



# Attitudes of Bahrain University Students Toward Women's Rights and Roles

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**Abstract:** The primary purpose of the present study was to explore the attitudes of Bahrain university students toward women's rights and roles. The study also determined whether the Arabic version of the Attitude toward Women Scale (AWS-AR) developed in this study had satisfactory psychometric properties and thus was a useful measure of gender-role ideology. The AWS-AR was administered to 364 students enrolled in the University of Bahrain. The results of this study provided additional evidence for the adequacy of the AWS for measuring attitudes toward women. They also corroborate the findings of other similar studies that utilized this scale for revealing student views concerning rights and roles of women. Implications of the results of study on teacher education in Bahrain are highlighted and discussed.

**Keywords:** Woman rights and roles, attitude, university students, reliability, validity.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Women's rights and gender roles continue to make the headlines in the twenty first century. Nowadays, controversies regarding women's responsibilities toward children and housework underlie much of the "family values" rhetoric dominating social life in most countries worldwide.

People in many states are increasingly concerned with the contemporary roles and obligations of men and women, as indicated in the "Family Codes" of their countries. Journalists claim that many professional women have quit their jobs to be on the "Mommy track," that men are increasingly involved with the parenting of their children, and that popular support for feminist objectives has diminished. Questions regarding the validity of media pronouncements regarding women's roles and choices, and attitudes toward women's roles can and should be empirically and regularly examined (McHugh & Frieze, 1997).

Being perceived in a depersonalized versus an individuated manner can lead to considerable negative social consequences for people, placing them at risk of stereotyping and discrimination. Recent studies in the United States and Canada (Donnelly, et al., 2016; Loo & Thrope, 2005; Stewart, et al., 2000; 2004;) have found that the extent to which women and men are individuated

– seen as unique individuals versus simply as category members – is determined by the perceiver's attitude toward women's societal roles. Women and men with more traditional attitudes toward women's roles, as measured by the Attitudes toward Women Scale (AWS; Spence & Helmreich, 1972) individuated men more than women, whereas individuals with less traditional attitudes better individuated women.

The proliferation of scales measuring gender-role attitudes is, to some extent, the "result of individuals being interested, for pragmatic and theoretical reasons, in different aspects and domains of gender roles" (McHugh & Frieze, 1997, p. 14).

Interest in measuring attitudes toward women goes back many decades in North America; for instance, Kirkpatrick (1936) published a Belief Pattern Scale for measuring attitudes toward feminism. Spence and Helmreich (1972) developed a 55-item self-report instrument, the Attitude toward Women Scale (AWS), to tap attitudes about the rights and roles of women in six major areas in society: (a) vocational, educational, and intellectual roles; (b) the freedom and independence rights of women compared to men in society; (c) the acceptability of various dating and etiquette behaviours for men and women; (d) the acceptability of drinking, swearing and joke-telling behaviours; (e) the issue of pre-marital sex; and (f) attitudes toward marital relationships



and obligations. On the basis of empirical relationships between AWS scores and scores from various feminism scales, several researchers (Frieze & McHugh, 1998; Loo & Thrope, 2005) have concluded that the AWS may be considered a measure of Liberal Feminism. A brief version of the AWS was developed (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973) containing 25 items and it is now frequently used to measure gender-role attitudes.

The advantage of using the AWS is that it allows for comparisons of responses – over time, across cultures, and among different respondent groups. Nevertheless, the AWS has been characterized as having a "ceiling effect", as being susceptible to social desirability influences (Beere, 1990; Fassinger, 1994). The AWS may not adequately discriminate at the most liberal ends of the continuum, especially in the context of rapid social change; for example, the findings of Spence and Hahn (1997) suggest that; despite pile up of scores toward the egalitarian end of the score distribution in current groups of college students, considerable variability in scores still exist, especially among men.

Taken en masse, the large body of work involving the AWS that has accumulated over the past forty years since its advent has amply demonstrated its utility. However, as Larson and Long (1988) suggest, the content of gender-role attitudes, may have changed over the years so that the items on the AWS are less relevant to the contemporary scene than they were in the earlier years and thus they need to be reexamined in the light of rapid societal changes.

An early scale designed to measure more comprehensive gender attitudes than the AWS is the Sex Role Egalitarianism Scale (SRES) developed by Beere et al. (1984), the explicit purpose of which was to measure sex role egalitarianism, "an attitude that causes one to respond to another individual independently of the individual's sex" (p. 584). Items assessing attitudes toward women and men in both traditional and nontraditional roles in five domains are included. The five (logically identified) domains tapped by the scale are: marital, parental, employment, social-heterosexual, and educational. The SRES has two versions and covers attitudes towards both women and men, and includes more explicit domains than the AWS.

