

The Perception of Women's Status in Israel as a Social Problem¹

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This study examines the perception of the status of women in Israel as a social problem, its cognitive structure and its correlates. The 994 respondents included a sample of university students, nurses, and female army officers. In general, the results suggest that feminist issues are perceived as less severe than most other social problems and that men perceive feminist issues as significantly less severe than do women. Factor analyses indicate that men and women think about social problems differently and that women have a broader more integrated conception of sex inequality. Sex, religiosity, education, and occupational context were all found to be significant predictors of perceptions of women's issues as social problems.

This study examines the perception of the status of women in Israel as a social problem, its cognitive structure, and its correlates. Accumulated research in recent years has discredited the myth of sex equality in Israeli society (Hazleton, 1977; Brandow, 1980; Izraeli, 1983; Izraeli & Gaier, 1979; Palgi, Blasi, Rosner, & Safir, 1983). Rather, it has pointed to persistent inequalities in most spheres of life (Izraeli, Friedman, & Schrift, 1982; Prime Minister's Commission, 1978). For example, the great majority of women are concentrated in a small number of occupations characterized by relatively low pay and low occupational ceilings; women are virtually excluded from the decision-making centers of the country's political, religious, economic, and military institutions. A Knesset (parliamentary) committee investigation reported a conservative estimate of the proportion of married women who are battered wives to be between

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5-10% (Bureau of the Advisor to the Prime Minister on the Status of Women, 1983).

Objective conditions, however, do not necessarily lead even those who are adversely affected by them to view the prevailing situation as problematic. "Social conditions do not in themselves constitute problems, rather their problematic character is a consequence of the values and attitudes that inform judgments of those conditions as undesirable, harmful or disruptive" (Fuller & Myers, 1941, p. 320). If conditions are not defined as social problems by the people involved in them, then they are not problems to those people.

The social significance and behavioral implications of this subjective perspective is that "in not being aware of a social problem a society does not perceive it, address it, discuss it or do anything about it" (Blumer, 1971, p. 303). Public awareness of the conditions and shared definitions about these conditions are an important stage in the transition of a social problem from the emergent stage to the stage when judgments are made that determine that conditions are objectionable and require correction and some type of ameliorative action (Hubbard, De Fleur, & De Fleur, 1975). Once an awareness of the existence of sex inequality emerges, therefore, it must gain salience to precipitate widespread social action (Ross & Staines, 1972). In not attributing importance to the problem a society is not likely to take the necessary steps to ameliorate it. The recognition that sex inequalities exist and constitute an important social problem is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for broad social change.

Another relevant perceptual element in the formulation of social problems that we examine in this study is the manner in which cognitions are organized or structured. While the definition of an issue as a social problem points to a heightened consciousness in relation to that issue, it does not indicate the content of that consciousness. The manner in which various facets of an issue are perceived to crystallize around a central topic both reflects and affects the manner in which the problem is defined and consequently dealt with. It is the connotative associations regarding women's issues, then, to which we refer when using the term "cognitive structures," or "maps." These structures, not to be taken as rigid or permanent, are another relevant element in the more general issue of how problems relating to women's status in society are perceived.

Spurred by our general interest in the forces for change regarding women's position in society, this study addresses three related questions: First, do students in Israel perceive issues related to the status of women to be a social problem and are there sex differences in this perception?

Israeli social scientists writing about social problems, social conflicts, and social stratification have generally omitted any discussion of the status of women as problematic (see, for example, Lissak, 1983; Smootha, 1978;

Stone, 1982) or have subsumed the discussion within the general topic of the family (Greenberg, 1979; Weller, 1974).

A recent national survey (Peled, & Zemach, 1983) of a representative sample of adults (kibbutz members excluded) suggested however, that the status of women is of some public concern. When asked whether newspaper items relating to women's place in society preoccupy them, 22% of the men and 39% of the women replied "often" or "very often"; 31 and 29% respectively, replied "occasionally" and the remaining 49 and 32%, respectively replied "rarely" or "never." These findings indicated that among a sector of the population in general and among women in particular there is an interest and sensitivity to women's issues. The majority of both sexes, however, are not strongly preoccupied with them.

