

HOW MEN CHARACTERS TREAT WOMEN IN THE THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

ABSTRACT

This study which subjected eleven women characters revealed the descriptions of women. On The Arabian Nights they are described as: intelligent, prim and proper, selfless, graceful, beautiful, wily, lustful and skillful. Almost all characters are pictured as beautiful women. The roles of women in the tales is the essential part of the story. The women characters from the story picture diverse personalities of women. In this Islamic tales women variate from an erudite story teller, a self-sacrificing woman, a loyal slave-girl, a woman separated from her lover, a proud Princess, a cunning woman, a beautiful woman from the sea turned leader, a powerful lustful woman and women skilled in using weapons. The men in The Arabian Nights treat women as someone whom they; respected, protected, admired, treated as a source of comfort, treated with cruelty, taken for granted, loved, admired, trivialized, cared for, treated contemptuously, longed for, regarded highly, greatly admired, loved and hated, deceived, betrayed, desired, loved with sincerity, regarded with understanding, trusted, treated with kindness, disappointed, loved exceedingly, loved, welcomed, respected, treated with concern, abhorred, mistrusted, respected, appreciated, feel guilty, treated with amazement, hated, feared, are jealous of, flattered, regard as commodity, challenged, treated with humility and recognized as superior to men. To sum it up, most men characters treat women characters with kindness and respect. They recognized the superiority of women and admits their inferiority with humility.

Keywords: women, Arabian Nights, Aristotle's Mimesis, De Beauvoir's theory on feminism, gender roles

I. INTRODUCTION

Male dominated society or patriarchy was historically prevalent. It has put the masculine gender at the center of the universe. The superiority of men and oppression of women was a common scenario in most ancient stories such as the Greek Myths. Uranus' superiority over Gaea is shown when he decided to throw their ugly-looking children in the deepest part of the Earth. This pained the mother Gaea, but she has no power to oppose her husband. Next is Cronus. He swallowed all his children and made his wife, Rhea, suffer. She has no voice to complain, but she has her wit and intelligence to emerge victorious in the end. Traditionally, men have considered women as inferior to them. However as ideas on feminist views become popular, women emanated as equal to men. As such, modern women have always exerted much effort to compete with men in the roles that they play in society. Today's women contend that both sexes are equally capable of performing various tasks competently. With the modern woman's ideology that men and women are equal vis-à-vis the traditional view on women, the researcher decided to carry out a study on the status of women in ancient civilization as they are treated by men characters. This study subjected eleven women characters in The Arabian Nights as they are treated by men characters in ten selected tales.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. This study tries to find out how men characters treat women based on:
 - a. The men's actions towards women characters;
 - b. The men's speech and thought towards women characters.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using textual analysis, focusing on the female characters as treated by male characters in *The Arabian Nights*. They were read using Aristotle's *Mimesis* and De Beauvoir's theory on feminism. Every action and expression of the men characters towards women characters in the stories were interpreted and analyzed.

Research Instruments

The Arabian Nights stories are some of the world's great treasures. They have existed for thousands of years, consisting of tales told in Persia, Arabia, India and Asia. *The Arabian Nights* (also known as *The 1001 Arabian Nights*) have inspired writers the world over with the ancient power of story.

There are versions of these stories in many languages and they all convey the great sense of adventure, truth, fantastic imagination, justice, and faith embodied by the great civilizations that contributed stories and ideas to the collection.

The *Arabian Nights* include fairy tales, fables, romances, farces, legends, and parables. The tales use a sweeping variety of settings, including Baghdad, Basrah, Cairo and Damascus, as well as China, Greece, India, North Africa and Turkey.

These fanciful, sometimes brutal tales, reveal in the art of storytelling. The underlying suggestion of the *Arabian Nights* is that a fantastically precious jewel exists which, when it comes into contact with people, actually changes them. The jewel is the magnificently powerful art of story. There may not be any better examples in the world of how art, trickery, magic and craft can swirl together and form a world that every reader and listener wants to enter. Regardless of the situation presented in any particular *Arabian Nights* story, the assumption contained in the story is that life is always worth living and that human endeavor, along with human weakness, is a wonderful and fascinating thing to behold. These stories form a powerful mental connection between the ancient civilizations of the East and those of the West. More so than any other piece of writing in history, these stories illustrate that the minds of the East and of the West consider carefully the same subject matter.