A large number of studies have been dedicated to the attitudes toward women. Abdalla (1996) conducted a study that Investigated the attitudes towards women held by 5974 Kuwaiti and 7382 Qatari professional men and women respectively, 53 men and 67 women Qatari college students, 26 Qatari college men student-father pairs, and 36 Qatari women student-mother pairs. The participants completed the short version of the Attitude toward Women Scale (AWS), and the Bem's Sex Role

Inventory. The results indicated that the AWS scores of the various groups of participants were very low, suggesting very traditional attitudes towards women in both countries.

Within the same context, Khalifa (1997) explored the prevailing stereotypes and conceptions among a sample of (580) students enrolled at the University of Kuwait about the Kuwaiti woman and investigated the differences in the total score of positive and negative attributes of woman. The Stereotypes Scale consisting of (90) items-attributes was used in the study. Results of study showed that males negatively perceived the woman as miserly, sharp-tongued, submissive, slanderer and liar, while females described her as beautiful, clean, attractive, boastful and avaricious.

King and King (1997) reviewed the psychometric properties of the SRES and found that the scale allegedly reflects "bidirectional" movement from traditional to nontraditional roles for both men and women. Yet, an egalitarian is defined as "one who accepts women entering traditional men's roles and men who enter typically women traditional roles" (McHugh & Frieze, 1997, p. 8). The strong correlation between the SERS and the AWS ( $r = 0.86$ ) is interpreted by King and King (1997) as indicating convergent validity, suggesting that the AWS does not measure the egalitarian attitudes of individuals scoring high on the SERS.

Loo and Thorpe (1998) provided a 20-year replication, using the full version of the Attitudes toward Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1972) with samples of mainly white undergraduates including nursing undergraduates at Western Canadian Universities in the mid 1970s and mid 1990s. Results based upon the full and subscale scores showed a significant liberalisation in attitudes for both genders since the mid 1970s and a narrowing of the gender gap in the 1990s, thus challenging the utility of the AWS after some 20-odd years. These results were later supported in Loo and Thrope's (2005) study showing that more liberal attitudes toward women's roles are associated with greater thinking skills.

In Askar and Ahmed's (2003) study, attitudes of (278) university students and employees toward appointment of women in supervising positions in Kuwait were explored using a questionnaire consisting of (24) Likert-type items. Results of this study revealed relatively positive attitudes toward women holding supervising occupations in different work sectors, with females more eager than males to see their peers as supervisors capable of competing with men. The findings were corroborated by the results of a subsequent study (Alshalal, 2005), which showed that the Kuwaiti women, in general, tend to positively perceive the necessity of



their active and direct involvement, along with men as partners, in the political life of the country.

In his study, Celikten (2010) examined attitudes toward women administrators and the impacts of gender difference and patriarchy on these attitudes in Turkey. The interviews with women teachers, administrators and employers revealed that they would not favor women as supervisors, and that women employees were not eager to accept such positions. The reason is that the proper place for a woman in Turkey, as the ideology suggests, is in the home, attending to housework and the children, while her husband is the breadwinner. The results also demonstrated that males who highly support patriarchy held the most negative attitudes toward women administrators while hostile and ambivalent sexists held more negative attitudes than less sexists. Females held more positive attitudes toward women administrators than males.

Byrne, Felker, & Vacha-Haase (2011) compared responses from college-age students and those 50 years and older using the Attitudes toward Women Scale (AWS) and the Attitudes toward Feminism Scale. Results from a multi-group confirmatory factor analysis showed groups differed on each scale, suggesting unidimensional scales no longer represent attitudes toward women or feminism.

Price (2015) compared individual attitudes toward women's right to employment in the Middle East (ME) region to individual attitudes in a global selection of nations available in the fourth (1999–2004) wave of the World Values Survey (N = 57), using hierarchical linear models. It was found that individuals in ME hold significantly less egalitarian attitudes toward women's employment, compared to those in all other nations sampled, and that this negative regional effect is reduced by accounting for national religiosity, levels of female tertiary enrollment, shares of women in parliament, rights for women, and national economic development.

In a recent study, Daniels and Sherman (2016) investigated adolescents' attitudes toward media images of women in non-appearance-focused and appearance-focused occupations (model and actor). One hundred adolescent girls and 76 adolescent boys provided ratings of likability, competence, and similarity to self after viewing media images of women in non-appearance-focused and appearance-focused occupations. Both boys and girls reported that women in non-appearance-focused occupations were good role models at higher rates than women in appearance-focused occupations. Girls reported greater likability and similarity to the self for women in appearance-focused occupations, whereas boys showed the opposite pattern. Boys rated women in non-appearance-focused occupations as more competent

than women in appearance-focused occupations, whereas girls showed the opposite pattern.

The review of previous studies clearly shows that the studies in the Middle East region were mainly concerned with attitudes toward women's employment and supervision in working conditions. Besides, the studies that dealt with women's legal rights and economic roles were conducted with small numbers of university students.

Based on these perceptions, the primary purpose of the present study was to explore the attitudes of Bahrain university students toward women's rights and roles. The study also aimed to determine whether the Arabic version of the Attitude toward Women Scale (AWS-AR) developed in this study had satisfactory psychometric properties and was useful measure of gender-role stereotypes and ideology.

