green</b>	classy	Freedom
	Creative, relaxed, earthy,	Giving – maturity
	Earth	Grass, life
	Earthy	Happiness
	Earthy	Nature, goodness, naivety
	environmental	Neutral
	grass / nature	Spring
	peaceful, life	Tender
<b>Orange</b>	Bright	
	Daring	Active
	not sure	Activity
	Quirky	Attractive
	Sikh, Buddhist, henna parties, confidence, unusual in a work setting	Bad choice
	the fruit orange	Blood, anger
	trendy	Garbage man
	Unusual	Shine
<b>Pink</b>	Feminine	Calm
	feminine	Childhood
	Girly	Cool
	Girly	Feminine
	girly	Girly
	little girls / femininity	Happy
	Loving	Livelihood
	Relaxed, calm, soft (pale) strong (bright) (on a man I associate with wealth)	Nicely
<b>Purple</b>	Childish	Blood, Red carpet
	Chocolates	Courage, happiness
	Individual, bold, power	Elegant

Color	British Meaning	Jordanian Meaning
	lilacs	Gentle
	maturity	Happy
	Regal	Livelihood
	royalty	Nature
	Soft	Warm
<b>Red</b>	confident	
	Feminine	Attractive, relations
	heat(in terms of temperature and spice) / sensuality	Beauty
	Making a bold positive statement	Blood, Love
	Passionate	Confident
	Sexy	Energy
	Strong, confident, positive, power	Happy
ugly	Loved	
<b>White</b>	Bridal	
	Calm, clean, pure, light, summer, relaxing, spiritual, smart	Dream
	Clean	Love
	clean	Luxury
	Fresh	Peace
	purity	Pure
	purity / cleanliness / innocence	Purity, death
Summer, coolness	Relaxed	
<b>Yellow</b>	Bright	
	Happy	Calmness
	happy	Courageous
	Happy, fun, noisy, confident	Creativity
	Outgoing	Illness, sorrow
	Summer	Jealousy
	sunshine / warmth	Jealousy
yuk	Shining, brightness	

### Copyright Disclaimer

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).