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Feminist Identity Development of Feminist Women living in Turkey, Ankara

Diploma Thesis

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I declare that I wrote the thesis independently using the sources dutifully cited and listed in the bibliography. The thesis was not used to obtain a different or the same title.

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Prague, January 5, 2024 ………………………….

Kadriye Melis Kaymak Aypulat

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ABSTRACT

Key Words: feminist identity, feminist identity development, feminist women, feminism in Turkey

This study was conducted to examine the feminist identity development of feminist women living in Ankara, Turkey. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with ten feminist women aged between 23-30, residing in Ankara. The feminist identity development model developed by feminist psychotherapists Downing and Roush in 1985 was used as the primary guiding model in the study. As a result of the research, six core themes related to participants' feminist identities emerged: (1) early childhood experiences with patriarchy and gender roles before encountering feminism, (2) biases against feminists and the role of education in the initial encounter with feminism, (3) feeling of relief through the discovery of sisterhood and anger against patriarchy, (4) feminists being marginalized in Turkey, (5) the importance of access to education and financial freedom, (6) the necessity of gender equality education. According to the study, it was observed that feminist identity in Turkey is mostly acquired in the school and educational environment. However, participants mentioned experiencing sexist and discriminatory incidents in their extended families and primary schools before encountering feminism, and they were aware of it at that time. For participants, having a feminist identity in Turkey brings certain prejudices, labels, and marginalization by the government and society. The study concluded that women from middle and upper classes in Turkey find it easier to embrace feminist ideas, and there is an emphasis on the importance of higher education in the development of feminist identity.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How and why does one become a feminist? When I was still an eighteen-year-old psychology student, discussions about society's perspective on women were taking place in a social anthropology class. The professor of the course was a middle-aged man who had received Islamic education and was influenced by this ideology. Throughout the semester, I felt that the texts we were reading were biased, and the discussions were conducted on a very narrow ground. When I witnessed some female friends saying things like "women need protection from men because they are stronger than us," I realized that something was not right.

I went to the final class of the semester well-prepared and gave a speech in which I systematically refuted problematic arguments. The professor applauded me and, as I descended from the stage, said, "Congratulations, you've prepared well, feminist!". That's how my journey to becoming a feminist began. Simply believing in gender equality and advocating for this idea was enough to label me as a feminist in the eyes of the professor and the class. As I stepped down from the stage, a group of girls, with whom I had never interacted before, called me over. They welcomed me into their circle, laughing and saying, "Welcome among us." Just a few minutes after becoming a feminist, I had the opportunity to meet them with this sense of sisterhood. The women in that group were from the socialist tradition and had been defining themselves as feminists for a long time, engaging in activist actions. My readings on feminism, participation in March 8ths Women marches, and the process of becoming politicized all began in this way.

My journey with psychology and gender studies continued in the later years of my education, and I believe that I gradually learned to view the world through a feminist lens during this process. Having completed a master's degree in psychology and studying in gender studies, I have always been fascinated by the process of individuals acquiring a feminist identity. I observed that women shared common experiences in this regard. Since I started my professional career and began working as a psychotherapist, I have encountered discrimination against women in various contexts -at home, on the street, within the family, and in corporations- sometimes only because of they exist as a woman. During this period, I started reading feminist psychotherapy articles, and when I came across the theory of Downing and Roush, I became very excited.

While trying to evaluate the process that made me a feminist according to Downing and Roush's model, I first assessed the elements that made me privileged in Turkey. The most crucial factor that allowed me to adopt a feminist identity was the accessibility to university education. Subsequently, when researching this topic in the literature, I found parallels in many studies that getting acquainted with gender issues and the women's struggle, and becoming a feminist, often involves exposure to feminist ideas particularly during one's educational journey (Bargad & Hyde, 1991; Gerstmann & Kramer, 1997; Williams & Wittig, 1997; Duncan,1999; Henderson-King & Stewart, 1999; Frederick & Stewart, 2018).

Especially in the last twenty years, Turkey's political shift towards the right, its conservative turn, and the popularization of anti-feminist policies (Kourou, 2020) can be seen as the most significant reasons for the increase in grim realities in Turkey, such as femicides, violence against women, child marriages, harassment, and rape. It is crucial for women who are aware of this reality and have inevitably encountered the violence created by inequality at some point in their lives to familiarize themselves with feminism and adopt a feminist identity. Understanding how women in Turkey who have embraced a feminist identity experience this process can provide insights into how other women and perhaps the entire society can become acquainted with feminism and how this idea can become more widespread in Turkey due to all these reasons.

The Objective of the Thesis

In my research, I aimed to examine the processes of feminist identity development among women living in Ankara, Turkey, who have chosen to define themselves as feminists. While conducting this research, I used the five-stage feminist identity development model developed by feminist psychotherapists Downing and Roush (1985) as the theoretical framework. However, in addition to this framework, I also sought information on other sub-identities that I believed could intersect with feminist identity. Thus, exploring intersectionality provided an enriching perspective to my research. In contrast to Western countries, Turkey is a unique intersection of Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, predominantly inhabited by Muslims. I believe that understanding how women in Turkey, where Muslim culture is prevalent, encounter feminism and why they choose to embrace feminism will contribute significantly to the feminist discourse. I chose interview method to observe the common themes experienced by women in this regard or to understand the varying experiences of different sub-identities such as ethnicity, class, religion. When forming my questions, I took these demographic

differences into account and asked participants to evaluate the relationships between these demographic characteristics and their feminist identities.

Structure

In this study, I examined the processes of feminist identity development among feminist women living in Ankara, Turkey. I used the interviews as the primary source and research conducted in the literature on feminist identity development as the secondary source in my research.

In Chapter 2, I started explaining my positionality as a researcher and then providing the demographic characteristics of the participants to introduce the sample in more detail. Subsequently, I shared the limitations observed in this research. I continued this section by explaining the formulation of my research question and the theoretical framework, and finally, I presented my main research question and sub-questions.

In Chapter 3, I first introduced the model developed by Downing and Roush. Then, I shared brief summaries of studies inspired by this model, identifying areas that needed deeper exploration. Finally, I provided the reader with an opportunity to interpret the research results in a broader perspective by touching upon the feminist movement in Turkey and the current political atmosphere in contemporary Turkey.

In Chapter 4, after providing information about the general characteristics of the participants, I analyzed the responses from the semi-structured interviews I conducted. In this section, I delved deeply into participants' processes of encountering feminism, acquiring feminist identities, and the elements they associated with their feminist identities. I explored the challenges they faced during this process and the privileges they possessed.

Finally, in the last chapter, I discussed the research findings, examining their relationship with the literature. Additionally, in this section, I shared some recommendations that I believe would assist future researchers interested in this topic.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

First and foremost, considering that this research is a feminist study, I would like to emphasize that the choice of topic, methods, and study group were crafted in alignment with this agenda. As stated by Letherby (2003) in her book "Feminist Research in Theory and Practice", the questions I posed throughout the research, my position as a researcher, the purpose of the study, and the contributions to feminism and discussions, as detailed in the previous section, have all been conducted entirely from a feminist perspective.

In my research that focused on examining the feminist identity development of women who identify as feminists and reside in Ankara, Turkey, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 participants age between 23-30. The demographic information of the participants will be provided in the next section. It is established as a prerequisite that all participants reside in Ankara and self-identify as feminists. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in November 2023.

To assemble participants, I employed the snowball sampling technique, a prevalent method in qualitative research that assembles samples through referrals (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p.141). I decided that this was the most suitable sampling technique for my research because I was expecting the participation of feminist women living in Ankara.

I initially prepared a poster introducing the upcoming interview and containing essential information from the consent form. I then distributed it to women I knew from my social circle, who I knew identified as feminists. I asked these individuals to share the study within their networks. I aimed to reach samples that I believed might have diverse demographic characteristics. I also reached out to groups that included some gender studies students, as well as the Women's Studies groups of the Turkey Workers' Party in the Ankara region. The sample was thus formed in this manner.