## 2. THE PRESENT STUDY

In Arab and Muslim countries generally, and in Bahrain, in particular, the man is paramount over all things, while the woman should yield to him. In this context, she must obey her father or older brother before her marriage, obey her husband when married, and follow her son after her husband's death (Erden-Imamoglu, 2013, p. 84).

In such a male-dominated society, a woman is basically regarded as an instrument that gives birth to sons for her husband's family. For centuries, her behaviour is limited to the confines of marriage for the sole purpose of procreation. If the woman was found to have an affair, she was punished by her father, brother, or husband because the affair would spoil her family's reputation. However, a Muslim man was allowed to acquire up to four wives, depending on his financial status. However, this right is currently widely opposed by many women in Bahrain (Supreme Council of Woman, 2016, p. 34).

Bahraini society began to modernise very quickly after the discovery of oil in 1932. During the past three decades, the society has been influenced by a variety of western cultures and ideologies, resulting in considerable changes in the roles assumed by women, especially in important spheres, such as education, economy, health, business, and other fields. Meanwhile, the women of Bahrain have had opportunities to deviate from their conventional roles in society. They are able to expand their roles and achieve careers in the fields of education, medicine, nursing practice and other health-related jobs, financial and banking profession, among others (State of Bahrain, 1998, p. 94).



The women in Bahrain gained their right to vote during the parliamentary elections in October 2002. They became "enfranchised women" after the revisions in the constitution of Bahrain were ratified in 2002, thereby making Bahrain the second country in the Gulf Cooperation Council to enfranchise its female population. Women's rights have been a cornerstone of the political reforms that contributed to their gain of the right to vote and stand as candidates in national elections for the first time, after the constitution was amended in 2002. The extension of equal political rights has been accompanied by a conscious drive to promote women to positions of authority within government. In 2004, Bahrain appointed its first female minister, Dr Nada Haffadh to the position of Health Minister, and in 2005, Shura member Alees Samaan became the first woman to chair a parliamentary session in the Arab world when she chaired the Shura Council, the upper house of Bahrain National Assembly (Supreme Council of Woman, 2016, p. 51).

The Human Development Index (HDI) measures the average achievement of various countries in the world with reference to basic human progress in areas such as health, knowledge, educational attainment and income, all of which allow for a decent standard of living, which is the prime indicator in human development. In terms of basic human development, Bahrain continuously occupies the first rank among Arab countries. However, this status declines significantly when gender sensitivity is introduced. In spite of this, the Kingdom is distinguished in that it is one of few countries that have achieved tangible progress in gender-related development during the years 1970 to 1992 due to the rapid and continuous increase in education attainment and health, which was firmly linked to equality between the two sexes during 1970-1992 (State of Bahrain, 1998, p. 91-92). Nonetheless, the most pressing issue for many Bahraini women is the lack of a unified family law or Personal Status Law as it is known, leaving matters of divorce and child custody to the discretion of Shariat judges, who have been criticized for a lack of consistency in their judgments.

In view of the previous situation of women in Bahrain, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the provision of legislation for the protection of women's status and rights is important. More crucial, however, is the need for women's and societal awareness on the extent and nature of these rights and the suitable means in which they can be utilized in women's endeavor to ensure their status as perfectly responsible members of society.

Therefore, the main purpose of the present study is to explore the attitudes of university students in Bahrain toward women's rights and roles. In particular, this

descriptive research study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are attitudes of Bahrain university students toward women's roles and rights?
- 2- What is the factor structure of the AWS-AR, which is developed in this study?
- 3- What are the psychometric properties of the developed AWS-AR in the study?

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1 Sample

A total sample of 364 undergraduate students (112 men and 252 women) of Bahraini ethnicity enrolled in University of Bahrain voluntarily participated in this study. The mean age was 23.14 years (range = 19.43 - 41.31), and no significant age differences were observed across genders. Most of the female participants had not been married.

#### 3.2 Instruments

**Attitude toward Women Scale (AWS):** There are three versions of the AWS: a 55-item version, a 25-item version, and a 15-item version. The items in the 55-item version pertain to six theme areas described earlier. The 25-item version contains a subset on the items on the longer version, and the 15-item version contains an even smaller subset of items. Items in all versions are followed by four responses ranging from "agree strongly" to "disagree strongly" (Beere, 1990, p. 448).

As the items of the 25-item version of the AWS (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973) mainly pertain to the rights and roles of women - the subject of interest -, this particular version was chosen to be used in this study. Given that 5 items ("It is all right for men to tell dirty jokes, but I don't think women should tell them" (item 2); "It is worse to see a drunken woman than a drunken man" (item 3); "A woman should be as free as a man to propose marriage" (item 6); "Women should be able go everywhere a man goes, or do everything a man does" (item 9); "Women should be encouraged not to become sexually intimate with anyone before marriage, even their fiancés" (item 17) of the scale appeared to be sensitive to the established cultural values and traditions in Bahrain, they were discarded, resulting in the *Arabic version of the Attitude toward Women Scale (AWS-AR)* consisting of only 20 items.

**Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ):** The PAQ (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974) is a self-report measure of personality on a five-point Likert-type scale. The short form consists of 24 items yielding three subscale scores (M, F, and M-F). The M-subscale reflects self-assertive and instrumental characteristics, and the F subscale reflects interpersonally-oriented expressive



characteristics. The M-F subscale reflects both instrumental and expressive characteristics. Spence (1986) contends that the short form is "conceptually purer" than the original, and thus reported reliability coefficients of .85, .82, and .78 for the M, F, and M-F subscales, respectively. The values for reliability coefficients of the PAQ obtained in this study were .91, .89, and .81, for the M, F, and M-F, respectively.

### 3.3 Procedures

The initial translation of the 20-item Arabic version of the AWS (abbreviated as AWS-AR) was prepared by the author in conjunction with a faculty member from the Psychology Department at the University. Utilizing methodology suggested for development of translated tests, this Arabic version was subsequently back translated into English by an independent bilingual Professor of Psychology. The original English version and the back-translated English version were then administered to 25 bilingual students (5 men and 20 women) to check for the equivalence of meaning between them. The Pearson product-moment correlation of students' scores on the two versions of the test was .95, which was considered evidence of the cross-language equivalence of the two forms of the AWS-AR.

Similarly, the original, English version of the PAQ was translated into Arabic by the author. The forward and back translation procedures recommended in cross-cultural research (Sperber, Devellis, & Boehlecke, 1994) were employed to ensure that the Arabic version was comparable version of the PAQ in English. Both forms were then administered to 40 bilingual students to check for the equivalence of meaning between them. The Pearson product-moment correlation of student scores on the Arabic and English forms was .92, which was considered evidence of the cross-language equivalence of the two forms of the PAQ, thus showing the adequacy of the Arabic version for research purposes.

Participants individually completed the 20-item AWS-AR in a classroom setting at the university

during a time-limited administration of the measure. Each student was asked to read each item first, and then express one's feeling about each statement by indicating the extent of one's agreement or disagreement with that statement. Each item was answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). A total score that is higher than 50 indicate an egalitarian attitude while a score lower than 50 demonstrate a conservative attitude toward women. A week later, the Arabic version of the PAQ was administered to the same sample of students in a normal classroom setting, in groups of 30 to 40 students.

Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and item-total correlation coefficients (R) for the AWS-AR items are presented in **Table 1**. Furthermore, the percentages of student responses to each item of the scale are shown in **Table 2**.

## 4. RESULTS

### 1- Item Analyses of Attitudes toward Women

Given that the AWS-AR is scored additively to generate a total composite score, the subsequent item analyses were conducted to assess the content homogeneity of the 20-item measure among the sample. The results of analyses are shown in **Table 1**.

The mean score of the 20-item AWS-AR for the total sample ( $n=364$ ) in this study was 65.96 ( $SD = 7.22$ ) indicating a general egalitarian attitude toward women. The mean of the AWS-AR for males was 67.47 ( $SD = 7.57$ ; range = 56-81), while that for females was 65.79 ( $SD = 7.18$ ; range = 41-83). No significant differences [ $F = .52, p < .001$ ] were found between the mean scores of males and females. Also, all item-total correlation values are significant ( $p < .05$ ) demonstrating content homogeneity of the developed scale (see **Table 1**). In order to clarify the picture, student attitudes about women on each topic of interest will be displayed below.

**1-1 Roles of women in society:** The mean scores for the items 1, 9 and 20 are considerably high, ranging from 4.21 to 3.91, indicating the students' strong support of the increasing role of women in Bahraini society. Moreover, negative items that confirm the dominant position of man in society were found to have solid opposition from the study sample (mean range = 2.12-3.12). For example, 75.9% of respondents were against giving more opportunities to men than women in getting jobs, 53.9% of them disagreed with the belief that men contribute more than women to the economic activities of society, and 41.7% opposed the idea that leading positions in public life should be largely in the hands of men (**Table 2**).



