



Feminist Identities Among Kuwait University Female Students

Dr. Hend B. Al-Ma'seb*

Abstract:

Downing and Roush in 1985 proposed a five-stage model of feminist identity development (FID). These stages are Passive Acceptance, Revelation, Embeddedness-Emanation, Synthesis, and Active Commitment. This study investigated whether there are differences between the five stages of the FID model based on marital status, tribal affiliation, and colleges attended among Kuwaiti female students. A sample of 500 female students from Kuwait University participated in the study. The main findings of the study showed that Kuwaiti female students conveyed different perspectives at each stage. Their different perceptions are based on the colleges they attended at Kuwait University. The results showed there is a significant relationship between the college they attended and two of the feminist identity stages (Passive Acceptance, Synthesis). Difference in perception is also based on the women's marital status. The results also showed a significant relationship between marital status and two of the feminist identity stages (Revelation, Embeddedness-Emanation). Difference in the women's perceptions is also based on their tribal affiliation. The results also showed a significant relationship between tribal affiliation and four of the feminist identity stages (Revelation, Embeddedness-Emanation, Synthesis, Active Commitment). The current study is the first empirical study that addresses the five stages of feminist identity among Kuwaiti female students.

Feminism, by definition, is a theory which asserts that men and women should be equal politically, economically, and socially. Feminism is an important subject in the social sciences in general and the field of Social Work, in particular. Feminism was brought into

* Sociology and Social Work Department, College of Social Science, Kuwait University, Supported by Kuwait University.

the field of Social Work long time ago (Lehmann & Coady, 2001). It is important for social workers to understand the feminist identity so they can help their clients. However, a number of social workers have been reluctant to accept feminist theory (Dankoski et al., 1998; Lehmann & Coady, 2001).

The Dictionary of Social Work defines feminist therapy as follows:

A psychosocial treatment orientation in which the professional (usually a woman) helps the client (usually a woman) in individual or group settings overcome the psychological and social problems largely encountered as a result of gender discrimination and gender role stereotyping. Feminist therapists help clients maximize potential, especially through raising their consciousness, eliminating gender stereotyping, and helping them become aware of the commonalities shared by all women. (Barker, 2003, p. 161).

According to (Tetreault and Al-Mughni, 1995, p. 143), Kuwaiti women were "entitled to participate as voters and as candidates in the administrations of local cooperative stores, although they still [could not] vote for parliament members." This continued to be true until May 2005, when women in Kuwait were given the political right to vote and to run for office in the parliament, which is regarded as a tremendous step forward in the women's movement in Kuwait. However, in Kuwait as in many Arab countries, women continue to suffer from gender discrimination (Alessa, 2009). For example, they do not have the freedom to control their own lives (AlMaseb & Julia, 2007).

Numerous scholars have studied feminist identities in the West. Unfortunately, in Kuwait there are only a few studies that address this subject. Therefore, it is important to study the stages of feminist identity among Kuwaiti females especially with all of the political and social challenges and changes that Arab countries are facing right now. Social workers in Kuwait need to understand the identities of their clients so they can work with them. This study will explore a new area in the field of social work in Kuwait, which is the stages of feminist identity.

Literature Review

Downing and Roush (1985): A Five-stage Model

(Downing and Roush, 1985) proposed a five-stage model of feminist identity development (FID), in which they explained that women go through five stages to achieve a feminist identity. The first stage of the feminist identity development model is Passive Acceptance. Women in this stage do not recognize sexism; nor do they deny it. They “not only accept sex-role stereotypes, but also find them beneficial” (Bargad & Hyde, 1991, P. 183).

The second stage is Revelation. In this stage, women may feel anger or guilt because they recognize discrimination and view men as the enemy. The third stage is Embeddedness-Emanation. Women in this stage connect more with other women. For example, they push themselves in the women’s culture.

The fourth stage is Synthesis, where women develop their feminist identity and recognize the positive sides of being women. In addition, women in this stage begin to evaluate men on an individual basis. The last stage is Active Commitment, in which women become active in the feminist movement. This stage “involves working on behalf of women’s rights because of the feminist identity achieved in the previous stage” (Liss & Erchull, 2010, p. 85).

(Downing and Roush’s, 1985) FID model was based on their experiences as women and clinicians and based on “experiences of second-wave feminists from the 1960s and 1970s” (Erchull et al., 2009, p. 382). The FID model is also based on Cross’s (1971) model of African American Identity Development (Green, Scott, Riopel, & Skaggs, 2008; Moradi, Subich, & Phillips 2002; Ng, Dunne, & Cataldo, 1995).