For *The Arabian Nights*, the translations of Richard Burton was used. These 16 volumes collection of tales comprise of 449 tales with additional 37 variants. In order to identify the tales for this study, titles with women characters mentioned were considered. However, the first tale is included although it has no woman character in the title for it is the frame story of the *Arabian Nights*, and the most important woman character in the entire collection of the tales portrays her role in this very tale. Further, the woman character referred to in the title should bear a name for her to qualify as a significant woman character.

From the Arabian Night's collection, ten tales with woman/women characters are subjected to analysis in the present study. The tales with the woman/women characters and corresponding male characters are the following:

- 1) Story of King Shahryar and His Brother – Shahrazad, *Sharazad's father, The King*
- 2) Tale of Aziz and Azizah – Azizah, *Aziz*
- 3) Niamar Bin Al-Rabia and Naomi His Slave Girl – Naomi, *King, Ni'amah*
- 4) The Loves of Jubayr Bin Umayr and the Lady Budur – Lady Budur, *Jubayr, Ibn Mansur*
- 5) Prince Behram and Princess Al Datma – Al Datma, *Princess Al Datma's Father, Prince Behram*
- 6) Hind, Daughter of Al-Nu'man and Al-Hajjaj- Hind, *Al-Hajjaj, The Commander of the Faithful Abd Al-Malik*
- 7) The Roqueries of Dalilah, the Crafty and Her Daughter Zaynab, the Coney Catcher – Dalilah, *Hasan Shuman, Caliph*
- 8) Julnar the Sea Born and Her Son Badar Basim of Persia – Queen Lab, *Julnar, Merchant, King, Abdallah, Badr Basim*
- 9) Ali Nur Al-Din and Miriam the Girdle-Girl – Miriam, *Ali Nur Al-Din, Druggist, Miriam's brother, Miriam's father, men soldiers, King*
- 10) The History of the King's Son of Sind and the Lady Fatimah - Lady Fatimah, *The Prince*

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1. discusses the treatment of women by men characters based on men's actions, speech and thoughts towards women characters in The Arabian Nights.

In The Arabian Nights, two women characters are found to exercise total freedom. They are, Princess Al-Datma and Queen Lab. Princess Al-Datma has a power to decide on her own although she has a father who is a King. Her father does not impose his cultural rights to control her. Queen Lab, on the other hand is a Queen who does not have any husband. Thus, she is the one who controls men. Men are inferior to her supernatural powers.

Viewing the father of Sharazad, he treats his daughter with protection and respect. He wants to control her decision, however, when she insists, he gives in to her decision. He recognizes the rights of her daughter and trusts her in her dangerous decision.

Aziz, the cousin of Azizah, treats Azizah with an uncaring attitude. He does not care if Azizah is hurt for as long as he is happy. He only looks at her as a source of comfort and warmth. He sometimes treated her with cruelty and without pity. Aziz is man with insensitivity and indifference. Although he looks up to her for her intelligence and her efforts in nurturing him, he does not return her kindness. Instead, he abused her, not only physically but emotionally. He does not even show guilt when Azizah dies, he only feels happy knowing that he is forgiven by her.

Niamah, Naomi's husband, treats Naomi not just as his sexual object, but a part of his life. He becomes seriously ill when Naomi was abducted. And the only cure would be the restoration of his damsel, Naomi. The Caliph, however, treats Naomi only as a sexual object which he only desires. On the other hand, Al-Hajjaj, treats Naomi as a high quality commodity which is a source of good income if sold, an object to be passed on to another owner.

Lady Budur's lover Jubayr treats her as a woman whom he could easily get away with. He treated her with indifference when she sent a letter only to be torn by him. But he was wrong, because ultimately, he realizes that he truly needs his lady in order for him to continue living. At the end he treats her with love, obedience and sincerity.