**TABLE 1**  
Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and item-total correlations (R) for the AWS-AR

Item	M	SD	R
1- Women should take increasing responsibility for leadership in solving the intellectual and social problems of the day	4.21	.75	.16
2- Both husband and wife should be allowed the same grounds for divorce	3.68	1.07	.16
3- Under modern economic conditions with women being active outside the home, men should share in household tasks such as washing dishes and clothes	4.02	1.05	.17
4- It is insulting to women to have the "obey" clause remain in the marriage service	2.75	1.37	.32
5*- Indecent behaviours among women should be disapproved more than such behaviours among men	2.97	1.37	.44
6- There should be a strict merit system in job appointment and promotion without regard to sex	4.38	.93	.16
7*- Women should worry less about their rights and more about becoming good wives and mothers	3.07	1.34	.30
8- Women earning as much as their dates should bear equally the expense when they go out together	2.74	1.29	.31
9- Women should assume their rightful place in business and all professions along with men	3.91	1.22	.17
10*- A woman should not expect to go to exactly the same places or to have quite the same freedom of action as a man	3.58	1.33	.39
11*- Sons in a family should be encouraged more than daughters to go to college	1.99	1.20	.40
12*- It would be ridiculous for a woman to drive a large van or a bus and for a man to darn socks	3.47	1.36	.44
13*- In general, the father should have more authority than the mother in bringing up children	3.31	1.32	.37
14- The husband should not be favoured by law over the wife in the disposal of family property or income	3.01	1.24	.30
15*- A woman's place is in the home looking after her family, rather than following a career of her own	3.80	1.25	.44
16*- The intellectual leadership of a community should be largely in the hands of men	3.12	1.43	.46
17- Economic and social freedom is worth far more to women than acceptance of the ideal of femininity which has been set up by men	3.05	1.13	.24
18*- Women have less to contribute than men to the economic activities of a society	2.72	1.23	.47
19*- Men should be given preference over women in being hired or promoted	2.12	1.23	.45
20- Girls should have as much opportunity to do apprenticeships and learn a trade as boys	4.07	1.16	.16
Total Score	<b>65.96</b>	7.22	-

Note 1. Negative items are marked with asterisks and scored in a reverse manner.



**TABLE 2**  
**Percentages of responses of the sample to each item of the AWS-AR**

Item	SD	D	DK	A	SA
1- Women should take increasing responsibility for leadership in solving the intellectual and social problems of the day	0	4.4	6.6	52.7	36.3
2- Both husband and wife should be allowed the same grounds for divorce	3.8	12.1	18.7	43.4	22.0
3- Under modern economic conditions with women being active outside the home, men should share in household tasks such as washing dishes and clothes	2.2	11.5	5.5	43.4	37.4
4- It is insulting to women to have the "obey" clause remain in the marriage service	18.7	36.8	11.5	17.0	16.0
5*- Indecent behaviours among women should be disapproved more than such behaviours among men	17.6	25.2	17.6	22.0	17.6
6- There should be a strict merit system in job appointment and promotion without regard to sex	1.7	4.9	6.6	27.5	59.3
7*- Women should worry less about their rights and more about becoming good wives and mothers	12.1	31.3	12.1	26.4	18.1
8- Women earning as much as their dates should bear equally the expense when they go out together	19.8	31.3	13.2	26.9	8.8
9- Women should assume their rightful place in business and all professions along with men	4.4	15.4	6.0	33.5	40.7
10*- A woman should not expect to go to exactly the same places or to have quite the same freedom of action as a man	9.9	18.1	4.9	38.5	28.6
11*- Sons in a family should be encouraged more than daughters to go to college	42.9	37.9	3.8	8.2	7.2
12*- It would be ridiculous for a woman to drive a large van or a bus and for a man to darn socks	7.6	26.4	6.6	29.7	29.7
13*- In general, the father should have more authority than the mother in bringing up children	10.4	26.4	2.7	42.3	18.2
14- The husband should not be favoured by law over the wife in the disposal of family property or income	12.6	24.2	26.9	22.5	13.8
15*- A woman's place is in the home looking after her family, rather than following a career of her own	7.7	13.7	2.2	43.4	33.0
16*- The intellectual leadership of a community should be largely in the hands of men	17.0	24.7	7.7	29.7	20.9
17- Economic and social freedom is worth far more to women than acceptance of the ideal of femininity which has been set up by men	7.1	29.1	26.4	26.4	11.0
18*- Women have less to contribute than men to the economic activities of a society	15.4	38.5	13.2	24.7	8.2
19*- Men should be given preference over women in being hired or promoted	37.4	38.5	6.0	11.0	7.1
20- Girls should have as much opportunity to do apprenticeships and learn a trade as boys	4.9	8.8	7.7	31.3	47.3

Note 1. SD=strongly disagree; D = disagree; DK=don't know; A=agree; SA=strongly agree.

Note 2. Negative items are marked with asterisks and scored in a reverse manner.



**1-2 Women rights and responsibilities:** As for attitudes of college students toward women rights, 80.8 % of the participants stressed the necessity of cooperation between man and woman in doing housework (item 3), and 65.4% of them called for equal rights for both men and women to ask for divorce (item 2). However, 76.4% of college students believe that a woman should be more concerned with looking after her family rather than pursuing one's own career, 60.4% think that bringing up children is mostly a man's prerogative, and 44.5% suggest that women should worry less about being equal with men and more about becoming good wives and mothers.