We expected to find that students, whose stereotypes are generally similar to but less exaggerated than those of the general population (Unger, 1979, p. 31) would, on the average, not attribute great importance to women's issues as social problems. We expected, however, that women would attribute them greater importance than men.

The second interest of this study concerns the cognitive maps that inform the perception of women's issues as social problems. When students think about social problems, what issues relate to women's status in society? Sex inequality, for example, can be perceived in association with the victimization of women. Alternatively, it can be conceived in terms of unequal opportunities for women. Another possibility is that it can be associated with both victimization and unequal opportunities, and thus form a feminist cluster, or both may be perceived as connected to the more general issue of civil rights. Given that we could not find previous research on which to base a hypothesis, we could only speculate that each sex would have a somewhat different cluster of connotative associations. Gilligan (1982), for example, argued that men and women experience moral problems differently: women are more concerned with responsibilities and relationships, while men are more concerned with rights and rules.

The third question examined in this study focuses on correlates of the perception of sex-related issues as social problems. Whitehead and Tawes (1976) found that feminism was negatively correlated with age and positively correlated with education. The latter finding was supported by Huber, Rextroat, and Spitze (1978). Tavis (1973) found that religious liberalism was an important predictor of attitudes towards women's liberation, although Tabory (1984) found that its impact is less powerful in Israel than in the United States. Himmelstein (1984) explained that religious persons are more likely to oppose such women's issues as ERA and abortion rights because they possess a culture that sanctions traditional family relationships and women's traditional roles. A more general argument has been made by Ross

and Staines (1972, p. 19), namely that group differences in perception originate in part from differences in social ideals, and in their conception of what is desirable and good social order.

In Israel, ethnicity is another important basis for social differentiation. The dominant socially defined distinction is between Jews from Moslem countries, known locally as "Easterners," and those from European and North American countries, known as "Westerners." Easterners come from a more traditional culture, and are on average more religiously observant (Bar-Lev & Kedem, 1984) and politically conservative (Peres & Shemer, 1984) than Westerners. In view of these differences, we expected Westerners to attribute greater importance to problems related to women's status in society than Easterners.

A recent work by Chafetz and Dworkin (1983) has suggested that organizational context may be a significant predictor of female consciousnesses. They argue that for women, working in an organizational context where males are present, even if such males are not in the same occupation, can have a consciousness-raising effect. The men, who share the workplace with women but are in positions of superior status, become a reference group against which women evaluate the equity of their own situation. We were interested in finding out whether women working in a mixed-sex environment but in a traditionally female occupational context differed in their perception of women's issues from women working in a nontraditionally female occupational context.

This study, then, also examines the effects of sex, age, ethnic origin, religiosity, education, and occupational context on the perception of women's issues. We predicted that factors generally related to traditional, conservative orientations would similarly affect one's ranking of women's issues as social problems.

METHOD

Sample

The sample was comprised of 994 respondents: 585 females and 358 males. Seventy percent of these were university students (361 undergraduates and 335 graduates) from two universities and a variety of specializations. In addition, 197 respondents were female army officers, 65 were female senior nursing students, and 24 were male army officers. The average age of the sample was 28, $SD = 8.3$. (Israelis usually begin university after two to three years of compulsory army service.) On the religiosity dimension, 104 defined themselves as orthodox, 244 as traditional, and 614 as secular.

On the ethnic dimension, 340 defined themselves as Easterners, 565 as Westerners, and 39 as mixed. Sample characteristics that do not add up to 994 reflect missing data.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire asking the respondent to rate the severity of each of 15 issues as social problems. It was constructed in three stages: First, 40 students in an undergraduate class in organizational behavior were asked to list what they considered to be current social problems in Israel, as reported in the press. Among the items mentioned, only one related to women. This was "the status of women," an umbrella term for sex inequality. A new list was then constructed. It included three items related to women and excluded items directly related to inflation and national security since we believed these issues were so salient that they would depress the rating of all other problems. A pretest of this list of items was conducted on 224 students. The instrument was then refined and included 15 social problems, four of them commonly defined as feminist issues. These include: inequality between the sexes, which is a diffuse umbrella concept; discrimination in advancement, which refers to inequalities of opportunity; violence against women, which refers to inequalities regarding personal safety or victimization, and prohibitions on abortion, which in feminist ideology refers to women's rights to control their own bodies. These items were dispersed among the others.