Many social science scholars provide evidence to support the assumption that females who develop strong feminist identities are more likely to have high self-esteem, academic achievement, self-reliance, and self-efficacy (Fischer and Good 1994; Foss and Slaney 1986; Liss et al., 2001; Valenzuela, 1993). In addition, women in the Passive Acceptance stage are less likely to have an egalitarian relationship with their partners or husbands. In contrast, women in

the Synthesis and Active Commitment stages are more likely to have egalitarian relationships with the opposite sex. Moreover, they are more likely to share household labor and childcare with their partners or husbands, and more likely to have equal education and employment as their partners or husbands (Yoder et al., 2007).

The bottom line is that, to my knowledge, no empirical study to date has been conducted among Kuwaiti female students to examine the relationship between the five stages of feminist identity and their association with marital status, tribal affiliation, and colleges attended. Therefore, it is important to explore this new area of research in the field of social work in Kuwait, which can help social workers in Kuwait to work with females who have social and identity problems. Using feminist theory can enable social workers to select the appropriate intervention that can help their clients, based on the female identity stages. The current study is the first empirical study that addresses the five stages of feminist identity among Kuwaiti female students.

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether there are differences between the five stages of the FID model (Passive Acceptance, Revelation, Embeddedness-Emanation, Synthesis, and Active Commitment) based on marital status, tribal affiliation, and colleges attended by female Kuwaiti students.

Methods

A descriptive approach was selected to address the research questions. It is used for descriptive and explanatory purposes. The goal of this research was to explore differences between the five stages of feminist identity and three independent variables, which are marital status, tribal affiliation, and colleges attended among Kuwaiti female students.

Participants

The population of this study is Kuwaiti female students enrolled at Kuwait University in Kuwait. In Kuwait University, there are 32475 students. 21962 are female- and 10513 are male students. This study used a non-probability, convenience-sampling method to recruit the study participants. A total of 500 female undergraduate students from

Kuwait University participated voluntarily in this research. Their ages ranged from 17 to 44 years old (mean = 19.71). Married women comprised 11.6% (N = 58) of the sample, single women comprised 87.8% (N = 439), and those who were divorced, 4% (N = 2). In terms of their places of residence, 23.6% of the sample reported that they live in Farwaniya, 23.4% in AlAsima, 17.4% in Mubarak Al-Kabeer, 16% in Hawalli, 12% in Al Ahmadi, and 7.2% in Aljahra. Of the total sample, 46.4% was tribal and 52.8%, urban. (See Table 1: The demographic characteristics of the study participants.)

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants (n = 500)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Marital Status		
Single	439	87.8%
Married	58	11.6%
Divorced	2	4%
Tribal Affiliation		
Tribal	232	46.4%
Urban	264	52.8%
Places of Residence		
Al Asimah	117	23.4%
Hawalli	80	16.0%
Al Farwaniyah	118	23.6%
Al Jahra	36	7.2%
Al Ahmadi	60	12.0%
Mubarak Al-Kabeer	87	17.4%

The Instrument

There are many standardized international measures of feminism to assess feminist identity development in English. Unfortunately,

there is no standardized measure in Arabic to measure the process of feminist identity development among the population of Kuwaiti women. Therefore, in this study, the author used the feminist identity development scale (FIDS; Bargad & Hyde, 1991). This is a popular instrument used widely among American women's population to measure women's feminist identity.

The FIDS is a 39-item instrument that asks respondents to select self-descriptive statements. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Bargad and Hyde found the FIDS valid and reliable (Passive acceptance $\alpha = 0.85$, Revelation $\alpha = 0.75$, Embeddedness-Emanation $\alpha = 0.82$, Synthesis $\alpha = 0.65$, Active Commitment $\alpha = 0.80$).

The language used in the questionnaire was English. A member of the Arabic Department at Kuwait University translated the questionnaire and cover letter from English to Arabic. A member of the English Department at Kuwait University back translated the questionnaire and the cover letter from Arabic to English to make sure that the translation was accurate.