**1-3 Women's freedom and equality:** Students' beliefs concerning women's freedom and their equality with men vary widely according to the issue under consideration. On the one hand, 86.8% of university students strongly corroborate the idea of a strict merit system in job appointment and promotion of men and women alike; 79.8% of them firmly resist the belief that sons should be encouraged more than daughters to go to college; 55.5% consider the "obey" clause in the marriage contract as insulting to women; 42.8% disagree that indecent acts among women should be disapproved more than such acts among men, and 37.4% agree that woman should not be treated in an old fashioned manner being subordinate to man (see **Table 2**). On the other hand, 67.1% of college students suggest that the woman should not expect to go to exactly the same places or to have quite the same freedom as a man; 59.4% of the students consider it ridiculous for a woman to drive a large van and for a man to darn socks; 51.1% object to the notion that women earning as much as their husbands should bear equally the expense when they go out together, and 36.3% agree with the idea that the law should give solely the man the right of disposal of family property or income.

## 2- Factor Structure of the Arabic Version of AWS

The factor structure of Arabic version of the AWS was investigated through principal components analysis (PCA). Correlations among the 20 individual items of the AWS-AR were subjected to factor analysis with Varimax rotation. Gorsuch's estimation criterion (1997) was followed, namely, to restrict the number of factors to those having at least three variables, each with a loading greater than .40 in absolute value and being the highest loading for the variable. Setting the loading criteria at this higher level increases the likelihood that the obtained factors will be replicable in future studies (Floyd & Widaman, 1995).

Seven rotated factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were initially present in the AWS-AR data. Application of Gorsuch's criterion (1997) resulted in three significant factors. The three-factor solution explained 32.48% of the total variance, with respective eigenvalues of 3.31, 1.66 and 1.53 for the three factors (**Table 3**).

**Factor one** had primary loadings for AWS-AR items 1, 9, 16, 18, 19 and 20, and accounted for 16.54% of the variance. These items target vocational, educational and intellectual roles of women in the contemporary society, consistent with the labeling of this factor as Attitude toward Women's Roles.

**Factor two**, which accounted for 8.31% of the variance, had five primary loadings on items 2, 3, 7, 13 and 15. The highest loading items seem to tap marital relationships and regulations and could be labeled as Attitude toward Women's Rights and Responsibilities.

**Factor three** was marked by items 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 17 (7.62% of the variance).

These items concern women's freedoms and equal rights with men and could be labeled as Attitude toward Women's Freedom and Equality with Men.

## 3- Psychometric Properties of the AWS-AR

**Reliability** of the scale was estimated by determination of inter-item and inter-total correlations, as well as alpha-if-deleted values. Average inter-item correlation coefficients of the three subscales ranged from .51 to .68, item-total correlation coefficients ranged from .59 to .73. The alpha-if-deleted values indicated that the scale would not be improved by the removal of any items; therefore the 20-item scale was accepted. Alpha for the scale was equal .92 while alpha values for the three subscales ranged from .76 to .89. The obtained figures clearly demonstrate the high internal consistency and homogeneity of the items of the developed measure.

**Content validity:** In this study, content validity was achieved by submitting the developed measure to 10 faculty members in various universities of Bahrain, whose majors are in the fields of educational assessment, psychology, and law. They were asked to give their opinions with respect to the clarity of items and to the relevance of each item to its domain. In the light of the specialists' remarks and comments, few changes were made to the relevant statements and to the scale as a whole. Analysis of the internal structure of the scale can indicate the degree to which the relationships among test items and test components conform to the construct on which the proposed scale score interpretations are based.



**Construct validity:** For the sake of construct validation, then, the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used. As stated above, implementation of the EFA yielded three factors that tap the dimensions of the developed measure.

**Criterion-related validity:** To assess the criterion-related validity of the scale, the correlation coefficients were calculated between the total item scores of the AWS-AR and the femininity subscores of the PAQ, particularly those items that describe woman's attributes associated with her roles and rights in society. The values of correlation coefficients between the masculinity and femininity subscale scores were low (.08-.09) and not statistically significant,  $p > .05$ , a fact indicating their orthogonality. The correlation coefficients between femininity subscale items of the PAQ and the corresponding scores of the AWS-AR ranged from .45 to .67,  $p < .01$ . Overall, the values of intercorrelations between the two measures indicate the concurrent validity of the AWS-AR.

**Discriminant validity** was achieved by applying the AWS-AR to a pilot group of 50 students. The highest and the lowest means of 25% of the students' responses were collected to check for statistical differences between them. A t-test was conducted to examine the differences between the two means. The significant differences found between means corroborated the discriminant validity of the scale.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The moderate intercorrelations between AWS-AR and the PAQ clearly indicate the criterion-related validity of the AWS-AR as well as its practical utility in discriminating between individuals with differing attitudes toward women's roles and rights. The results clearly support the hypothesis of multidimensionality as opposed to bi-dimensionality in both evaluation instruments that are used to assess gender roles and stereotypes in society.

Analysis of the three extracted factors reveals that they capture those aspects of attitudes toward women reflected by the AWS (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973), an obvious indication of the construct validity of the Arabic Version of AWS.