The final questionnaire, was headed "Questionnaire on Social Problems in Israel." The instructions were as follows: "Below is a list of topics reported in the newspapers. With regard to each, please indicate to what extent in your opinion the topic constitutes a social problem. You are not requested to indicate the extent to which the phenomenon exists but rather the extent to which it is a social problem." Respondents were requested to rate each item on a scale from 1 (*not at all a problem*) to 9 (*a very severe problem*). Respondents were told that the purpose of the research was to elicit people's views of social problems in Israel. In the debriefing sessions, students did not indicate they had been aware of our particular interest in women.

RESULTS

t tests for sex differences in ratings of the 15 items were computed and appear in Table I. An unanticipated finding is the tendency for women to rate social problems in general as more severe than men. Differences are

Table I. Mean Ratings of Issues as Social Problems by Sex^a

Social problems	Men		Women		<i>t</i>
	<i>x</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>SD</i>	
1. Discrimination in advancement of women	4.6	2.2	6.3	2.4	11.17 ^b
2. Inequality of sexes	4.3	2.2	5.9	2.5	10.06 ^b
3. Prohibitions regarding abortions	4.9	2.5	5.8	2.6	5.47 ^b
4. Violence against women	6.0	2.4	6.7	2.3	4.79 ^b
5. Political morality	5.6	2.5	6.2	2.4	3.74 ^b
6. Kidnapping	4.3	3.0	4.9	3.1	3.16 ^c
7. Racism among Jews	6.1	2.6	6.7	2.4	3.09 ^c
8. Emigration	6.0	2.3	6.4	2.2	2.89 ^c
9. Immigration	5.1	2.6	5.9	2.4	2.58 ^c
10. Traffic accidents	6.5	2.7	6.9	2.6	2.07 ^d
11. Religious coercion ^e	6.3	2.5	6.7	2.5	1.94 ^d
12. Crime	7.5	1.7	7.7	1.6	1.72
13. Ethnic inequality	6.0	2.3	6.4	2.4	1.54
14. Unemployment	7.6	1.6	7.7	1.7	1.35
15. Infringement of civil rights	6.5	2.3	6.5	2.5	0.24

^aKey 1 = not at all a social problem; 9 = a severe social problem.

^b $p \leq .001$.

^c $p \leq .01$.

^d $p \leq .05$.

^eRefers generally to effort of the state-supported rabbinate and religious political parties to impose religious laws on the governance of civil life (Tabory, 1981).

significant for 11 of the 15 issues and in no case do women rate a problem lower than men. The greatest sex differences, however, as measured by size of *t* and level of significance, occur for the four sex-related issues. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) for repeated measure of the four women's issues revealed the following: a main sex effect ($F = 108.47$, $p < .001$), with women assigning higher scores than men; a main item effect ($F = 70.22$, $p < .001$), with violence against women receiving higher ratings than the other three items; and an interaction effect ($F = 12.47$, $p < .001$), with the difference between violence against women and the other three items being significantly greater among men than among women.

Using the center of the 9-point scale as the dividing point for issues perceived to be social problems and those perceived not to be social problems, we find that women perceive all four sex-related issues as social problems, while men do so only in regard to violence against women. Except for kidnapping, men rated every other problem as more severe than the four women's issues. Women rated only three problems higher than violence against women but eight higher than the other three women's issues.