The researcher field-tested the Arabic version of the questionnaire utilizing a panel of judges (three professors from the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Kuwait University) who are familiar with the study. This panel evaluated a draft of the questionnaire and members gave their opinions. The panel found all items were good and did not require any changes. The internal consistency of this measure was found to be reliable at alpha 0.85. The alpha scores were as follows: Passive Acceptance, $\alpha = 0.60$; Revelation, $\alpha = 0.70$; Embeddedness-Emanation, $\alpha = 0.55$; Synthesis, $\alpha = 0.53$; and Active Commitment, $\alpha = 0.81$. (See Table 2: Reliability of the FID scale.)

Table 2
Reliability of the FID Scale

	Stages	Items	Alpha for US sample	Alpha for Kuwaiti sample
1.	Passive Acceptance	12	0.85	0.60
2.	Revelation	7	0.75	0.70
3.	Embeddedness-Emanation	6	0.82	0.55
4.	Synthesis	5	0.65	0.52
5.	Active Commitment	9	0.80	0.81

Data Analysis

Several statistics tests were used to answer the research question. Descriptive analyses were used to describe the sample to calculate the means and the percentages. The t-test was conducted to illustrate the differences between marital status, tribal affiliation, and colleges the female Kuwaiti students attended at Kuwait University and the five stages of the FID model.

Results

T-test analysis was used to illustrate the differences between single and married women on the stages of feminist identity development. Based on the feminist identity development scale, there are five stages. These are Passive Acceptance, Revelation, Embeddedness-Emanation, Synthesis, and Active Commitment. The analysis indicated that there are no differences between single and married Kuwaiti female students based on the following stages: Passive, Synthesis, and Active Commitment. In other words, the means of the Passive, Synthesis, and Active Commitment stages did not differ significantly at $p < 0.05$.

However, results of the t-test showed that there are differences between single and married Kuwaiti female students based on the Revelation and Embeddedness-Emanation stages. In the Revelation stage, single female students had a mean of 3.3 and married female students had a mean of 2.9 ($p = 0.001$), which means that single female

students are more likely to feel gender discrimination and to be angry with men.

In the Embeddedness-Emanation stage, single female students had a mean of 3.5 and married female students had a mean of 3.2 ($p = 0.01$), which means that single female students are more likely to push themselves in the women's culture than married female students

(See Table 3: T-test between marital status and the five feminist identity stages)

Table 3
T-test between Marital Status and the Five Feminist Identity Stages

Scales	Single		Married		df	t
	M	SD	M	SD		
Passive Acceptance	3.3	.53	3.2	.63	495	1.27
Revelation	3.3	.71	2.96	.77	495	3.34***
Embeddedness-Emanation	3.52	.60	3.28	.71	495	2.84**
Synthesis	3.76	.59	3.64	.63	495	1.40
Active Commitment	3.53	.69	3.31	.75	495	2.20

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, (2-tailed)

The colleges were accommodating two groups: Arts (Law, Art, Education, Shari'a and Islamic studies, Women, Social Studies, and Business Administration) and Sciences (Science, Medicine, Engineering and Petroleum, Allied Health Sciences, Pharmacy, Dentistry, and Medical Science).

T-test analysis indicated that there are differences on the Passive and Synthesis stages between female students who attended Art colleges and female students who attended Science colleges. On the Passive stage, female students who attended Art colleges had a mean of 3.2, and female students who attended Science colleges had a mean of 3.1 ($p = 0.05$), implying that female students who attended Art

colleges are more likely to accept sex-role stereotypes for women than the female students who attended Science colleges.

In the Synthesis stage, female students who attended Art colleges had a mean of 3.7, and female students who attended Science colleges had a mean of 3.8. ($p = 0.01$), which means that female students who attended Science colleges are more likely to develop feminist identities than female students who attended Art colleges.

However, the analysis indicated that there are no differences in the Revelation, Embeddedness-Emanation, and Active Commitment stages, for which the means did not differ significantly at $p < 0.05$. (See Table 4: T-test between college attended and the five feminist identity stages.)

Table 4
T-test between College Attended and the Five Feminist Identity Stages

Scales	Art		Science		df	t
	M	SD	M	SD		
Passive Acceptance	3.28	0.57	3.17	0.48	498	1.99*
Revelation	3.23	0.73	3.31	0.70	498	-1.01
Embeddedness-Emanation	3.50	0.62	3.49	0.60	498	0.063
Synthesis	3.71	0.63	3.82	0.49	498	1.92**
Active Commitment	3.52	0.72	3.47	0.64	498	0.78

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, (2-tailed)

Analysis of the t-test showed that there are differences between tribal and urban female students in the Revelation, Embeddedness-Emanation, Synthesis, and Active Commitment stages. Tribal female students in the Revelation stage had a mean of 3.1 and urban female students had a mean of 3.3 ($p = 0.01$). In the Embeddedness-Emanation stage, tribal female students had a mean of 3.3 and urban female students had a mean of 3.5 ($p = 0.001$).