I contacted individuals who expressed interest in volunteering and provided them with information about the study. After determining suitable dates and times with the participants, I conducted all interviews face-to-face, in a suitable environment that prioritized privacy. Before commencing the study, I orally presented the consent form to the participants. After obtaining verbal consent to record the conversation, I obtained their written consent while reiterating the confidentiality of their information. Since the interview questions required participants to

reflect on personal experiences beforehand, I shared the questions with them before the interviews to allow them to think in detail about their experiences. The interviews with participants who had preconceived ideas about the questions and had previously thought about the experiences they wanted to share lasted approximately 25-35 minutes each. While participants knew the basic questions beforehand, when they shared their experiences, I directed additional questions in cases where I needed more detailed information, and this was a natural outcome of the semi-structured interviews.

At the end of the interviews, while expressing my gratitude to the participants, I asked them about their feelings and thoughts. I received overwhelmingly positive feedback from nearly all of them. Many expressed the need to talk about the topic for hours and mentioned that sharing these experiences encouraged them to engage in feminist actions more frequently. They also noted feeling better and more hopeful after the interview. The participants willingly and eagerly answering the questions and providing detailed information about their experiences further affirmed to me that the semi-structured interview was the most suitable technique for my study. Throughout the interviews, I made an effort to refrain from asking yes no questions to have deeper information.

2.1. Positionality

After receiving my psychology education, I began to contemplate more deeply about the influences of society and culture on individuals' psychologies. Subsequently, pursuing a master's degree in gender studies led me to read and actively engage in understanding the impact of gender on the mental health of individuals and society. Throughout this process, the most intriguing aspect for me was understanding why some people maintain sexist attitudes while others possess awareness about gender and feminism. In seeking answers to the question of why and how someone becomes a feminist, I found myself immersed in this research journey.

As a woman born, raised, and having spent a significant part of my life in Turkey, I wanted to conduct my research with women who, like me, have developed a feminist identity and live in Ankara, perhaps because I believed that this group, which I am most familiar with and dominant in, might be the most suitable. However, being a feminist in Ankara would not mean experiencing all the same things, as I was aware of the diverse economic levels, beliefs, and ethnic differences among women in Turkey. In explaining my positionality as a researcher, it would be appropriate to first discuss the privileged and disadvantaged aspects of the demographic characteristics I possess and the group to which I belong.

I must acknowledge that being a "Turk" living in Turkey has been an advantage for me. Particularly, had I been one of the Kurds, Arabs, or members of other ethnic groups, or immigrants who are politically marginalized and numerically a minority, it might have required me to engage in different struggles in various areas.

Another factor that places me in a privileged group could be coming from an educated family that has completed higher education. My family, recognizing the importance of education, has always supported and encouraged me in my educational pursuits. In contrast, I am aware that in many cases, uneducated families in Turkey tend to encourage their daughters not to continue schooling beyond primary education but rather to get married. Being encouraged in education and having access to it has, in my opinion, been the most significant factor in acquiring my feminist identity and being able to gain economic independence as a woman, allowing me to engage in the struggle for freedom.

Another aspect that I consider privileged is being born into a family that is more egalitarian than our society. My family never imposed their religious views on me and provided me with the space to freely choose and explore my beliefs. Until the end of my adolescence, I identified myself as a Muslim but lived a secular lifestyle. Realizing in my late adolescence that I no longer believed in any religion and accepting this was one of the liberating experiences for me. From this perspective, I notice that this situation has made it easier for me to embrace a feminist identity. Reading certain verses that allocate less inheritance to women, allow men to marry multiple women in some cases, and define women as beings who need protection and preservation by the men in the family were among the crucial factors that led me towards feminism. Of course, I have also met women who identify as both Muslim and feminist, and I want to emphasize that I respect their views on this matter.

Perhaps the luckiest aspect for me was that my family belonged to the middle class and lived in the capital city. Growing up in a household where both of my parents worked, shared household chores, and lived a more equally distributed life, I developed a perspective that sees gender equality as something that should naturally and rightfully exist. This situation greatly contributed to my understanding and acceptance of gender equality.

Despite all these elements I consider privileged, being a girl and woman in Turkey still did not prevent me from experiencing inequality in every aspect. While I didn't feel this discrimination in my family, during larger family gatherings, tasks such as serving meals and washing dishes were assigned to me and my female cousins as girls. In elementary school, we

were not allowed to play ball during breaks like boys; it was not considered suitable for girls. The beginning of menstruation in the early years of adolescence was a nightmare because we were taught to hide it from everyone at school; it was considered shameful. In high school, discrimination became more evident with the onset of romantic relationships. Throughout high school, I always noticed issues like slut-shaming for girls who changed partners frequently, while boys were often labeled as playboys. As my life progressed, being a woman became increasingly challenging. Every activity, from walking on the streets taking a taxi, using public transportation and to going out at night, began to carry the risk of sexual assault or getting killed.

Since I became a feminist, many of my friendships have ended because people started to perceive my views as "too extreme"; they labeled me as a "communist." I became the rebellious and outspoken one in the group. Eventually, I decided to adapt to all of this and began forming closer relationships with like-minded individuals. While I could ensure equality in my personal and social life, I realized that struggling alone was not enough, especially in the instutions and regarding government policies. This encouraged me to join feminist communities and more politically-oriented organizations.

Especially in the last twenty years, being a feminist has become more challenging and crucial than ever, as LGBTIQ+ individuals, feminists, and activists have been systematically marginalized, pushed to the fringes of society, and violence against women and femicides have reached alarming rates. In this period where protective agreements like the Istanbul Convention are abandoned, feminists' experiences and this research carry significant and personal meaning for me. I want to be their voice.

2.2. Participants

In this section, I will present the demographic data of the participants (see table 1). The demographic information I have identified, considering its relevance to the research, includes age, marital status, educational background, occupation, monthly income, religious belief, political views, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Since all participants are unmarried and reside in Ankara, I did not include these two demographic pieces of information in the table.

As stated in the consent form, due to the personal and sensitive nature of the information contained in the research questions, I deemed it appropriate to assign pseudonym to participants, sharing their information in this manner to protect their privacy.

Table 1. Description of participants

Partici-pants by pseudonym	Age	Education	Occupation	Income (Monthly)	Sexual Orientation	Religious Belief	Ethnicity	Political View
Simay	30	MA graduate	Project manager	40.000	Heterosexual	Deist	Turkish	Lİberal
Ceren	24	MA student	Psychologist	9.000	Heterosexual	Muslim	Turkish	Secular
Selen	28	Bachelor's graduate	Actress	30.000	Heterosexual	Deist	Turkish	Apolitical
Gamze	30	MA graduate	Clinical Psychologist	13.000	Heterosexual	Ateist	Turkish	Liberal
Ceyda	23	Undergraduate Student	Medical Student	30.000	Heterosexual	Ateist	Kurdish/ Turkish	Socialist
Eda	24	Undergraduate Student	Nursing Student	6.000	Bisexual	Deist	Turkish	Liberal
Merve	29	MA student	Teacher	15.000	Heterosexual	Ateist	Turkish/ Bosnian	Leftist
Bahar	27	PhD Student	Academic	25.000	Heterosexual	Agnostic	Turkish	Liberal
Tuba	27	Bachelor's Graduate	Barsita	18.000	Bisexual	Deist	Turkish	Liberal
Derya	28	Bachelor's Graduate	Communi-cation Specialist	35.000	Heterosexual	Ateist	Turkish/ Arabic	Social Democrat

The selection of women residing in Ankara who identify as feminists as the target audience had several reasons. Firstly, I wanted to conduct the study in Ankara because I preferred face-to-face interviews, aiming to make participants who would share their private experiences on sensitive issues feel safer. Additionally, considering Ankara is the second most populous city in Turkey after Istanbul and also the capital, I thought it could represent a more diverse structure fort he research. Additionally, I thought that women living in Ankara might be experiencing similar or closely related experiences, and I wanted to explore this pattern in the context of the study. Furthermore, reaching a sample within my social circle of women who I knew identified as feminists and lived in Ankara made the interview process feasible for me. Secondly, I aimed to reach women who self-identify as feminists. Since the research aimed to examine the development of women's feminist identity, I believed that women who do not identify as feminists or do not prefer to define themselves as feminist should be the subject of a different study with different research questions.