Another measure of relative salience is the proportion of men and women who rated the women's issues as either 8 or 9, that is, as very serious problems: These are for abortion prohibitions (18% of the men and 33%

Table II. Varimax Factor Rotation of Social Problems

Social Problems	Men		Women	
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2
Inequality of sexes	.86	.22	.77	.08
Discrimination in advancement	.82	.28	.85	.10
Religious coercion	.29	.36	.50	.29
Violence against women	.34	.27	.46	.23
Infringement of civil rights	.18	.78	.46	.61
Racism among Jews	.27	.50	.32	.45
Unemployment	.01	.18	.03	.59
Crime	.09	.04	.07	.56
Kidnapping	.12	.35	.14	.50
Ethnic inequality	.20	.34	.26	.48
Prohibitions regarding abortions	.23	.05	.37	.12
Emigration	.10	.06	.06	.15
Political morality	.25	.25	.20	.16
Immigration	.03	.09	.13	.08
Traffic accidents	.08	.08	.09	.05
Eigen value	3.54	1.45	3.84	1.04
R ²	.52	.21	.61	.17

of the women), for violence against women (34% and 49%, respectively), for sex inequality (7 and 32%, respectively), and for discrimination in advancement (9 and 39%, respectively).

To discover how men and women think about social problems and the connotative associations they make, a factor analysis was employed to determine the underlying factor structure of the 15 items (Table II). The research objective was to isolate the number of conceptually meaningful, statistically independent dimensions contained within the list of social problems. Factor analysis of scores on the 15 items for each sex separately produced two principal components with eigen values >1. These were rotated with varimax solution to achieve a simple structure. A factor loading of .45 was adopted as the cutoff point for inclusion.

For men, factor one accounts for 52% of the explained variance, and comprises only two significant items: inequality of the sexes and discrimination in advancement. For women, factor one accounts for 61% of explained variance and included five items. Three are women's issues, but religious coercion and civil rights also loaded on this factor. Women appear to have a more integrated perception of sex inequality in that the factor for women includes a wider range of issues than is the case for men and is associated with the general problem of infringement of civil rights. Abortion prohibitions did not load on any factor.

Civil rights appears to be the underlying dimension of factor two, although men and women differ in what they associate with civil rights. For men, it loads only with racism among Jews; for women it loads with

unemployment and criminal kidnapping, as well as with ethnic inequality and racism. The former is an ideological abstract dimension, the latter combines ideology with personalized, concrete elements.

An index of sex inequality (ISI) was constructed from the combined average score of the two items that were common to both sexes and that had the highest loading on factor one: sex inequality and discrimination in advancement, $\sigma = .86$. The index of sex inequality, as well as prohibitions on abortion and violence against women, were treated as three dependent variables. Separate stepwise regressions of each of these variables were computed for the total population on the dependent variables of sex, age, ethnic origin, religiosity, and an interaction variable of sex and religiosity.

Sex and religiosity combined explain 16.5% of the variance in ISI (regression 1). While the beta in both cases is significant, sex is a better predictor of the index than religiosity. The same two variables entered the regression of prohibitions on abortion, but in reverse order (regression 2). Religiosity is a better predictor of perception of abortion prohibitions as a social problem than is sex. Together they explain 7.2% of the variance in the dependent variable. The other variables—age, ethnic origin, and the interaction between sex and religion—did not enter any of the three regressions (Table III).

Since we did not have precise data on education for nurses and army officers, the effect of education on the three dependent variables was tested for university students only. Two education variables were tested: the level of education, which was treated as a dichotomous variable—graduates and undergraduates—and area of specialization, which was also treated as a dichotomous variable—predominantly women's specialization (literature, psychology, and sociology) and predominantly men's specialization (economics and management). A separate one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed for each of the three dependent variables. Level of education is significant for the ISI ($F = 5.98, p \leq .05$) and for violence against women

Table III. Stepwise Regression of ISI, Prohibitions on Abortions and Violence Against Women on Independent Variables^a

Regression	Independent variables	Beta	R ² change
1. ISI	sex	.345 ^b	.113
	religion	.221 ^b	.049
Total			.162
2. Abortions	religion	.203 ^b	.038
	sex	.185 ^b	.034
Total			.072
3. Violence	sex	.156 ^b	.024

^a $N = 989$.

^b $p \leq .001$.

($F = 4.01, p \leq .05$) but not for abortions. Graduates gave higher ratings than undergraduates. The differences between students by area of specialization, however, are not significant.

To test for the effects of occupational context on perception of women's issues as social problems, three ANOVAS were computed for female nurses and female army officers with ethnic origin, religiosity and occupational context as independent variables; the ISI, abortions and violence as dependent variables (see Table IV).