Prince Behram treats Princess Al-Datma as the woman of his dreams, he regards her highly. Princess Al-Datma's father treats her daughter as a free woman and respects her. He does not exercise control over his daughter. Prince Behram goes through the risk of embarrassment to marry her. When he fails however, he uses his wit and strength as man to subdue her. Al-Datma is deceived, betrayed and loved by the Prince. He has no choice but deceive her for indeed he loved her with sincerity.

The father of Hind, in contrast to Al-Datma's father, treats Hind as an object for sale. He gives Hind in marriage to a repulsively looking man for as long as the price is right. Al-Hajjaj, Hind's husband treats her not as an essential part of his life, but an object which if no longer serves him well, he could easily dispose of. The Caliph also admired and desired Hind.

With the men that surrounds Dalilah, the men whom he victimized hated her. At the same time they are awed by her cunning and deviousness. However, Hasan Shuman, recognized what she really wanted. He played as the connection of Dalilah to the Caliph. And the Caliph too was not hard on her. He trusted her, gave her pardon and with confidence in her, granted her boons.

The Caliph to whom Julnar was sold showed extreme kindness and love to Julnar. He loved her even when she did not speak for more than a year. The more that he treated her tenderly when she had spoken and born him an heir. Until, the Caliph died, he did not show any instance of negative attitude towards Julnar. Julnar's son trusts her mother in matters of leadership that he confidently left her to rule his kingdom while he conquers the woman of his dreams. Julnar's brother treats her as a dear sister although they had a quarrel as Julnar recalled, it was completely forgotten when they meet after four years. He expresses that she is welcomed, respected and loved.

The men around Queen Lab treated her with mistrust. Badr Basim loved her at first but finding out her lustfulness and deceitfulness he lost his trust and respect on her. He punished her when she attempted to use her spell to him. Abdallah, her trusted care taker betrayed her in favour of Badr and in favour of righteousness.

In examining the men who dealt with Miriam, the first would be the men in the marketplace. They treated Miriam as an object and became angry when they were rejected. Ali Nur Al-Din, however, treats Miriam kindly. He borrowed money to pay

		<p>of this is not deserving of slaughter, for indeed the time favoureth us not with her equal. By the Almighty, I have been reckless of mine affair, and had not the Lord overcome me with His ruth and put his one at my service so she might recount to me instances manifest and cases truthful and admonitions goodly and traits edifying, such as should restore me to the right road, I had come to ruin! Wherefore to Allah be the praise here for and I beseech the Most High to make my end with her like that of the Wazir and Shah Bakht." [King]</p>	<p>Respected Admired Protected</p>
<p>2. Azizah</p>	<p>So I abode two days in the house, neither going out nor coming in; neither eating nor drinking but I laid my head on my cousin's lap, whilst she comforted me... When I heard her words, I gave her a kick in the breast and she</p>		<p>A source of comfort and warmth</p> <p>With cruelty Without</p>

	<p>fell down in the saloon and her brow struck upon the edge of the raised pavement and hit against a wooden peg therein. I looked at her and saw that her forehead was cut open and the blood running</p>	<p>I found the daughter of my uncle sitting with her face to the wall; for her heart was burning with grief and galling jealousy; albeit her affection forbade her to acquaint me with what she suffered of passion and pining when she saw the excess of my longing and distraction.[Aziz]</p> <p>"She acquitted me of offence ere she died;"[Aziz]</p>	<p>pity</p> <p><i>With insensitivity and indifference</i></p> <p><i>With guilt</i></p>
<p>3. Naomi</p>		<p>"If that be so, I will take her to wife."[Ni'amah]</p> <p>"By my life, O Naomi, sing to us with the tambourine and other instruments!"</p> <p>"Heaven favoured art thou, O</p>	<p>Loved</p> <p>Admired</p> <p>Admired</p>