In the interviews conducted with women who identified as feminists and lived in Ankara, it was a hopeful experience for both me as a researcher and them as participants. All participants willingly came for the interviews, did their best to contribute, and shared all possible information and experience. They expressed happiness about being part of feminist solidarity and contributing to amplifying the voices of feminists in Turkey. In the midst of this positive atmosphere, I will share some limitations I identified in the research in the next section.

2.3. Limitations

From the beginning of the research, I endeavored to anticipate and take precautions for potential limitations. The most crucial measure among these was to conduct all interviews face-to-face to avoid any disruptions or errors that might occur in online research. Thus, I believe I eliminated concerns such as internet interruptions, difficulties in understanding questions and answers, participants' unsuitable environments, and the inability to ensure privacy.

However, it would be beneficial to address some limitations that have emerged, both for a better understanding of the research and to shed light on future studies in this regard. Firstly, considering that the research is a qualitative study, the primary goal was to obtain in-depth information rather than generalizability. I believe I achieved this goal to a certain extent.

The first limitation I want to discuss is related to the participants. Throughout the interview process, I made efforts to reach women with diverse demographic characteristics, but

I couldn't reach the desired number of married feminist women or women from different ethnic and political backgrounds. The sample consisted mostly of unmarried and liberal women. Accessing minority groups such as Kurdish, Alevi, or immigrant women, reaching married and possibly mothers, and contacting women with lower economic status could have enhanced the representativeness of the research.

Another related limitation was the time factor. The limited time I allocated to conduct the research led me to interview women from my social circle and their acquaintances as quickly as possible; a more extended timeframe could have allowed me to reach a more diverse group of participants.

Another limitation was language. The interviews were conducted in Turkish and analyzed in Turkish. While translating the findings into English, I aimed to do so as accurately as possible without losing meaning. However, this can still be considered a limitation of the research.

Finally, the selection of only feminist women was a personal preference aligned with the research's purpose, but it can also be seen as a limitation. In a more comprehensive study, comparing the findings with women who advocate for equality but do not identify as feminists would have enriched the research.

As a feminist researcher, my agenda illuminated the process of formulating questions for me. While asking questions, I endeavored to highlight participants' experiences and thoughts rather than directing them towards the answers I was seeking, aiming to deeply understand their experiences.

2.4. Research Question Formulation and Theoretical Framework

When starting this research, my aim was to better understand women's processes of self-identifying as feminists and developing a feminist identity. In the course of my literature review towards this goal, I came across the feminist identity development model proposed by Downing and Roush, who work in the field of feminist psychotherapy, and this model caught my attention. Since the model was developed in 1985, I considered that over the years, the processes of women's feminist identity development, similiar to the feminist movement, could have diversified. I found that the majority of studies on this topic in the literature were conducted in the United States and other Western countries; thus, I noticed a gap in the literature on this subject and realized that conducting studies in different cultures would be beneficial.

Considering all this, I chose my sample from Turkey with the intention of shedding light on the experiences of feminist women living here.

While preparing my research questions, I attempted to consider Downing and Roush's (1985) model and the five stages they identified. However, I chose not to exclusively tailor my questions to this model because I thought it could be directive. Instead, I aimed to ask open-ended questions that would allow women to elaborate on their identity development experiences. While using this model as a lens for my evaluation, my intention was to uncover aspects of the feminist identity development processes of women living in Turkey that may diverge from the model.

Furthermore, in order to obtain more detailed information about my research sample, I included not only demographic items such as age and marital status but also factors like religious beliefs and political views. One of my research questions aimed to understand the intersections of these demographic characteristics (ethnicity, educational background, religion, socioeconomic status, political views, etc.) with feminist identity. The concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, suggests that racism and gender discrimination are interconnected concepts, pointing to the shared struggles of non-white women in various fields of equality (Crenshaw, 1989, p.142). Over time, intersectionality has evolved to encompass different sub-identities, becoming a concept that includes all marginalized and otherized identities. Considering that evaluating demographic information in light of intersectional feminism would be beneficial in understanding feminist identity in Turkey, I took this into account during the interviews.

Main Research Question

What are the factors influencing the feminist identity development process of women living in Ankara, Turkey, who identify themselves as feminists?

Sub questions:

1- What are the experiences of feminist women living in Turkey with patriarchy before embracing feminism?

2- How do feminist women in Turkey encounter feminism? Why and when do they define themselves as feminists?

3- How does being a feminist in Turkey impact their experiences?

4- In what ways do demographic characteristics play a role in shaping feminist identity in Turkey?

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I will provide a literature review associated with my research question. Firstly, I will touch upon Downing and Roush's model of feminist identity development, which serves as the starting point for this study. Secondly, by examining other studies in the literature related to feminist identity development, I will shed light on alternative models and also take a look at how Downing and Roush's model has emerged up until the present day. Finally, I will share studies on the history and current state of the feminist movement in Turkey to better understand the experiences of feminist women in Turkey.

3.1. Feminist Identity Development Model

While developing the feminist identity development model, Downing and Roush conducted an exploration of other identity development theories in the literature. They observed that Erickson's (1950) work, "The Eight Stages of Man," is the most frequently encountered theory. It is important to note that Erickson's theory, although not explicitly stated, was based on a sample consisting solely of men and therefore does not encompass the identity development of women. Some researchers, such as Chodorow (1973), Gilligan (1982), and Marcia & Friedman (1970), have reached a consensus that women's identity development is not a sequential process, but rather occurs concurrently (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.703). They argue that women discover their identities through their interpersonal relationships (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.704). While formulating this model, Downing and Roush specifically aimed to shed light on the understanding of women's experiences and processes of identity formation, particularly for psychotherapists and practitioners of feminist therapy. They also believed that this study would be beneficial not only for women's studies but also for society as a whole (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.706).

Downing and Roush provide us with a framework for comprehending how women's feminist identities can evolve. The authors emphasize that feminist identity development is a dynamic process, acknowledging that individuals may undergo different experiences in forming their feminist consciousness. Furthermore, they suggest that this model can assist in enhancing women's dedication to their rights and gender equality on both personal and societal scales (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.695). The five stages of feminist identity development proposed by Downing and Roush are named as follows: Passive acceptance, revelation, embeddedness-

emanation, synthesis and active commitment. Before delving into the details of Downing and Roush's five-stage model of feminist identity development, it is worthwhile to take a look at Cross's black identity theory, which inspired them to create this model.

William E. Cross Jr. is an American psychologist known for his work in the field of ethnic and racial identity development. Cross' (1971) Nigrescence Model, which outlines the stages of black identity development, has been influential in understanding how individuals of African descent navigate their identities in the context of a racially diverse society. This theory has been influential in understanding how individuals of African descent navigate their racial identities in the context of a racially stratified society. It provides a framework for counselors, educators, and psychologists to better support black individuals in their identity development (Cross, 1971, p.13-31).

Cross' model for black identity development consists of five stages: preencounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, internalization-commitment. The Pre-encounter stage, which is the first phase of the Black Identity Model, is characterized by a lack of racial awareness or a preference for assimilation into the dominant culture. Individuals in this stage may downplay their racial identity in favor of adopting mainstream cultural values and norms. The encounter stage has two stages within, first the individual experience a crisis then reanalyze the the world. In the immersion-emersion stage individuals actively seek to immerse themselves in Black culture and history. They may become deeply involved in activities and communities that promote Black identity and pride. They may also express anger or frustration towards the dominant culture. The internalization stage is characterized by a balanced and secure racial identity. During this stage, individuals begin to synthesize their racial identity with their overall self-concept. They develop a secure sense of Black identity that is integrated with other aspects of their personality. In the last stage which is internalization-commitment stage, individuals are not only secure in their Black identity but are also motivated to actively contribute to the betterment of the Black community and society at large (Cross, p.13-31).

It is important to note that individuals may move through these stages at different paces, and some may not progress through all stages. Additionally, the theory acknowledges that racial identity development is not a one-size-fits-all process; people may have unique experiences and interpretations of their racial identity (Cross, p.13-31).