The ANOVA for the ISI reveals a main occupational context effect ($F = 16.19, p \leq .01$) and a significant religiosity and occupation interaction ($F = 8.50, p \leq .01$). The officers perceive inequality to be a more salient social problem than do the nurses ($\bar{x} = 6.7$ and 5.2 , respectively). Nurses who defined themselves as traditional on the religiosity scale scored significantly lower on ISI compared to the other groups: $\bar{x} = 4.2$ compared to 6.1 for secular nurses, 6.8 for traditional officers, and 6.7 for secular officers. The distribution of the four means suggests that the main occupational effect found for the ISI is explained primarily by traditional nurses. The mean for secular nurses is more similar to the mean for officers than it is to that of traditional nurses.

The lack of a main religiosity effect may have been an artifact of the sample. Since our sample contained few nurses and officers who were orthodox ($n = 9$), this category was eliminated for this analysis and the com-

Table IV. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Index of Sex Inequality, Prohibitions of Abortions and Violence Against Women by Religiosity, Ethnic Origin, and Occupational Context

Source of variance	Index of sex inequality (ISI)			Prohibition on abortions		Violence against Women	
	Sum of squares ^a	df ^b	F	Sum of squares	F	Sum of squares	F
A. Nurses vs army officers (females)	66.01	1	16.19 ^d	9.12	1.32	47.13	8.89
B. Easterners vs Westerners	1.32	1	0.32	6.57	0.95	2.21	0.42
C. Traditional vs secular ^c	4.80	1	1.18	1.65	0.24	1.89	0.36
Interaction A × B	2.56	1	0.63	2.59	0.38	3.24	0.61
Interaction A × C	34.66	1	8.50 ^e	6.68	0.97	7.15	1.35
Interaction B × C	0.01	1	.00	0.36	0.05	7.88	1.49
Residual	876.64	216		1492.03		1171.69	
Total	993.22	222		1525.93		1251.55	

^aBecause there is only one degree of freedom, the mean square is identical to the sum of squares.

^bThe degrees of freedom are identical for all three dependent variables and therefore, presented only once.

^cThe category, "religious," on the religiosity scale excluded because of too few respondents.

^d $p < .001$.

^e $p < .05$.

parison was made between traditional and secular respondents only. As reported earlier, a one-way analysis of variance for the total population revealed that orthodox respondents rate inequality significantly lower than do traditional and secular respondents who do not differ significantly from each other.

Another way of examining the impact of occupational context on perceived importance of sex discrimination in advancement is to compare the severity attributed to this issue by each occupation relative to the severity each attributed to the other social problems. The mean for this item was 6.84 for officers and 5.99 for all other female respondents, excluding officers. The officers gave a higher rating to only two other issues than they did to sex discrimination in advancement, while all other women rated 11 other issues as more severe or conversely only three issues as less-serious problems than they rated sex discrimination.

No main effects or interaction effects were found for the abortion variable. A main occupation effect, however, was found for violence against women. In this case, nurses rated this problem as more severe than did the army officers ($\bar{x} = 7.7$ and 6.6, respectively).

Occupational context does affect perception of the severity of women's issues, but the direction of the effect is not consistent for all dependent variables. The nurses perceive violence to be more important than do the officers who, on the other hand, attribute greater importance to inequalities of opportunity than do the nurses.

DISCUSSION

The data suggest that while the Israeli students do not reject women's issues as social problems, they also do not strongly endorse them. Men, in particular, rate the items relating to women as less severe than every other issue except kidnapping. Women rate violence relatively high, but they rate the other three women's issues as less severe than most others, including traffic accidents and crime.

The relatively high rating given by both men and women to violence against women reflects the process of social problem construction in Israel. Since the early 1970s the feminist movement has campaigned to make the plight of women who are victims of rape and of beatings by husbands visible and an issue of public discussion. It was instrumental in gaining legitimacy for these issues, particularly for rape. This led to changes in legislation and in police policy, and also to the development of rape crisis centers and shelters for battered women. These were initially run exclusively by feminist groups but later new centers were sponsored by the large, more tradi-

tional women's organizations. The feminist movement may be said to have "produced" the problem (Tierney, 1982).

