ATTITUDES TOWARD
THE CHANGING ROLE OF
WOMEN IN JORDAN

BY

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A. Background and Scope

In this era of development that pervades almost all Arab countries, the potential role of women, particularly as part of the labor force and as socializers of new generations in the development process, is widely recognized (cf. Othman, 1974: 14; Chabaud, 1970: 153; Goode, 1970: 145-146; Ginzelberg, 1971: 176-78). Yet women’s participation in the process of development will be drastically limited if the new public roles of women (i.e., education and employment outside the home) are not collectively accepted and strongly supported by different segments of the population, especially the policy makers and other elite groups in the society. The purpose of the present study, therefore, is to investigate the norms held for the behavior of women by a highly educated segment of the population - university graduates. The universe to be studied is defined as the recent university graduates resident in Amman District, Jordan in 1974.

The importance of the university graduates as a social group is based upon two related assumptions. The first assumption is that the group of college graduates in general is an elite group. Their college education and their relatively higher socio-economic status render them more influential in shaping the present and future realities of the society than many other groups, such as nomads,
farmer's, and illiterates. Within this context I have accepted the following definition of the term "elite":

The term elite refers to any socially visible category of individuals who possess valued characteristics such as intellectual ability, high administrative position, military power, or moral authority, and who consequently have high prestige and widespread influence. Here, such individuals may or may not manifest some degree of group cohesion, and may simply influence or be imitated by the non-elite rather than directly controlling behavior politically as implied in the narrower oligarchic sense of elite (Woodland, 1970: 65-66).

The second assumption is that since this elite group is usually involved in the cultural and intellectual debates regarding the future of Jordan, its members hold well-articulated views about the roles of men and women in society, views that they openly communicate, usually through the mass media communication, and defend on clear rational basis. One can assert on the basis of these two assumptions that this highly urbanized, highly educated group take upon themselves the role of a "cultural elite", presenting a mode of a desirable life style to others.

B. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the attitudes of University of Jordan graduates toward sex roles in three major areas of social life *- namely: women's education, women's employment outside the home, and the role of women within the family. These three major areas constitute much of women's behavior in the society today.

In addition, even more decisively, it is widely held that other areas of sex roles, i.e., political and recreational are either a

*It is important to note that the university graduates are persons integrated in the society, actually facing sex-role issues. Therefore, it is believed that the graduates' sex role attitudes are reflective of sex-role behavior in Jordan.
direct or an indirect result of women's education and their expanding participation in economic activities outside the home (cf. Dodd, 1973; Holter, 1970; Berger, 1964). In addition to examining the attitudes of respondents toward these three areas of sex role, this research inquires into the effects of three factors that affect sex role attitudes: socio-economic status, mother's education, and sex of respondents.

C. Hypotheses

This study is an inquiry into sex role norms in the developing society of Jordan, and into the structural sources of these norms. Three aspects of social structure are examined to ascertain their effects on sex role attitudes. These aspects are: socio-economic status of respondents' families, mother's education, and sex. Findings on the association between SES and sex role attitudes in general, indicate an inconsistent relationship, yet a considerable number of studies have reported a strong positive association between the two variables: SES and sex role attitudes (cf. Holmstrom, 1973: 549; Dodd, 1968: 167-68; Basli, 1967: 187; Najati, 1963: 193). So it is essential to examine the effects of SES on sex role attitudes in the socio-economic structure of Jordan. This suggests:

Hypothesis I:

The higher the socio-economic status of the family, the more likely that respondents tend to support egalitarian or non-differentiating sex role norms.
A second important aspect of social structure is mother's education. There is some evidence that mother's education is strongly associated with their children's egalitarian sex role attitudes. The educated mother, who tends to support non-differentiating sex role ideology (cf. Holter, 1970: 67; Ishaq and Hirabayashi, 1958: 39) tends to have stronger influence on the character formation of her less children than the uneducated mother or the uneducated one, and she tends to convey through her stands and actual behavior modern feminine images to them (cf. Mieir, 1972: 115; Dodd, 1968: 170-171). Through these two processes the educated mother is expected to have an egalitarian influence on her children's sex role attitudes. This suggests:

Hypothesis II:

The higher the education of the mother, the more the respondents tend to support egalitarian sex role norms.

A third important aspect of social structure is sex. In a traditionally male-oriented society like Jordan it is believed that the male sex is more opposed to non-differentiating sex role norms since these norms imply a loss of power and prestige on the part of this sex (cf. Mieir, 1972: 117; Holter, 1970: 69-70; Hafes, 1965: 256-76; Muhly, 1959: 32-33; Payne, 1956: 347) whereas the female sex, which is unsatisfied with the existing non-egalitarian sex role norms (cf. Holter, 1970: 69), is expected to support egalitarian sex role norms more than the male sex since this implies an improvement in female's exchange power in society. This suggests:
Hypothesis III:

Women are dissatisfied with the existing sex role norms and tend to prefer egalitarian sex role norms more than the men.

D. The Setting of the Study: Jordanian Society, 1974

Jordan society is a very interesting case to be studied since it is in its present size and composition a result of a fairly recent historical incidents. The modern history of Jordan began only after the First World War when Emir Abdullah established a Hashemite Emirate in Jordan in 1921, which, after gaining independence from the British rule in 1946, was then called the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.* The results of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and the unity of the two banks of Jordan in 1950 have introduced a new active element to the population of Jordan. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians migrated to the East Bank and mainly settled in cities. Amman, for instance was transformed from a small town with a population of 60,000 in 1945 to a large city of 108,000 in 1952 which doubled again to reach a population of 216,474 by 1961. The city continued to grow rapidly during the 1960's by a high average annual growth (natural growth slightly more than internal migration) estimated at 9.9 from 1945-1949 and at