In light of all these explanations, Downing and Roush have presented a five-stage model of feminist identity development for women and indicated that, if necessary, this model can also be applied to men.

Passive Acceptance is the first stage of feminist identity development model. In this initial stage, women may passively accept societal norms and stereotypical gender roles without critically examining them. They may conform to traditional expectations without questioning the status quo. In this stage, it is observed that women embrace traditional roles and believe that adopting these roles is advantageous for both women and men. Towards the end of this stage, women are expected to transition towards a state of preparedness for the change (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.698).

The Revelation stage involves the realization of gender-based disparities, discrimination, and injustices. Parallel to Cross's theory, it is assumed that women encounter a crisis situation in this stage. Women begin to recognize the existence of gender inequalities in various aspects of society. In the Revelation stage, women often experience emotions such as anger and guilt. They may feel ashamed for being part of the patriarchy before acquiring this new perspective, and they may also feel angry for realizing the discrimination they face from the world and society simply for being women. Additionally, in this stage, women may develop a negative identity, as described by Erickson, and adopt a dualistic belief such as "all men are bad, all women are good." (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.700).

Embeddedness-emanation stage is marked by active seeking of information and support related to feminism. Individuals seek out resources, engage in discussions, and explore feminist literature to gain a deeper understanding of gender issues. In this stage, women feel a sense of closeness towards other women who share their perspectives, and they begin to communicate with them (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.701).

The fourth stage is the Synthesis stage, where women begin to synthesize themselves with the positive aspects of their identity as women. In this stage, women reorganize their relationships with their own personal characteristics, values, and perspectives. They come to understand that they can evaluate situations differently, rather than adopting dualistic perspectives such as all men are bad. (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.702).

In the final stage, which is the Active Commitment stage, represents a proactive and committed engagement with feminist ideals. Individuals in this stage not only hold feminist

beliefs but also actively work towards challenging and changing patriarchal systems. They may participate in feminist activism, education, and advocacy efforts (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.702).

As in other identity development theories, it is also believed in this model that women may sometimes transition between stages. It is possible for an individual, when faced with a crisis or a stressful situation in life, to regress to earlier stages and emerge from these stages having learned new things. Furthermore, it is thought that transitions between stages are not only related to women's readiness, but also influenced by environmental factors (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.702).

Downing and Roush acknowledged certain limitations in this study and urged that future research take these into account. Firstly, factors such as class, age, race, ethnicity, and their impact on feminist identity were not expounded upon in this study. Secondly, personal, environmental, institutional, and cultural factors may serve as both facilitators and barriers in feminist identity development. Thirdly, a thorough examination of transitions between stages will contribute to more realistic conclusions. Fourthly, comparative research between this model and other developmental theories is warranted. Finally, it is crucial for this model to be tested by a wider array of researchers (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.707).

3.2. Studies Associated with Feminist Identity

McNamara and Rickard (1992) conducted a study to test Downing and Roush's feminist identity development model in feminist therapy sessions with women. The primary purpose of this research is to provide counseling on the transition of a female client in the passive acceptance stage to subsequent stages of development. The secondary purpose is to obtain new data on how Downing and Roush's model can be applied in the field of therapy, shedding light on future research endeavors (McNamara & Rickard, 1992, p.184). The authors emphasize that different stages may require different therapeutic approaches. For example, a woman in the early stages may benefit from psychoeducation about feminism and empowerment, while a woman in later stages may require support in navigating complex issues related to feminist activism and community involvement (McNamara & Rickard, 1992, p.187). By recognizing and respecting the diverse experiences and beliefs of women, therapists can effectively support them in their journey towards empowerment and self-discovery (McNamara & Rickard, 1992, p.188).

In their study, Bargad and Hyde (1991) operationalized Downing and Roush's model with the aim of measuring the contribution of women's studies courses to the feminist identity development of female students. In this two-phase study, they constructed a 39-item, self-explanatory, closed-ended Feminist Identity Development Scale (FIDS). FIDS was administered in this study to 184 students participating in women's studies courses and to a control group of 39 individuals at the beginning and end of the period. The qualitative data revealed that women's studies students underwent development in terms of the model's stages, while there was no significant change observed in the control group (Bargad & Hyde, 1991, p.181). The study highlights the crucial role of supportive environments and networks in fostering feminist identity development. Access to feminist communities and resources positively influences this progression, emphasizing the unique journey each woman undertakes in embracing feminist ideals (Bargad & Hyde, 1991, p.196). The scale developed in Bargad and Hyde's research was prepared to measure the five stages of feminist identity development sequentially, and it has been scientifically proven to effectively assess individuals' current stage. Therefore, when preparing the semi-structured interview questions in this study, inspiration was also drawn from the items of this scale.

Ng, Dunne, & Cataldo's article, published in 1995, aims to test the validity of the FIDS developed by Bargad and Hyde (1991) on female students at a university in New Zealand, and simultaneously investigate the relationship between feminist identity and the strategies preferred by female students for enhancing their self-concept (Ng, Dunne, & Cataldo, 1995, p.561). It was emphasized that the sample largely consisted of women of European descent who were university educated and middle-class women and it is necessary to apply the FIDS to women from different cultures, classes, and age groups. The study found that there is a relationship between the stages of feminist identity development and the strategies individuals use to protect that identity. Specifically, those in the active commitment stage, who strongly identify with women as a social category and reject traditional gender roles, tend to employ social originality strategies and avoid individual mobility strategies. Overall, this suggests that an individual's choice of strategy may evolve in response to their development of a feminist identity over time (Ng, Dunne, & Cataldo, 1995, p.569).

Laurie A. Rhodebeck's study explores the relationship between individuals' feminist identities and their opinions on feminist issues. The research delves into whether having a strong feminist identity correlates with holding more progressive and egalitarian opinions on gender-related topics (Rhodebeck, 1996, p.386). The study shows that a strong identification with

feminism corresponds to a greater endorsement of feminist views. Rhodebeck's study underscores the importance of feminist identity in influencing one's stance on gender equality issues. It suggests that a solid feminist identity leads to a more steadfast and progressive position on feminist topics, regardless of gender (Rhodebeck, 1996, p.400).

Henderson-King and Stewart conducted a study with the aim of understanding what it means from a psychological standpoint when a woman identifies herself as feminist. In this study, they utilized Downing and Roush's model of feminist identity development. The sample of the study consists of 234 female university students, with nearly 75% being White students, and 25% belonging to ethnic groups such as Asian American, African American, Hispanic and other groups (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1997, p.417). Upon examining the results of the study, it appears that women's thoughts regarding men align with the model developed by Downing and Roush (for instance, the elevated perception of men in the passive acceptance stage, and the redirection of animosity towards men in the revelation stage) (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1997, p.422). Another finding of the study is that, as expected, women's self-identification as feminists is directly associated with their perspectives on feminism (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1997, p.423). As Downing and Roush also pointed out, it is known that individuals may recycle between stages, making it perpetually uncertain which stage they are in. This can pose challenges in terms of scientific measurement. However, this does not diminish the significance of Downing and Roush's model. On the contrary, it provides us with a roadmap to shed light on the experiences of women in different groups and cultures (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1997, p.424).

Gerstmann and Kramer (1997) aim to assess the reliability and validity of two scales, which are used to quantify the progression of individuals in their feminist identity. The first scale is Rickard's (1989) Feminist Identity Scale (FIS) and the second is Bargad and Hyde's (1991) Feminist Identity Development Scale (FIDS). Women's studies students showed an increase in feminist identity over the semester, unlike general psychology students. The study also identified a link between feminist identity and cognitive development (Gerstmann & Kramer, 1997, p.347). This study is significant not only in encouraging researchers to utilize existing scales but also in highlighting the crucial role of courses and communities focused on increasing awareness in gender-related topics, such as women's studies. It once again underscores how these platforms are instrumental in enabling women to develop a positive feminist identity.

