

SEX DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN KUWAIT TOWARD MANUAL WORK

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Introduction

In cultures where sex-roles are prominently differentiated, males and females are expected to have sex-related attitudinal differences. In Kuwait, as in all Arab countries, boys and girls are brought up differently. Individuals are strongly influenced by social expectations as to the type of work that men and women should do. While girls are socialized for the role of housewife as their main responsibility, boys are trained to be productive breadwinners (Azzam, 1981).

Consistent with this notion, many college students in the Gulf states look upon manual occupations as inferior to the qualifications they obtain from university, and/or improper for the social status of the family (Jaber & Khodari, 1978). Differences between males and females regarding perceptions about manual work have also been attributed to the negative attitude toward everything that is not related to white collar occupations. The purpose of this study is to investigate the discrepancy in attitudes about manual work between male and female students, and between students specialising in the arts and sciences. Manual work throughout this study refers to physical labor in general and/or blue collar workers who engage in manual labor or work in industry.

Several investigations have indicated contradictory results as to what differentiates the attitudes of college students toward manual work. A study of social versus individual opinion toward some social issues by Sherif and Alsarraf (1986) found that college students, when asked to rank their own opinions and those of society toward manual occupations, showed their own opinions to be more positive than those of the society. It was also shown that

male students expressed a slightly more positive attitude toward manual occupations than females. It was concluded that a more intensive analysis of work preferences could suggest how to achieve better results in educating and guiding young people toward careers in the technological fields.

Feldman (1972) found that attitudes of university students were differentiated more by occupations. McGuire (1969) cited a number of studies that collectively support the notion that commitment provides stability for attitudes. Neils (1971) reported that different jobs require different attitudes, and possession of positive attitudes may be crucial to job success. Healey and Beblassie (1974) found that the total socio-economic and cultural background of youths influenced their job knowledge and their work preference.

Harper and Collins (1975) in a longitudinal study of attitudes of youth toward work reported that girls rated people-oriented values highest when it came to choosing jobs while boys rated reward-oriented values highest. In an in-depth study, Bachy (1977) found that the majority of young people regard work as a means to achieving a better life. A striking feature of today's youth is rejection of manual labor.

Research Problem

The theoretical position in this study is that since attitudes toward work are influenced by affective factors and involve positive feelings and motivation attributable to the cultural orientation, and since blue collar workers who engage in manual labor in Kuwait are predominantly non-Kuwaitis (Annual Statistical Abstracts, 1988:161), it might be reasonable to argue that a traditional culture such as in Kuwait provides overt reinforcement for both sexes to have the same attitudes toward manual occupations as being inferior to white collar work.

Specifically, the study endeavored to answer the following hypotheses:

- 1) There are no significant differences in attitudes toward manual work between male and female students in the arts-related colleges.
- 2) There are no significant differences in attitudes toward manual work between male and female students in the science-based colleges.
- 3) There are no significant differences in attitudes toward manual work between male and female students.

Research Method

Sample: A total of 1339 Kuwaiti students (434 males and 905 females) were selected by stratified random sampling from nine university colleges at Kuwait University. These students were enrolled in the Colleges of Science (22%), Arts (15%), Commerce, Economics and Political Science (14.3%), Engineering (11.9%), Allied Health (9.7%), Law (9.3%), Education (7.5%), Sharea'a (6.4%) and Medicine (3.7%). The ratio of the socio-economic status of the families of the male and female students was approximately the same: for the families of the female students, 75% were middle-class and 25% lower-class; whereas for the male students, 73% of the families were middle-class and 27% lower-class. With regard to educational attainment of the fathers of the student sample, only 5.7% were post-university graduates, 17.2% were university graduates, 21.4% were high school graduates, 36% were elementary school graduates, and the remainder (19.7%) were illiterate.

Instrument: A Likert-type questionnaire consisting of 35 statements was constructed by the researcher (see Appendix). The objective of this questionnaire was to measure the individual's beliefs and feelings by indicating the degree of his/her agreement or disagreement with a series of statements about manual work in Kuwait. Each statement was rated on a five point scale. The number of statements favorable toward manual work (52%) was approximately equal to the number of unfavorable statements (48%). All statements favoring manual work were assigned the following scores: strongly agree (5 points), agree (4 points), undecided (3 points), disagree (2 points), and strongly disagree (1 point). For statements opposing this point of view, the items were scored in the opposite order, i.e., from strongly agree (1 point) to strongly disagree (5 points). Thus, the instrument yielded a total score for each respondent.