Responses of Bahrain university students to AWS-AR items clearly reveal two contradicting tendencies: A tendency to demonstrate strong support to woman's roles and rights and to call for equality between men and women, and a tendency to submit to the historically established, dominating role of the man in the Arabian society.

There are **several reasons to explain the observed discrepancy** of ideas and thoughts between undergraduate students who took part in this study:

**First**, attitudes of university students are not shaped by all of their thoughts and perceptions about it; rather, they depend mainly on their salient beliefs about that topic. While attitude is developed in a person by his beliefs towards the expected behaviour, salient beliefs play a major role in predicting intentions that lead to behaviour. Herath (2010) defines salient beliefs as "those beliefs that first come to mind when respondents are asked open-ended questions such as "What do you think would be the advantages for you to engage in certain behaviour"?" (p. 25).

Francis et al. (2004) mentioned that the final set of salient beliefs for a study can be selected from 75 % of all beliefs stated in the elicitation study. It provides an adequate coverage of the beliefs of the target population. In line with this notion, the 15 most frequently mentioned beliefs (held by at least 50% of the sample) are shown in **Table (4)**. In a descending order, these beliefs can be summarized as follows:

- 1- Women should take increasing responsibility for leadership in solving problems.
- 2- There should be a strict merit system in job appointment without regard to sex.
- 3- Sons in a family should not be encouraged more than daughters to go to college.
- 4- Men should share in household tasks such as washing dishes and clothes.
- 5- Girls should have as much opportunity to learn a trade as boys.
- 6- A woman's place is in the home looking after her family, not following her career.
- 7- Men should not be given preference over women in being hired or promoted.
- 8- Women should assume their rightful place in all professions along with men.
- 9- A woman should not expect to have quite the same freedom of action as a man.
- 10- Both husband and wife should be allowed the same grounds for divorce.
- 11- The father should have more authority than the mother in bringing up children.
- 12- It would be ridiculous for a woman to drive a bus and for a man to darn socks.
- 13- It is not insulting to women to have the "obey" clause in the marriage service.
- 14- Women do not have less to contribute than men to the activities of a society.
- 15- The intellectual leadership of a community should be largely in the hands of men.



**TABLE 3**  
**Percentages of salient beliefs of university students about women**

Item	Agree	Disagree
1- Women should take increasing responsibility for leadership in solving the intellectual and social problems of the day	<b>89.0*</b>	4.4
2- Both husband and wife should be allowed the same grounds for divorce	<b>65.4</b>	15.9
3- Under modern economic conditions with women being active outside the home, men should share in household tasks such as washing dishes and clothes	<b>80.8</b>	13.7
4- It is insulting to women to have the "obey" clause remain in the marriage service	33.0	<b>55.0</b>
6- There should be a strict merit system in job appointment and promotion without regard to sex	<b>86.8</b>	6.6
9- Women should assume their rightful place in business and all professions along with men	<b>74.2</b>	19.8
10*- A woman should not expect to go to exactly the same places or to have quite the same freedom of action as a man	<b>76.1</b>	28.0
11*- Sons in a family should be encouraged more than daughters to go to college	15.4	<b>81.8</b>
12*- It would be ridiculous for a woman to drive a large van or a bus and for a man to darn socks	<b>59.4</b>	34.0
13*- In general, the father should have more authority than the mother in bringing up children	<b>60.5</b>	36.8
15*- A woman's place is in the home looking after her family, rather than following a career of her own	<b>76.4</b>	21.4
16*- The intellectual leadership of a community should be largely in the hands of men	<b>50.6</b>	41.7
18*- Women have less to contribute than men to the economic activities of a society	32.9	<b>53.9</b>
19*- Men should be given preference over women in being hired or promoted	18.1	<b>75.9</b>
20- Girls should have as much opportunity to do apprenticeships and learn a trade as boys	<b>78.6</b>	13.7

*Note 1.* Items with at least (50%) of agreement or disagreement are marked with asterisks.

*Note 2.* Negative items are marked with asterisks and scored in a reverse manner.

As it can be seen, the students enrolled in the University of Bahrain, in general, tend to believe that women should be treated on an equal basis with men in all aspects of life (education, work, marriage, society, etc.), and hence they should be given the opportunity to lead and demonstrate their abilities. On the other hand, however, students seem to adhere to the negative stereotypes established in social consciousness about the roles and rights of a woman, such as the idea that a woman's place is in the home, she should not expect to have the same freedom of action as a man, she should have the "obey" clause in the marriage service, the father should have more authority than the mother in bringing up children and also in the intellectual leadership, because it would be ridiculous to switch roles between men and women. These ideas appear to be firmly held by students, especially males, and they mirror the accepted social norms and taboos in Arab society in general, and in Bahrain, namely.