Social factors hold as much importance as individual factors in the development of individuals' feminist identities. It is known that there are individuals who, despite believing in and endorsing gender equality, somehow hesitate to identify themselves as feminists. To better understand the relationship between individuals like these and feminist identity development, Williams and Wittig (1997) conducted a study inspired by Downing and Roush's model. They aim to shed light on the factors that create a distinction between having a pro-feminist orientation and identifying as a feminist. The study utilize qualitative research methods such as interviews and surveys to collect data from individuals who have pro-feminist feelings but hesitate to define themselves as feminists. The participants were asked about their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences related to feminism (Williams & Wittig, 1997, p.885). The authors also included social identity theory (SIT, e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Tajfel, 1978, 1982; Turner, 1982) in their research, believing it could have an impact on individuals' tendency to distance themselves from feminist identity due to concerns about fitting into or being perceived by certain social groups (Williams & Wittig, 1997, p.888). Upon examining the research results, it was revealed that factors such as misunderstanding the goals of feminism, concerns about societal consequences, and a desire to distance oneself from radicalism contribute to individuals' reluctance to identify as feminists (Williams & Wittig, 1997, p.901). The researchers also noted that there could be differences between how individuals perceive themselves as feminists internally and how they vocalize their feminist identity in their social circles (Williams & Wittig, 1997, p.902).

Myaskovsky and Wittig (1997) conducted a study on factors influencing the development of social feminist identity in university students. They found that elements such as exposure to feminism, positive thoughts about feminism, recognition of discrimination against women, and belief in collective action are influential factors in developing a positive feminist identity (Myaskovsky & Wittig, 1997, p.879). Additionally, in the subsample of 36 African American female students, it was demonstrated that racial identity, as well as the conflict between racial identity and feminist identity, align with certain aspects of feminist beliefs and values (Myaskovsky & Wittig, 1997, p.881). In parallel with the findings of Williams and Wittig's previous study, it emerged in this research that spreading awareness about what feminism truly entails positively encourages individuals to identify themselves as feminists (Myaskovsky & Wittig, 1997, p.879).

Fischer, Tokar, Mergl, Good, Hill and Blum (2000) conducted a study with the aim of investigating the psychometric properties of two scales (FIDS and FIS) developed based on

Downing and Roush's (1985) feminist identity development model, in order to better assess women's feminist identities (Fischer et al., 200, p.26). The authors have developed a new scale, Feminist Identity Composit (FIC), acknowledging that it is not perfect but asserting its reliability and validity. Additionally, they have drawn attention to certain conceptual and philosophical considerations in Downing and Roush's model. For instance, they pointed out the existence of various branches of feminism, like separatist feminism, and noted that Downing and Roush incorporated their own feminist perceptions into their model. They also emphasized that the complexity of multiple contexts in women's lives, such as gender, race, ethnicity, culture, class, age, sexual orientation, and disability, is not fully addressed in their model (Fischer et al., 200, p.28). Hence, this insight, which emphasizes the need to evaluate feminist identity in future research considering these contextual factors, has also served as inspiration for this study.

Moradi and Subich (2002) reviewed Downing and Roush's model of feminist identity development along with subsequent studies and concluded that the psychological distress experienced by women may be associated with their encounters with sexism and their attitudes towards feminist identity development. For instance, it was predicted that women in the passive acceptance stage, who reject gender discrimination, would experience higher psychological distress when exposed to sexism. Additionally, another hypothesis of the study is that women in the passive acceptance stage would perceive sexist situations to be lower, whereas women in more advanced stages would perceive them to be higher (Moradi & Subich, 2002, p.49). The research concluded that only the passive acceptance stage and recent perceived sexist situations predict distress. Additionally, it was observed that the passive acceptance stage has a negative significant relationship with distress, while other stages of feminist identity development have a positive significant relationship with distress (Moradi & Subich, 2002, p.44).

Nancy Downing Hansen (2002) published an article 16 years after their study with Roush (1985), addressing some issues related to measurement, particularly concerning the synthesis stage, and aiming to provide a clearer description of the model (Downing Hansen, 2002, p.87). In their 1985 study, they proposed examining feminist identity development in stages, but also noted that women transition between stages periodically. This is seen as a complicating factor for linear measurement. However, conducting a study on identity of this nature is always challenging in terms of measurement, as identity development, as Downing pointed out, is influenced by a multitude of individual and environmental factors. On an individual level, experiences and lived realities vary from person to person (Downing Hansen,

2002, p.89). Therefore, Downing agrees with the criticisms raised against their model, emphasizing the need for feminist identity to be supported by longitudinal and qualitative research (Downing Hansen, 2002, p.90). Downing points out that the majority of studies have been conducted with middle-class educated American women. She emphasizes the need for future research to shed light on the relationship between factors such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, priviledge, socioeconomic status, and class with feminist identity development (Downing Hansen, 2002, p.93).

Moradi and Phillips (2002), in their article examining the research and application of the feminist identity development model, acknowledge that the majority of studies conducted so far have focused on white women with university education. They emphasize the importance of expanding studies to women of different ethnicities, sexual orientations, beliefs, educational backgrounds, and age groups for the development of the model. Only through this broader approach can the feminist development model be applied to more diverse samples beyond white, college-educated women. Additionally, previous studies have shown that courses like women's studies and consciousness-raising can contribute to women's feminist identity development (Moradi & Phillips, 2002, p.32).

Witte and Sherman (2002) conducted a study examining the relationship between Jack's (1991) concept known in the literature as "silencing the self" and Downing and Roush's (1985) model of feminist identity development (Witte & Sherman, 2002, p.1075). The sample of the study consisted of 92 female university students enrolled in a psychology course, with approximately 90% of them being Caucasian (Witte & Sherman, 2002, p.1077). According to the results of the study, there was a significant positive relationship between the passive acceptance stage and silencing the self (Witte & Sherman, 2002, p.1080). In other words, it was interpreted that women who embraced traditional gender roles and believed they should submit to their partners tended to engage in self-silencing, both in their romantic relationships and in their coping strategies (Witte & Sherman, 2002, p.1081). The authors hoped that the findings of this study would encourage women to question traditional gender roles, thereby preventing self-silencing behavior (Witte & Sherman, 2002, p.1075).

As seen in the studies of authors like Williams and Wittig (1997), Duncan (1999), and Henderson-King and Stewart (1999), exposure to feminist content through social networks or women's studies courses facilitates the development of feminist identity in those who have been exposed, compared to those who have not. Reid and Purcell (2004) conducted a study to

understand the impact of exposure to feminism on the acquisition of feminist identity, and also to assess this relationship for ethnic and racial groups, which are known to have been less studied in the literature. A total of 92 female university students participated in the study, with 50% being Hispanic, 31% Black, 6% White, 4% Asian, and 8% identifying with other ethnic backgrounds (Reid & Purcell, 2004, p.762). The authors examined the relationship between exposure to feminism and feminist identity, testing it through factors such as gender role attitudes, awareness of illegitimate power inequities, individuals' collective orientations, and evaluations of feminists (Reid & Purcell, 2004, p.763). According to the findings of the study, women who were exposed to feminism were observed to have a greater sense of "we-ness" or shared fate compared to those who were not exposed. Additionally, it was observed that these women did not embrace the stereotypical perception of feminists (such as being man-hating, ugly, and masculine) (Reid & Purcell, 2004, p.766). This study suggests there is a level of comparability between ethnic and racial groups. While there were average differences in the willingness of women from different races and ethnicities to embrace feminism, the process through which exposure facilitates feminist identification appears to be similar across groups. However, according to the authors, further in-depth research is needed to shed more light on this matter (Reid & Purcell, 2004, p.768).

Yakushso's (2007) paper examines various stages or patterns of feminist identity development and how they relate to women's overall life satisfaction, happiness, and fulfillment. The study involved 691 women aged between 18 and 83 residing in the United States (Yakushso, 2007, p.226). As a result of the research, women were categorized into three groups based on their levels of feminist identification: those embracing traditional values, those with moderate values, and those embracing feminist values. Women with feminist and moderate values demonstrated significantly higher levels of well-being compared to those endorsing traditional values, especially in sub-dimensions such as life purpose, autonomy, and personal growth (Yakushso, 2007, p.231).