The statements were submitted to a panel of six judges, and their recommendations were taken into consideration. Out of 50 statements submitted to the judges, 15 were disregarded and the remaining 35 constituted the questionnaire. A trial test was also administered to a number of subjects, and only those items that were highly correlated with the total test were retained. This was crucial for internal consistency, and the correlations ranged from .35 to .66.

Results

The means and standard deviations for responses on the questionnaire for the male and female subjects in art colleges are reported in Table 1, along with the results of the t-tests. Art colleges here refer to the Colleges of Arts, Education, Law, Sharea'a, and Commerce, Economics and Political Science. The t-test for art college students indicates that females scored significantly higher than males in art colleges ($t=2.63$), which means that females are more or less favorably inclined toward manual work. One interesting result is that females gave high value scores to most statements favoring a manual occupation, and low mean scores to most statements unfavorable to a manual occupation.

Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations and T-Test Value
for the Sample of Art Colleges*

Sex	No. of Students	Mean	S D	T Value
Male	194	117.33	10.94	2.63*
Female	511	119.81	11.77	

*Significance level of .01

As for the discrepancy between male and female responses in science colleges, t-tests revealed no significant differences between the two groups (Table 2). The four science colleges are those of Science, Engineering, Allied Health and Medicine.

Table 2

*Means, Standard Deviations and T-Test Value
for the Sample of Science Colleges*

Sex	No. of Students	Mean	S D	T Value
Male	240	119.86	10.51	.65
Female	394	120.45	12.02	

However, the results of t-tests on the combined arts and science samples showed significant differences between males and females ($t=2.09$). The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3. This table also demonstrates that the female subjects had larger means (120.09 versus 118.73) and standard deviations (11.88 versus 10.77) as an indication of variability of their responses. Specifically, females as compared to males seemed to have more favorable attitudes about manual work. Although the results in Table 3 indicate that both sexes expressed a slightly positive attitude toward manual work (both the means for males and for females were 118.73 and 120.09 respectively), yet female students showed a slightly more positive attitude than that of male students.

Table 3
*Means, Standard Deviations and T-Test Value
for the Total Sample*

Sex	No. of Students	Mean	S D	T Value
Male	434	118.73	10.77	2.09*
Female	905	120.09	11.88	

* Significance level of .05.

Discussion

The hypothesis that there are no significant differences in attitudes between male and female students in art colleges toward manual work was not supported. When student responses were compared on the basis of giving high values to statements favoring a manual occupation, female students proved to have a somewhat more positive attitude than male students.

The data also showed that respondents of both sexes in science colleges expressed a slightly positive attitude toward manual work. Both means for males and females (119.86 for males and 120.45 for females) were higher than 105, the undecided point, with females expressing a slightly more positive attitude than males. However, this slight difference in the means of the sexes is not large enough to be of any significance, statistical or practical, meaning that science students do not differ

significantly in their work-value orientations. If the number of respondents is taken into account, it can be seen that almost half of them belong to the science colleges. This may indicate that sex alone is not the determining factor in attitudes toward manual work. The slight difference between the two sexes may reflect the fact that cultural versus scientific values remain the major factors in inculcating certain attitudes in boys and girls who specialize in the science fields, and that consequently they come to realize this reality and plan for their future accordingly.

The third hypothesis, that there are no significant attitudinal differences between male and female students toward manual work, was also not supported. The results obtained indicated that there were noticeable differences between the opinions of males and those of females concerning a manual occupation. Comparing the two groups, the responses of the female students indicated that they were more favorable to manual work than their male counterparts. This was reflected in the high values given to the statements favoring manual work, reflecting a belief that manual work should be given more consideration in their lives and better acknowledgment in the development plans of the country, contrary to what the males believed. This is not surprising, since Kuwait is a traditional society and it is not unusual for males to have different views and attitudes from those held by females.

One possible explanation for male students not preferring manual work in society is simply because it sounds unglamorous or it does not have high prestige value. The data revealed a significant negative attitude in males toward manual work, supporting results of earlier investigations (Jaber & Khodari, 1978; Azzam, 1981).