	<p>when Ni'amah saw his handmaid Naomi, he rose to meet her and strained her to his bosom and both fell to the ground fainting.</p>	<p>Naomi!" [Ni'amah] "Needs must I contrive to take this girl named Naomi and send her to the Commander of the Faithful, Abd al-Malik bin Marwān, for he hath not in his palace her like for beauty and sweet singing." [Al Hajjaj, Viceroy of Cufa] "Take a thousand dinars and apply thyself to her treatment, till she be completely recovered." [King]</p>	<p><i>As object to be passed on to another owner</i></p> <p><i>With love and concern</i></p> <p><i>Loved purely</i></p>
<p>4. Lady Budur</p>	<p>I brought out the letter and gave it to him; but, when he [Jubayr] had read it and mastered its contents, he tore it in pieces and throwing it on the floor,</p>	<p>'O my lady, and what was the cause of your separation?'</p>	<p><i>With concern</i></p> <p><i>Indifference Contempt</i></p>

	<p>said to me,...</p> <p>And seeing her he sprang to his feet as though nothing pained or ailed him and embraced her like the letter L embraceth the letter A and the infirmity, that erst would not depart at once left him. [Ibn Mansur]</p>	<p>as I was about to return to Baghdad, I bethought me of the Lady Budur and said to myself, 'By Allah, I must needs go to her and see what hath befallen between her and her lover!' [Ibn Mansur]</p> <p>'Yes, I would fain write her a letter and send it to her by thee. If thou bring me back her answer, thou shalt have of me a thousand dinars; and if not, two hundred for thy pains.'</p> <p>Thereupon Jubayr stood up and taking a bag containing an hundred thousand dinars, said, O Kazi, marry me to this young lady and write this sum to her marriage-settlement.'</p>	<p>With concern</p> <p>Loved</p> <p>Loved Longed for</p> <p>Loved with sincerity</p>
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<p>5.Al-Datma</p>	<p>...when he saw(her face), he was confounded by her beauty and his strength failed and his spirit faltered. When he recovered from his stupor, he abode several days without meat or drink or sleep for despite and love of the girl which had taken hold upon his heart. .Then he rose to kiss her, and she off her guard and fearing nothing but, when he came up to her, he suddenly laid hold of her</p>	<p>"O my son, as regards my daughter Al-Datma, I have no power over her, for she hath sworn by her soul to marry none except he overcome her in the listed field." [King]</p> <p>"I journeyed hither from my father's court with no other object but this; I came here to woo and for thine alliance to sue;"</p> <p>"I am Behram, the King's son of Persia, who have changed my favour and am become a stranger to my</p>	<p>Respected</p> <p>Highly regarded</p> <p>With great admiration and amazement</p> <p>Loved Hated</p> <p>Deceived Betrayed Loved</p>
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	and sent to her, to ask her in marriage;--		
7. Dalilah		<p>"Indeed, she hath not played off these tricks, because she coveted the folk's stuff, but to show her cleverness and that of her daughter, to the intent that thou shouldst continue her husband's stipend to her and that of her father to her daughter. So an thou wilt spare her life I will fetch her to thee." [Hasan Shuman]</p> <p>"By the life of my ancestors, if she restore the people's goods, I will pardon her on thine intercession!" [Caliph]</p> <p>"Thou art indeed crafty and full of guile." Whence she was dubbed Dalilah the Wily One. Then quoth he, "Why hast thou played all these tricks on the folk and wearied our hearts?" [Caliph]</p> <p>"Ask a boon of me, O Dalilah!"</p> <p>"O Dalilah, I will write thee a</p>	<p><i>With understanding of her foul dealings</i></p> <p><i>With forgiving heart</i></p> <p><i>With curiosity</i></p> <p><i>With utmost kindness</i></p> <p><i>Trusted</i></p>

	<p>The Caliph granted her this also and she and her daughter removed to the pavilion in question, where Zaynab hung up the one-and-forty dresses of Calamity Ahmad and his company.</p>	<p>patent of guardianship of the Khan, and if aught be lost therefrom, thou shalt be answerable for it. "</p>	<p><i>With trust and confidence</i></p>
<p>8. Julnar</p>		<p>"O my lord, I bought her for two thousand diners of the merchant who owned her before myself, since when I have travelled with her three years and she hath cost me, up to the time of my coming hither, other three thousand gold pieces; but she is a gift from me to thee." [merchant] "Amend ye the case of this maiden and adorn her and furnish her a bower and set her therein." And he bade his chamberlains carry her everything she needed and shut all the doors upon</p>	<p><i>As a precious gift</i></p> <p><i>Cared</i></p>