Nelson, Liss, Erchull, Hurt, Ramsey, Turner, and Haines (2008) conducted a study with 282 women living in the United States. Their aim was to investigate how women's life experiences influenced their beliefs (conservative, radical, and liberal) and the impact of these beliefs on forming a feminist identity. Additionally, they attempted to determine whether the development of a feminist identity leads to collective action (Nelson et al., 2008, p.721). Approximately 44% of the participants identified themselves as feminists, while 56% indicated that they were not feminists. Across the sample, it was observed that collective participation

was low, there was a high tendency towards liberalism, and there was generally a positive outlook towards feminism (Nelson et al., 2008, p.725). According to the findings of the study, women's life experiences influence their beliefs, which in turn affect the development of feminist identity. It is concluded that the formation of feminist identity also influences collective action. In conclusion, life experiences can serve as a catalyst for both the development of feminist identity and collective action (Nelson et al., 2008, p.727).

Fisele and Stake (2008) argued that feminist attitudes and feminist identity are concepts that need to be distinguished from each other. They expressed that feminist identity is more associated with a collective and social identity, while feminist attitudes pertain to gender equality, the goal of feminism (Fisele & Stake, 2008, p.233). In their study, they examined the relationship between self-efficacy in women and their feminist attitudes and feminist identity. They found that feminist attitudes do not always lead individuals to activism, but having a feminist identity has a much more significant association with activism (Fisele & Stake, 2008, p.239). Additionally, starting from the conclusion that individuals with feminist attitudes and feminist identity also have high levels of self-efficacy, they believe that developing a feminist consciousness will generally lead to an increase in self-efficacy in women (Fisele & Stake, 2008, p.241).

Erchull, Liss, Wilson, Bateman, Peterson, and Sanchez (2009) conducted a study to examine Downing and Roush's (1985) feminist identity model in the experiences of young women in 2009, as well as the experiences of older feminists who lived through the second wave of feminism. Both feminists and non-feminist women participated in the study. The authors found that non-feminist women had the highest scores in the passive acceptance stage. In the embeddedness-emanation stage, the highest self-identification scores were found across all age groups. In the active commitment stage, both older women and young women who identified as feminists had the highest scores (Erchull et al., 2009, p.839). Another finding supporting Downing and Roush's model was that as women aged, they transitioned from the revelation stage to the active commitment stage (Erchull et al., 2009, p.841).

In almost all quantitative studies related to feminist identity development, it has been emphasized that the subject should be addressed in qualitative research and tested in different samples. Responding to this call, Frederick and Stewart (2018) conducted a comprehensive qualitative study with a total of 45 activist feminist women from different cultures (China, Nicaragua, Poland, the US, and India), listening to their life stories and providing a space for

them to define their own feminist development. Possessing feminist attitudes doesn't automatically lead to self-identifying as a feminist. The main objective of this study is to comprehend the process by which women who identify as feminists make this determination and acquire their feminist identity (Frederick & Stewart, 2018, p.276). The study resulted in six themes: education, social relationships, gender-based injustices, activism, emotions, and violence. The study concluded that individuals go through different paths in acquiring their feminist identity (Frederick & Stewart, 2018, p.263). The category of "Education" encompasses formal or informal readings by women on feminist texts or topics related to feminism. "Social Relationships" involves meeting and developing relationships with women, feminists or individuals engaged in social change. The category of "Gender-based Injustices" refers to situations involving recognizing, perceiving, identifying, and understanding such injustices. "Violence" focuses on developing awareness about violence against women, while "Activism" includes participation in any activist movement before acquiring a feminist identity. Finally, the category of "Emotion" encompasses expressing all positive or negative emotions related to the experiences of women or girls (Frederick & Stewart, 2018, p.269). This qualitative exploration sheds light on the richness and diversity of pathways to feminist identity among women actively involved in the women's movement.

Moore and Stathi (2020) conducted a study with a total of 312 women who identified their sexual orientation as either heterosexual or non-heterosexual (minority). In this study, they examined the relationship between women's self-identification as feminists, their sexual identity, and exposure to stereotypes about feminism (Moore & Stathi, 2020, p.273). The results of the study revealed that non-heterosexual women had higher levels of self-identification as feminists and greater participation in collective action compared to heterosexual women. Additionally, exposure to positive stereotypes about feminism was associated with women identifying themselves as feminists, regardless of sexual orientation. As expected, exposure to negative stereotypes about feminism reduced both feminist self-identification and participation in collective action (Moore & Stathi, 2020, p.276). In light of all these findings, the authors emphasize the importance of exposing women to feminist content and creating a positive outlook on feminism, as it contributes to an increase in self-identified feminist women and the growth of collective activism (Moore & Stathi, 2020, p.278).

The number of studies specifically focusing on feminist identity in Turkey is quite limited. There are six different studies that have addressed feminist identity in Turkish academic

literature and half of them are master thesis. Due to the limited nature of studies in Turkey, it is also worth briefly mentioning the findings from master's thesis.

One notable study in the Turkish literature that addresses feminist identity is the study conducted by Altintas and Altintas (2008), which utilizes Downing and Roush's feminist identity model. In this research, the authors examine the relationship between feminist identity and leadership styles among female managers. The study concludes that feminist identity is associated with visionary, collaborative, and participative leadership styles. Another finding of the research is that the more egalitarian a female manager is, the more visionary she tends to be. However, it was also observed that these individuals are less inclined towards collaboration (Altintas & Altintas, 2008, p.185).

In a qualitative study conducted by Birer (2019), married women who identified themselves as feminists shared their experiences regarding the division of household and caregiving responsibilities. The study focuses on the relationship between narrative and feminist identity formation. As a result, it was concluded that feminist women initiate this conflict rather than bearing the burden of household and caregiving labor alone, even if it leads to issues in their marriages. Women expressed that feminism makes them feel empowered and, by empathizing with the researcher on this matter, they solidified their struggles (Birer, 2019, p.28). The author emphasized that based on the narratives of the feminist women interviewed, it strengthens the claims that identity is not a fixed state or a mere declaration of belonging, but rather a process (Birer, 2019, p.29).

Abadan and Oz Soysal conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 mental health professionals who identified themselves as feminists. The aim was to examine their development of feminist identity and their opinions on feminist therapy approaches. The results indicated that gender inequality had the most significant impact on mental health professionals in the acquisition of their feminist identities. Additionally, growing up in an egalitarian family, having a strong female role model in the family, and engaging in feminist activism were identified as influential factors in the development of feminist identity (Abadan & Oz Soysal, 2023, p.120).

In her master's thesis, Cavdar (2018) examined the relationship between women's levels of psychological resilience, feminist identity stages, and psychological violence. The author tested the hypothesis that combining feminist identity and political orientations in the study enhances psychological resilience and protects women from violence. While the results did not

confirm the researcher's hypothesis, they revealed some possibilities that can be interpreted specifically for Turkey. For instance, women who engage in political activities in a manner contrary to traditional gender norms, regardless of the political movement they identify with, are more likely to experience psychological violence (Cavdar, 2018, p.58).

In another master's thesis related to this topic, Kuzu (2021) examined the relationship between women's feminist identity level, resilience level, and self-concept. The findings revealed that women in the passive acceptance exhibited weaker tendencies in entrepreneurship and communication/relationship-building when examining their resilience scale results. Additionally, research indicates that as women's feminist identity increases, their research-oriented and inquisitive characteristics come to the forefront. The fourth and fifth stages, considered as the final stages of feminist identity development were found to be associated with almost all sub-scores of resilience. Evaluating the findings of the thesis, it can be observed that as the level of feminist identity development increases in women, the level of resilience also increases (Kuzu, 2021, p.66).

Cingil (2022), in her master's thesis, focuses on understanding the interplay between feminist identity development, perceptions of gender, and psychological well-being among female university students. The study concludes that there are positive correlations between feminist identity development, gender perception, and psychological well-being among female university students. This suggests that as students' feminist identities and gender perceptions develop, positive impacts on their psychological well-being are observed. The author highlights that embracing a feminist identity can contribute to a sense of empowerment and agency among female university students. This empowerment positively affects their overall psychological well-being (Cingil, 2022, p.90).