Since this is the case, it seems reasonable to assume that parents play a major role in influencing the attitudinal values of their sons and daughters toward manual work. It seems quite obvious that counseling ought to be directed to parents as well as their children. Counseling services for parents provided as part of the regular services of the schools and colleges would better enable parents to fulfil the home guidance function. The University of Kuwait Counseling Center should conduct meetings, conferences, workshops and short courses for both the youth and their parents. Also, teachers

should exert more effort with their students in cultivating positive attitudes towards physical labor in general.

The role of counseling for college students should embark upon the fact that the college graduates look forward to having positions in jobs where they are provided with air-conditioned offices. They are reluctant to go out and use their hands and do the job themselves, even if they are trained for that (e.g. College of Engineering graduates). This "reality" is perpetuated by two factors. First, the weather of Kuwait is exceptionally hot as the temperature reaches 120° F for almost half the year. Second, members of the general public have stable beliefs concerning the characteristics of members of different occupations, and they contend that white collar occupations are more prestigious than blue collar jobs. Consequently, the country relies heavily on foreign workers to do most of the manual labor. There seem to be no effective general counseling services available to guide the youth of the country to achieve a better understanding of the importance of manual labor for the development of the country.

This is why the issue of counseling is important for college students. Goals should include developing positive attitudes towards physical labor, showing the role of the working class in developed countries, and providing incentives for manual career possibilities. Parents, schools, and media hold the key to any successful counseling program needed for such a change in attitudes. Consequently, Kuwait needs counseling services in such areas as parent counseling, school counseling, and vocational counseling. Unfortunately, very little is currently being done along these lines.

Through counseling and media discussion, students may develop more healthy and positive attitudes toward manual work. Counseling related to this matter can fall into three categories: (1) informational programs to provide students with facts concerning manual work in more advanced societies; (2) educational programs to help parents change their negative attitudes toward manual work so as to understand the usefulness of work for both themselves and their children; and (3) wide-range student-training programs to help students develop positive attitudes and working skills for manual occupations.

Additional research will be required to determine the extent to which these counseling intervention procedures can benefit young people, males in particular, in the society of Kuwait.

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Appendix

Questionnaire Items

1. Manual work is preferable to office work.
2. Kuwaiti society prefers office work to manual work.
3. Manual work is preferable to office work in Islam.
4. Manual work is the basis of creativity in modern societies.
5. Manual work frees man from restrictions and subordination.
6. Without manual work Kuwait would not have developed.
7. Manual work imparts a humanizing value.
8. Manual work teaches patience and endurance of hardship.
9. I like to perform some kinds of manual work because they need special skills.
10. Manual work is the basis of civilization.
11. Man cannot find happiness in manual work.
12. He who does not believe in manual work is considered backward.
13. I do not like to do manual work because it causes body fatigue.
14. I like to do manual work which does not cause body fatigue.
15. Manual work is looked upon with contempt by men.
16. Manual work is looked upon with contempt by women.
17. Manual work is not socially acceptable for men.
18. Manual work is not socially acceptable for women.
19. I like to perform manual work which does not require special skills.
20. Manual work does not correspond with current technological advances.
21. The climate of Kuwait makes manual work very difficult.
22. The nature of Kuwaiti society does not encourage Kuwaitis to undertake manual work.
23. Manual work does not guarantee a happy life.

24. Manual work does not meet the expectations of college graduates.
25. Manual work belittles the dignity of Kuwaitis.
26. Manual work is only proper for illiterates.
27. Manual work is not appropriate for female college graduates.
28. Manual work is not proper for sons and daughters of wealthy families.
29. I do not like to perform manual work which might have tremendous risks.
30. Kuwaiti families do not encourage their sons to undertake manual work.
31. Kuwaiti families do not encourage their daughters to undertake manual work.
32. Kuwaiti society does not encourage its youth to perform manual work.
33. School education does not help students to develop interests in manual work.
34. Traditions and conventions underestimate the importance of manual work.
35. Manual work is not one of the aims I would like to achieve in life.

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This study investigates the social attitudes of college students toward manual work in Kuwait. A sample of 1399 students was selected by stratified random sampling from nine colleges at Kuwait University. A questionnaire was specifically designed to measure their attitudes, and the students were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with a number of statements about manual work in Kuwait. T-test analysis revealed that in the arts-related colleges female students had significantly more positive attitudes toward manual work than male students, whereas there were no significant differences in the science-based colleges. Considering all nine colleges together, however, female students gave significantly more positive attitudinal responses than male students on all the questionnaire statements. Implications of these findings are discussed in terms of counseling for parents as well as the students in schools and colleges in Kuwait.