	<p>he loved her with exceeding love and falling upon her, took her maidenhead and found her a pure virgin; ...Then he devoted himself altogether to her, heeding none other and forsaking all his concubines and favourites, and tarried with her a whole year as it were a single day.</p>	<p>her. Then Shahrیمان went in to her; but she spake not to him neither took any note of him. Quoth he, 'Twould seem she hath been with folk who have not taught her manners." "Glory be to God, the Creator of this girl! How charming she is, save that she speaketh not! But perfection belongeth only to Allah the Most High." When the King heard her speech, his face shone with joy and gladness and he kissed her head and hands for excess of delight, saying "Alhamdolillah-- laud to Lord-- who hath vouchsafed me the things I desired!, first, thy speech, and</p>	<p><i>With disappointment for her silence</i></p> <p><i>Venerated Glorified</i></p> <p><i>With exceeding love, admiration and thankfulness for her purity or virginity</i></p> <p><i>loved exceedingly</i></p>
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<p>9. Queen Lab</p>		<p>"Know, O my son that this is the City of the Magicians and its Queen is as she were She-Satan, a sorceress and a mighty enchantress, passing crafty and perfidious exceedingly. [Abdal lah</p>	<p>Abhorred Feared</p>
		<p>His sense was ecstasied and his breast broadened, and he forgot his strangerhood and said in himself, "Verily, this Queen is young and beautiful and I will never leave her; for her kingdom is vaster than my kingdom and she is fairer than Princess Jauharah." [Badr]</p> <p>... jealousy got hold upon him and he was wroth with the Queen because of the black bird. [Badr]</p>	<p>Admired</p>
		<p>"Beware of her, for know that the birds upon the tree were all young men and strangers, whom she loved and enchanted and turned into birds. That black bird thou sawest was one of her Mamelukes whom she</p>	<p>With jealousy</p> <p>Mistrusted</p>

		<p>loved with exceeding love, till he cast his eyes upon one of her women, wherefore she changed him into a black bird";</p>	
10.Miriam		<p>So do thou consult her and if she say, 'I consent,' sell her to whom thou wilt: but an she say, 'No,' sell her not."</p> <p>"O Princess of fair ones, is there in the world a comelier than thou?" "O my lady, were I in my own land, I had bought thee with all that my hand possesseth of monies;"</p> <p>O my son, they have cheated thee in the matter of this damsel! However, an thou have taken a fancy to her, lie with her this night and do thy will of her and to-morrow morning go down with her to the market and sell her, though thou lose by her two hundred dinars, and reckon that thou hast lost them by shipwreck or hast been robbed of them on the road." [druggist]</p>	<p>Respected</p> <p>With flattery</p> <p>Regards the girl as a commodity to be enjoyed and dispatched. A worthless thing except for her price.</p>