3.3. Feminist Movement in Turkey

The sample of this study consists of women living in Turkey who identify themselves as feminists, therefore it is necessary to briefly mention the feminist movement in Turkey. Since this study is not a historical research, I will briefly introduce how feminism has evolved in Turkey without going into extensive details about Ottoman Feminism and the feminist movements in the Republican Era.

Demir (1999) notes that the women's movement in the Anatolian region of the Republic of Turkey can be traced back to the Ottoman period (19th century) before the proclamation of

the republic. Unlike the feminist movement in Europe, women in the Ottoman Empire advocated for rights related to participation in the workforce and education rather than demands for political inclusion (such as the right to vote). The women's struggle during this period paved the way for the rights and reforms granted to women after the proclamation of the Republic (Demir, 1999, p.113).

In her book where she compares feminism in the West and the Ottoman Empire during the modernization process, Koc (2019) discusses the emergence of the women's movement in the Ottoman Empire initiated by daughters of the middle-upper class families. The struggle, which initially began with writings addressed to women in women's magazines, gradually continued with demands for women's education and the opening of schools exclusively for girls (Koc, 2019, p.66).

Tunali's (1996) published her master's thesis in which she examined feminism in Turkey, compiling research on women's rights and the feminist movement since the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey. Shortly after the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, significant strides were made in the field of education through new legal regulations in 1924. These regulations ensured that both boys and girls received a contemporary education together, and made primary education compulsory for everyone. Additionally, in 1926, the Civil Law was enacted, largely inspired by Switzerland, granting women new rights and freedoms (Tunali, 1996, p.30). Civil Law eliminated Islamic rules that disadvantaged women and led to inequality, such as allowing men to marry multiple women or giving men a larger share in inheritance, thus ensuring equal rights for women and men before the law (Tunali, 1996, p.31). Finally, in 1935, as a result of the struggle and demands of women in Turkey, women were granted the right to vote and run for office. In the same year, 18 female members of parliament were elected to the assembly (Tunali, 1996, p.36).

Gulen (2015) suggests that during the modernization efforts initiated with the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish feminism and Turkish nationalism moved together. However, during this period, the political activities of the Women's People Party (KHF), founded under the leadership of Nezihe Muhiddin, were obstructed and suppressed. Thus, it was observed that the foundational idea of Turkish nationalism, which was the starting point of the modernization project, was patriarchal, sexist, and authoritarian (Gulen, 2015, p.153). Nagel (2011) notes that despite their central contributions to many nationalist struggles, it is common for feminist nationalists to find

themselves under the influence of restructured patriarchy once national independence is achieved. Nationalist movements advocating for women's participation in the name of national independence often exhibit a resistant attitude towards feminist demands for gender equality (Nagel, 2011, p.81).

Tunali, in line with the thoughts of some other researchers in the field of feminism (Tekeli, 1982 & Doltas, 1992), asserts that western-style feminism began to be observed in Turkey only after the 1980 coup. After this time, we see that women started to identify themselves as feminists, organized mass actions for days like March 8th, and began to publish feminist magazines and publications (Tunali, 1996, p.57). To better understand the period when feminism emerged in Turkey and when women began to identify themselves as feminists, it is important to be aware of Islamist and reactionary policies and parties. Particularly, the rise of groups with Islamist ideologies after the 1980 coup posed the greatest threat for women who identified themselves as liberal, secular, and advocates of freedom (Tunali, 1996, p.59). When Tunali penned this thesis in 1996, she noted that feminism was predominantly carried on by women with left-wing perspectives, often in small groups, almost evolving into a subculture, and that one could still not speak of a large-scale feminist movement in Turkey.

Cakir (2007) emphasizes the significance of Turkish women exploring Ottoman-era feminism in the 1990's and beyond, along with the increase in academic historical research on this subject, in terms of women constructing a feminist memory. As women in Turkey discovered that there could be beliefs beyond the Kemalist perspective offered by the state during the period of modernization and nationalization, they began to come together to strengthen the feminist movement, shaking the convictions of the official historical understanding (Cakir, 2007, p.67). As a result, the strong belief that the Republic granted women some rights without their demand was shaken with the discovery and reading of Ottoman feminists. Women in Turkey discovered that they had fought for the rights they obtained for many years and only after the 1980s did they gain the awareness that they needed to spread and sustain the struggle for living in a more equal and just country (Cakir, 2007, p.75).

Bora and Gunal (2002), in their compilation book, stated that only in the 1990s did the feminist movement in Turkey manage to institutionalize, and the state began to realize the need for specific efforts for women's rights. However, despite the growing recognition of women's issues in the 1990s, a supportive and positive perspective towards feminists did not develop during this period (Bora & Gunal, 2002).

In the year 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by Erdogan, came to power, marking a turning point for women's rights and feminists. The AKP defines itself as a right-wing, Islamist, and conservative party and, in its 21st year in power, pursues a policy towards women and LGBTIQ+ individuals that is almost hostile.

Negrón-Gonzales (2016) evaluates the approaches of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) towards women's rights during their time in power (since they came to power in 2002). She points out that the literature addressing gender equality in Turkey often emphasizes the deep-rooted nature of patriarchy in the country and highlights the AKP's strong views on traditional gender roles. For instance, Cosar and Yegenoglu (2011) state that the religious, nationalist, and neoliberal policies adopted by the AKP led to a gradual decrease in economic opportunities for women, particularly in terms of economic opportunities (Cosar & Yegenoglu, 2011, p.558). Acar and Altinok (2013), on the other hand, assert that the AKP's adoption of neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies complement each other and deepen gender inequality (Acar & Altinok, 2013, p.198). Moreover, Negrón-Gonzales emphasized that the feminist movement in Turkey is more dynamic and robust during the AKP era compared to other periods in Turkish history. However, it should be noted that the reason behind this dynamism is not the government's support for the feminist movement, but rather the stance and policies of the AKP on gender issues, which have propelled the feminist movement towards greater dynamism (Negrón-Gonzales, 2016, p.210).

Cosar and Ozkan Kerestecioglu (2016) suggest that one reason for the absence of a feminist movement until the 1980s could be the belief that leftism and Kemalism provided solutions to all problems. Some ideological divisions (such as nationalism, Kemalism, islamism, socialism, etc.) still lead to disagreements and tensions within feminism. For instance, Kurdish feminists and Kemalist feminists, as well as socialist feminists and liberal feminists, diverge and sometimes clash on major issues like the headscarf problem (Cosar & Ozkan Kerestecioglu, 2016, p.155). When looking at the feminist movement in present-day Turkey, it can be observed that the issues causing divisions among feminists are often related to ethnic identities and Islamic faith. The authors further noted that the Gezi Park protests in 2013, which opposed the authoritarian stance of the AKP, led to a greater resonance of feminist thought in society. Ideas such as the belief in a woman's existence beyond the family sphere began to be understood by larger audiences, and the voice of feminist activism became more distinctly heard (Cosar & Ozkan Kerestecioglu, 2016, p.168).

All of these studies are highly significant in considering that the feminist movement and feminist identity in Turkey have a history distinct from Western Feminism. They also highlight that the process of feminist identification in Turkey is likely to be influenced by factors such as ethnicity, class, political and religious beliefs.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

In this section, I shared the analysis I conducted on the transcripts of the participants' interviews that I recorded. Throughout the transcript and translation process, I identified recurring patterns that I noticed and that addressed my research questions. As a result of the analysis, six common themes emerged.

Themes:

1) Sexism in the extended family and at primary school: Experiences with patriarchy and gender roles before encountering feminism

2) Initial experiences with feminism

• They would call me ''feminist'' when I refused to obey: Society's and the media's biases against feminists

• I met feminism in a university course: The importance of high school and university education in adopting a feminist identity

3) I was sad that we needed feminism, but I wasn't feeling alone anymore: Exploring feminism and sisterhood

4) Having a feminist identity in Turkey: Experienced challenges as feminists in Turkey and coping with them

5) Access to education and financial independence as a priviligde: Intersectionality of feminist identity in Turkey

6) A world where we no longer need feminism: What do feminists in Turkey want and how do they contribute to change

A Brief Description Of Participants

Before starting the analysis, I thought it would be necessary to provide a general overview of the participants. This way, I believed we could obtain more detailed information about the responses to questions, emerging themes, and demographic characteristics of the participants.