Similar efforts on behalf of abortion rights, however, were far less successful, as reflected in the relatively lower ratings assigned to this issue. The difference in public response may be explained in terms of differences in degree of compatibility between the values represented by the issue and those of the established institutions in a position to assist or curtail the problem construction process. The resource mobilization perspective (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) suggests that groups working on issues congruent with the priorities of established institutions are likely to obtain support from outside sources in producing a social problem (Tierney, 1982).

Traditional Jewish values strongly support protecting women from physical abuse. The civil law passed in 1978 proclaiming forceful sexual relations between husband and wife as rape was based on Jewish religious law. There was consensus on the opposition to violence against women, which received normative support from public institutions such as the police and health services. This is not the case regarding abortion. The claims-making activities (Spector & Kitsuse, 1977) on behalf of abortion rights conflicted with the values of religious groups such as the state-supported chief rabbinate and the religious political parties, as well as pronatalist groups who view abortion as morally objectionable or as a demographic threat to Jewish survival. These groups have engaged in an organized struggle against abortion rights. For example, in 1978 the Knesset passed an amendment that permitted abortion on social and economic grounds, then repealed it in 1979.

We found consistent sex differences in the perception of women's issues. A MANOVA of the four women's issues showed a strong main sex effect, as well as a sex and item interaction effect. Sex was the best predictor of ratings on the index of sex inequality, the only significant predictor of violence, and it explained about the same amount of variance as did religion on the abortion issue. While the separate factor analyses performed for each sex produced essentially the same two dimensions, the item loadings were very different. Women displayed less differentiated but more complex connotative associations than did men. The sex inequality factor incorporated feminist as well as civil rights variables, although the issue of abortions did not load on it. The sex differences found in this study regarding the evaluation of the severity of women's issues as social problems may be contrasted with the lack of sex differences found in national surveys of social values regarding the desirability of sex equality. These reported that the great majority of both sexes endorse the principle of sex equality (Levy & Guttman, 1981; Maimon, 1975; Peled & Zemach, 1983). It appears that men and women in Israel share similar values about the desirability of equality but have different definitions of the nature of the prevailing social reality. The

relatively low rating that men assigned to discrimination against women in advancement as a social problem is of special practical importance for women. In the absence of affirmative action legislation and in consideration of the fact that men are the gatekeepers to top-level positions, their insensitivity to sex discrimination create often insurmountable barriers for women, on whom rests the burden of proof that they are worthy of promotion.

While sex, religiosity, and education were associated with perceptions as predicted, age and ethnicity were not. The explanatory power of age found in other studies may be due to the assumption that older and younger people belong to different sociological generations (Mannheim, 1952). In our study over 70% of the respondents were between 20 and 30 years old, and the great majority of those who were older were university students. This suggests that they are a self-selected group with relatively "modern" attitudes.

The failure of ethnicity to predict perceptions supports the argument that ethnic differences found in research are in large measure an artifact of differences of class and religiosity, which are highly correlated with ethnic origin (Smootha, 1978). For example, in their study of ethnic differences in leisure patterns, Katz and Gurevich (1976) found that when age and education were controlled, ethnic differences virtually disappeared. The Easterners in our sample were relatively young and well educated, which in combination appears to have nullified the influences of the more traditional Eastern culture.

The contention by Chafetz and Dworkin (1983) that organizational and occupational context is a significant predictor of female consciousness was supported by our data. Two explanations for the differences found between women nurses and army officers may be offered: The first is that a self-selection process among women with differing social orientations results in their choice of different occupations. According to this perspective, differences in perceptions are the direct and indirect outcome of differences in preoccupational socialization. The second explanation is that adult occupational experience has a real substantial impact on people's psychological functioning (Kohn & Schooler, 1973; Mortimer & Simmons, 1978) and experiences in the workplace shape attitudes and perceptions. While both processes may be operating here, we have no way to examine which of the two forces is the more powerful. There is some research evidence for the socializing impact of serving as an army officer. A longitudinal study of a cohort of women in the Israel defense forces (Bloom & Bar Yosef, 1985) from time of first registration for service (age 17) to a year after completion of compulsory service (age 21) showed a dramatic increase in occupational aspiration level among women officers not found among women who were not officers.