Urban female students in the Synthesis stage had a mean of 3.8 and tribal female students had a mean of 3.6 ($p = 0.001$). Tribal female students in the Active Commitment stage had a mean of 3.4 and urban female students had a mean of 3.6 ($p = 0.001$). This implies that the urban female students are more likely to develop feminist identities than tribal female students are.

In the Passive stage, the mean did not differ significantly at $p < 0.05$, which means that there are no differences between tribal female students and urban female students in their acceptance of sex-role stereotypes. (See Table 5: T-test between tribal affiliation and the five feminist identity stages.)

Table 5
T-test between Tribal Affiliation and the Five Feminist Identity Stages

Scales	Tribal		Urban		df	t
	M	SD	M	SD		
Passive Acceptance	3.25	0.57	3.25	0.52	494	-0.10
Revelation	3.15	0.71	3.35	0.72	494	-3.06**
Embeddedness- Emanation	3.39	0.64	3.59	0.57	494	-3.70***
Synthesis	3.64	0.67	3.84	0.50	494	-3.61***
Active Commitment	3.40	0.74	3.60	0.64	494	-3.21***

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, (2-tailed)

Discussion

Despite the similarities among the five stages, female Kuwaiti students conveyed different perspectives in each stage. Their differing perceptions were based on the college they attended, their marital status, and their tribal affiliation.

The results of this study demonstrate that single female Kuwaiti students recognize discrimination and understand the oppression of women. However, married women show less recognition of the

women's situation in this culture. This result could be explained by the fact that married women in Arab culture are usually controlled by their husbands. They have a tendency to obey their husbands' decisions. Moreover, married women usually pay great attention to and focus on their families and their needs more than their own. Single women, on the other hand, may have fewer responsibilities and more freedom than married women do; therefore, single women may be more likely to concentrate on women's situation in Kuwait.

Female Bedouin Kuwaiti students show less adaptation to the stages of feminist identity development than do urban female Kuwaiti students. Urban women in Kuwait have more freedom than do Bedouin women.

The results of the current study indicates that female Kuwaiti students who attend Science colleges had higher adaptation to the advanced stages of the FID model than did the female students who attended Art colleges. This result may be due to the fact that most students in Art colleges are likely to come from Bedouin society, which emphasizes submission and obedience to males and to social morés. This result is also supported by the fact that one of the Art colleges at Kuwait University is Shari'a College, which is an Islamic college that also emphasizes the idea of male superiority over women. Therefore, it is only logical for students in Art colleges to have a different perspective of women's roles and identities based on their values and beliefs. Their perspectives on the most part lean toward the lower stage of the FID model, where women cannot recognize sexism and accept the roles that society assigns them.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Social workers who work in the field can develop a better understanding of their female clients' point of view based on the stage that these clients adopt. According to (Downing and Roush, 1985), "viewing female clients' presenting problems within the context of this developmental framework will add richness to the therapist's understanding of clients' concerns" (p. 705). Moreover, in the field of Social Work, there is always a need for good therapies that can help social

workers treat their clients. Knowing the FID model and the differences among stages in this model based on variables such as marital status, colleges that females attend, and tribal affiliation can help develop appropriate interventions for clients.

Future Research and Recommendations

Many studies have been conducted in the area of feminist identity. However, more research needs to be conducted, as well. For example, research is warranted that replicates the current study, using a different sample that represents different age groups or employed female Kuwaitis, who may have a different perspective than the current sample of female students. Another area for future research is using a quantitative method to discover the relationship between stress levels and the feminist identity development stages that Kuwaiti women adopt. Future studies can investigate whether Kuwaiti women who adopt advanced stages experience a high level of stress or not.

The researcher would like to make the following recommendations based on the findings of the current study.

- Design social programs that help women to develop their identities based on what they believe, not based on what others believe.
- Social workers in Kuwait should work with groups who are more likely to be at risk of gender discrimination - such as married and Bedouin women - and social workers should use appropriate interventions that can help these groups to become aware of this discrimination.
- Conduct more research that can evaluate new therapies to work with these populations who are at risk.

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