**Second**, recent research in the United States (Donnelly, et al., 2016) has demonstrated that, for the most part, adults' attitudes toward working mothers became more egalitarian between the 1970s and the early 1990s, showed a small "backlash" in the late 1990s, and then continued the trend toward increased egalitarianism in the 2000s and 2010s, and that Millennials (born 1980s–1990s) have continued trends toward more egalitarian gender roles. This, in part, reflects the generational changes in personality and behaviour that might strongly affect generations' responses to typical measures like the Attitudes toward Women Scale used in this study, which was itself the product of a particular historical and social context (Twenge, 2011).

In the context of the Kingdom of Bahrain and other Arabian Gulf states, the temporal changes from egalitarianism to traditionalism in the 1980s were mostly triggered by the turmoil changes that occurred in the



neighboring countries, which gave rise to ideas of fanatics and Islamic traditionalism. In the era of globalisation and technological development, however, traditional beliefs about women tend to pave the way to more liberal views among the younger generations about woman's roles and rights in the contemporary society. Of course, this change has been accompanied by striking social changes, where married women with children have been entering the labor force in great numbers, and the hiring practices based solely on gender by employers have diminished as a consequence of legislation barring gender discrimination and mandating affirmative action (Supreme Council of Women, 2016).

**Third**, given that girls constitute the vast majority of the study sample, the findings of the study would imply a low level of self-esteem and self-realization among the prospective female teachers who have been largely influenced by traditional values prevailing in the Arab environment. Women's submission to old fashioned traditions and beliefs would really hinder their progress toward occupying leading posts in public and private life, gaining equal rights, and assuming the same responsibilities with men in society, despite the fact that three women were freely elected to the Bahraini parliament in the last elections held in the kingdom in November 2014.

The findings of the study have important implications for teacher education. When women "do reach senior posts in teaching, they tend to correspond to 'traditional feminine' educational areas, while men tend to be heads of faculty and headteachers". In Bahrain, females make up the overwhelming majority of primary school principals, which means that Bahraini women are "promoted to posts which combine teaching with caring roles" (Delamont & Coffey, 1997, p. 212), thus handing the access to much of the power and policy making within the education sector to men. In that sense, the teaching profession in Bahrain, while becoming increasingly feminized, is not becoming distinctly feminist.

As the concept of ideology contains more than all relevant opinions and beliefs of those who adhere them, as it stipulates that opinions are "structured in a hierarchical manner" and they "defend the interest of a particular group in the society" (Meighan & Siraj-Blatchford, 2005, p. 187), it appears that opinions and beliefs of university students in Bahrain, if judged by their responses to AWS-AR, reflect contradicting gender-role ideologies in respect of women and feminism. This confirms the picture the author found while investigating students' views toward culture and cultural activities in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (AlMusawi, 1998).

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study provided additional evidence for the adequacy of the AWS for measuring attitudes toward women. It also corroborates findings of other similar studies that utilized this instrument for detecting student views concerning rights and roles of women (e.g., Youn, 1998).

The resultant measure includes only 20 items, rendering it easy for quick and efficient use in a university classroom setting. The AWS-AR items can be used to evaluate college student perceptions about women's rights and roles in order to influence their beliefs about teaching and learning processes at the university (AlMusawi, 2003). The new measure can also be utilized to evaluate the extent to which woman are involved in decision- and policy making. Results of such studies would contribute to improving teaching practices in higher education institutions.

## 7. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has demonstrated that the developed tool represents a valid and reliable measure of student attitudes towards women. University teachers can easily use this tool in typical educational settings to assess the attitudes of their male students toward their female colleagues in class, and to pinpoint the basic problems encountered in teaching students belonging to different genders. This scale can also be used for quality education and accountability purposes as well as by individual students for self-assessment of attitudes toward women. Faculty members are expected to be involved in gender-based teaching in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, to increase the quality of their teaching and to solve problems that occur in their universities in a meaningful and constructivist manner. Accordingly, teachers of higher education need to be more socially involved with students of differing attitudes toward women's rights and roles, a key factor in achieving high standards of quality education in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

As feminist scholars face the task of developing educational programs and strategies that empower girls and women without encouraging detrimental levels of self-focus that reach the level of narcissism and unrealistic expectations, the author contends that instead of teaching self-esteem (which often ends up encouraging narcissism instead), one should focus on balancing the highly beneficial aspects of femininity (love, caring, compassion) with a strong emphasis on gender equality.

On the classroom level, this would mean to construct a teaching and learning environment that celebrates diversity, which means understanding that each



individual is unique, and recognizing the individual differences between learners that can be attributed to the race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political orientations, or other ideologies.

Finally, it is important to mention **some limitations** of this study, associated with the age and education level of respondents, and with the biases in student responses to the developed measure motivated by social desirability, which limits the generalizability of results. **In future studies**, it would be of interest to examine the responses of university students actively involved in women's issues and women societies and associations. It would be interesting to discover whether this group will display equivalent non-traditional views of women's roles and rights in Bahrain.

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