		<p>"Make this all into girdles and teach me likewise how to make them, that I may work with thee; for never in the length of my life saw I a fairer craft than this craft nor a more abounding in gain and profit. By Allah, 'tis better than the trade of a merchant a thousand times!" [Nur Al-din]</p> <p>"O lady of fair ones, and who shall interpose between us, seeing that I love thee above all creatures and tender thee the most?"</p> <p>"By Allah, O my lady Miriam, verily runneth the Reed with whatso Allah hath decreed. The folk put a cheat on me to make me sell thee, and I fell into the snare and sold thee. Indeed, I have sorely failed of my duty to thee; but haply He who decreed our disunion will vouchsafe us reunion." [Nur Al-Din]</p>	<p><i>Admired with amazement Appreciated for her craftmanship</i></p> <p>Loved</p> <p><i>With guilt and repentance</i></p> <p>Comforted</p>
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		<p>And indeed he marvelled at the blackamoor's stature and praised the Princess for her deed, wondering the while at her valour and stout-heartedness. [Nur Al-Din]</p> <p>"O Miriam, doth not what hath already befallen us on thine account suffice thee, but thou must leave the faith of thy fathers and forefathers and follow after the faith of the Vagrants in the lands, that is to say, the faith of Al-Islam? By the virtue of the Messiah and the Faith which is no liar, except thou return to the creed of the Kings thy Forebears and walk therein after the goodliest fashion, I will put thee to an ill death and make of thee the most shameful of ensamples!" [Bartaut, Miriam's brother]</p> <p>"O Fasyán, surnamed Salh al-Subyán, go forth, O my son, to do battle with thy</p>	<p>With amazement</p> <p>Challenged</p> <p>With extreme hatred</p>
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		<p>sister and take of her the blood-wreak for thy brothers and fall on her, come what may; and whether thou gain or thou lose the day; and if thou conquer her, slay her with foulest slaughter!"[Miriam 's father]</p> <p>Now when the Knights and riders who rode with her sire saw his three sons slain, who were the doughtiest of the folk of their day, there fell on their hearts terror of the Princess Miriam, awe of her overpowered them; they bowed their heads earthwards and they made sure of ruin and confusion, disgrace and destruction. So with the flames of hate blazing in heart they turned their backs forthright and addressed themselves to flight[men soldiers]</p> <p>"In very sooth Princess Miriam hath belittled us; and if I venture myself and go out against her alone,</p>	<p>Feared Respected</p> <p>Feared</p>
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		<p>haply she will gar me succumb and slay me without ruth, even as she slew her brothers and make of me the foulest of examples, for she hath no longer any desire for us nor have we of her return any hope. Wherefore it were the better rede that I guard mine honour and return to my capital." [Miriam's father]</p> <p>The Caliph looked at Miriam and saw that she was slender and shapely of form and stature, the handsomest of the folk of her tide and the unique pearl of her age and her time; sweet of speech and fluent of tongue, stable of soul and hearty of heart. [King]</p> <p>"O Miriam, Allah bless and direct thee in the way of righteousness! Since thou art a Moslemah and a believer in Allah the One, I owe thee a duty of obligation and it is that I should never transgress against thee nor</p>	<p><i>Admired for her beauty</i></p> <p><i>Respected</i></p>
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		<p>forsake thee, though be lavished unto me on thine account the world full of gold and gems. So be of good cheer and eyes clear of tear; and be thy breast broadened and thy case naught save easy. Art thou willing that this youth Ali of Cairo be to thee man and thou to him wife?"[King]</p> <p>"Hast thou heard her words? How can I her send back to her father the Infidel, seeing that she is a Moslemah and a believer in the Unity? Belike he will evil entreat her and deal harshly with her, more by token that she hath slain his sons, and I shall bear blame for her on Resurrection- day. And indeed quoth the Almighty 'Allah will by no means make a way for the Infidels over the True Believers.'[King]</p>	<p>Concerned Protected</p>
<p>11. Fatimah</p>	<p>Hereupon the bridegroom repeated his query till at last she confessed it</p>		<p>With humility and admission of his inferiority</p>

	<p>was she had done that deed of derring-do; and the Prince rejoiced much in her.</p>		
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IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study that subjected eleven women characters and how men characters treated them from ten tales in The Arabian Nights revealed that during ancient times, not all women were oppressed. From the eleven women characters, only one was treated badly by a man character [Azizah]. There is another one woman character who was sold by his father [Hind], however, she did not wish to suffer the fate of being a wife of an unattractive person. She devised a way to escape from her unhappy state and emerged victorious. The men in the tales, with the exception of Aziz, are kind and respectful to women characters. Surprisingly, there are some men characters who are physically inferior to women characters. Among eleven women characters, seven are found to have traits superior to men. Women are portrayed as more powerful to men as opposed to their culture which puts women as second class citizens. This veneration of women in their tales which were composed by unknown people of the place may reflect their psychological struggle of aspiring to put women's status as equal if not, superior to men.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Men should read this study to make them aware of the kind treatment of most male characters to women characters in these tales. Thus, some of the tales from this study may be included in the selections to be read by high school students. Furthermore, some of the tales under this study should be included in Literatures of Asia.

Stories from this study should be read by feminists to allow them to realize that women's struggle for equality and even superiority is deeply rooted from antiquity.

Women who believe in transcending from their natural roles such as being a wife and mother should read this study for them to understand that women have the capacity to dominate men.

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