The officers in our study, while numerically in the minority, were not tokens in their units. Most were engaged in nontraditionally female occupa-

tions and were in direct or indirect competition with men for jobs on fast career paths. There is institutionalized sex discrimination in the army that results in the most senior ranks being closed to women, including the head of the women's corps. On the day the questionnaires were completed the officers had been convened by the head of the women's corps for the purpose of discussing the status of women in the army. In addition, that same day the army had announced that as a budget-saving device all personnel were required to work an hour longer without pay, including mothers of small children. These two events—the initiative taken by the leadership and the extended day requirement (never implemented)—may well have had a consciousness-raising effect that reflected itself particularly in high ratings on the sex inequality index. The nurses, on the other hand, are in a traditionally female occupation, and while they work with men, they do not compete with men for advancement. Their socialization for the helping-medical role may contribute to their greater concern for violence against women, compared to the women officers.

CONCLUSION

This study was initially prompted by our interest in understanding the apparent contradiction between the persistence of pervasive sex inequality in Israeli society and the lack of greater organized support for social change. Our basic assumption was that the probability of widespread mobilization for the transformation of women's status in society is influenced by the severity with which people perceive women's issues to be a social problem.

Our findings enable us to suggest that characteristics of those who attribute the greatest severity to women's issues, especially to sexual inequality and discrimination in advancement. These are: being female; religiously secular, or to a lesser degree, traditional (but not orthodox); well educated and/or in competition with men for nontraditional jobs. While women with these characteristics may have the greatest potential for developing the group consciousness necessary for the emergence of a movement to transform the status of women, whether they will in fact develop and act on a feminist consciousness appears to be influenced by the priority that they assign to sex inequality relative to other social problems.

While the women in our study rated women's issues as more pressing than did men, they also rated most other issues as equally or more severe than women's issues. It must be emphasized, furthermore, that we did not include the most pressing social issues—military insecurity and economic inflation. It may be suggested that when a society is preoccupied with problems that it defines as "survival" issues—such as military security, inflation,

and unemployment—then conditions are not conducive for effective mobilization around the issue of inequality of opportunity nor to that issue's emergence as a social problem.

To date the most successful problem generating activities of feminist groups have been around issues of women as victim and not around those of equal opportunity for wealth, power, and prestige. These groups have also devoted most of their organizational energy to the issue of violence against women. Two reasons may be suggested for this strategy and its outcome. First, helping the victims of violence makes fewer claims on society for the redistribution of power and privilege (Boneparth, 1980) and therefore meets with less resistance. Second, there is greater legitimacy in Jewish culture for protecting women from violence than there is for equal opportunity. The feminist movement succeeded in impressing upon Israelis that violence against women does exist and that women are not to blame for it. In these efforts they were supported by women members of parliament.

We suggest that the relatively low ratings given by both sexes to sex inequality and discrimination compared to other social issues, considering that the most pressing ones were not even included in our study, reflect both the cause and the consequence of the failure of the emergence of sex inequality as a social problem in Israeli society.

In the last decade, however, there has been an increasing number of women entering higher status, nontraditional occupations such as law, medicine, and management where men are more likely to become points of reference for assessing the equity of their situation than in traditional female occupations. In addition, a growing number of women have advanced to middle levels in organizational hierarchies, particularly in the civil service, and find themselves in direct competition with men for higher level jobs and other resources. The higher ratings given by women army officers to sex discrimination compared to both other women and to other social problems suggests that occupational context may become an increasingly important factor in the future emergence of discrimination as a social problem. There are indications that this is the case in the very recent establishment of organizations whose expressed purpose is advancing women to positions of power and prestige, and in very recent policy declarations of the government requiring some form of affirmative action within the civil service.

Using a literature search, we were unable to find comparable non-U.S. studies. There is a need for cross-cultural research using standardized instruments to test the hypotheses raised by this study.

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