Simay is a 30-year-old woman who was born and raised in Ankara, and she holds a master's degree in gender studies. She developed her feminist identity towards the end of high school, and she believes that the most crucial factor in forming this identity was women's economic independence. Simay works as a project manager in an international corporate firm and has a good income compared to the average income in Turkey. Growing up witnessing that non-working women in her extended family had to submit, she emphasizes the importance of women's education and economic status, considering them vital.

Ceren is a 24-year-old graduate student and child psychologist who learned about feminism in the late years of high school through news about violence against women on social media. Feminism empowered her, especially after experiencing restrictive and toxic behaviors in romantic relationships. She expresses that feminism and women's solidarity have liberated her first in romantic relationships and then throughout her entire life. She believes that women need to fight for equality in various fields. She believes that educating children on issues such as violence against women is crucial for addressing these issues in society.

Selen is a 28-year-old theater actress. She first encountered feminism through a socialist organization in high school but has distanced herself from political actions due to concerns about potential consequences. She believes that beauty standards significantly impact women's lives and is committed to challenging and changing this system, particularly in her personal life, including her involvement in theater. Selen, stating that she has been fighting against inequality since childhood due to growing up in an egalitarian family, now emphasizes that she continues her struggle, particularly approaching her profession with a feminist perspective.

Gamze is a 30-year-old clinical psychologist. She first encountered feminism in a university course, and this ideology encouraged her to break societal taboos. Feminism has been particularly helpful for her in addressing issues related to sexuality, which she perceives as a conservative taboo in Turkey. She mentions that she operates with a feminist perspective in her profession, social, and personal life, and emphasizes the importance of maintaining her relationships on an egalitarian basis.

Ceyda is a 23-year-old medical student. She first encountered feminism through a text she read in middle school, and since that day, she began constructing her feminist identity. She believes that her natural inclination to speak out against injustice made it easy for her to integrate with this identity. Ceyda, identifying her ethnic identity as half Turkish and half Kurdish, mentions that she doesn't have much knowledge about her Kurdish identity due to

being born and raised in Ankara. She indicates that the most influential factors on her feminist identity are the education she received and coming from the upper-middle class.

Eda is a 24-year-old nursing student and a bisexual woman. She believes that being feminist is related to economic independence and having access to education. She also thinks that feminist and queer individuals are marginalized in Turkey and face a challenging struggle. Despite considering herself a feminist woman and coming from an egalitarian family, Eda points out that she had to live her bisexual identity in secret. She mentions that being both a woman and bisexual is considered disadvantaged in Turkey.

Merve is a 29-year-old graduate student and also a teacher. She believes that feminism has empowered her, particularly in the face of bullying and harassment in her professional life. She emphasizes the distinct disadvantages and challenges of first being a girl, then a woman, and further, a feminist and single woman in Turkey. Drawing attention especially to the challenges of being a single woman who lives alone, she, like other participants, emphasizes the importance of education and economic freedom for all women.

Bahar is a 27-year-old academician who comes from a conservative family, setting her apart from the other participants. She notes that her initial resistance was directed towards the men in her family, and she believes that the idea of feminism has empowered her by demonstrating that being submissive is not her destiny. Bahar states that in her fight for equality, she initially opposed the restrictive attitudes of her father, who was the head of the family. Later, she discovered the importance of her own voice and began to use her voice and the power to stand against inequality in every aspect of her life.

Tuba is a 27-year-old barista working in the coffee industry, where men are predominantly employed. Tuba, despite having an egalitarian nuclear family, noticed the adoption of traditional gender roles in her extended family at a very young age. She states that she has dealt with these roles since childhood by challenging them, moving beyond stereotypes, and staying true to herself. She is uncomfortable with the discrimination she faces in her work life and believes that women should not need positive discrimination.

Derya is a 28-year-old communication specialist working for a non-governmental organization. She first encountered the idea of feminism during an International Women's Day on March 8th event in high school, and she states that feminism freed her from the guilt associated with the harassment she experienced. Discovering women's solidarity has been a

turning point in her life, and since adopting a feminist identity, she continues to actively advocate for other marginalized groups and women who face exclusion in society.

4.1. Sexism in the extended family and at primary school: Experiences with patriarchy and gender roles before encountering feminism

In the initial stage of feminist identity development termed as the Passive Acceptance Stage by Downing and Roush (1985), it is observed that women may not recognize or tend to deny gender discrimination towards their own gender. Acknowledging and naming this discrimination may consciously or unconsciously be avoided by women during this stage, as it could be distressing and disrupt their life balance (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.698). In this study aimed at shedding light on the participants' feminist identity development, I first asked them about their experiences before acquiring a feminist identity, and even before encountering feminism, to learn what they remembered from that period.

When I inquired about participants' experiences before encountering feminism and adopting a feminist identity, two recurring themes stood out. The first was the gender discrimination they felt during childhood and adolescence, particularly during large family gatherings they remembered. Another theme was the gender discrimination they felt and observed during the early years of elementary school. In this section, firstly I examined the shared experiences related to extended family gatherings and then explored the common aspects of the discriminations participants experienced during the early years of elementary school.

The majority of the participants have indicated that they come from nuclear families that embrace an egalitarian approach to gender roles. However, despite this, most participants have encountered traditional roles during gatherings with their extended families. The setting, where women and girls are primarily responsible for serving meals and beverages, has been the first context where they noticed inequality. Examining the atmosphere of extended family gatherings in Turkey will help us understand participants' experiences on this matter.

According to Dogan (2009), the Islamic religion holds a significant place in shaping the Turkish family structure. In the family structure prescribed by Islam, similar to Turkish society, the head of the family is the male (father or grandfather). However, religion alone is not sufficient to explain the formation of the family structure. Traditions, geography, and the style of governance also have a significant impact on the formation of the Turkish family structure (Dogan, 2009, p.33).

On days when extended families gather, the presence of family elders and a more traditional sharing environment may lead to the encouragement of traditional roles. According to Kagnicioglu (2017), in Turkey, where patriarchal dominance is more prevalent in society, men are perceived as the heads of households, while women are seen as primarily responsible for domestic tasks (Kagnicioglu, 2017, p.352). Similarly, research results from the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (2011) indicate that responsibilities at home are not equally shared between boys and girls within families, with girls being assigned more responsibilities.

Especially during the Eid al-Fitr (Holiday of Breaking the Fast), which we can describe as the Christmas for Muslims, large gatherings take place at the home of the family elders. Starting with a grand festive breakfast, these gatherings often continue throughout the day. Breakfast, which holds a significant place in Turkish culture, and the tea, sweets, and dinner served after breakfast are crucial parts of this holiday. Grandparents, their children, and grandchildren come together, and in this crowded environment, it is often observed that meals and treats are prepared by the women in the household, especially the young girls.

As the hosts and due to the respect shown to them, the elders usually do not serve during these gatherings. Since these meetings are generally crowded, when not everyone can fit into one room, sometimes women and girls spend time in the kitchen or other rooms while the family elders, especially the men of the family, expect to be served in the living room, the main room, and at the large table. In these extended family gatherings, girls are encouraged to participate in serving alongside their female cousins and mothers, reinforcing traditional gender roles in this way.

A participant shares her experience on this matter as follows:

> For example, my male cousins used to visit, and we would all have family meals together. After the meal, the elders would say, "Come on, girls, let's clear the table and wash the dishes." Of course, my family didn't have bad intentions; they had just witnessed it that way and were continuing the tradition, but household chores were immediately placed on the girls. (Ceren)

Even though participants noted that their nuclear families had a more egalitarian view of gender, a pattern emerged where they observed the distinction between women and men in extended family gatherings, particularly those involving grandparents.

Eyce (1994) noted that traditional extended families generally consist of three generations and contain a hierarchical structure regulating intra-family relationships (Eyce, 1994, p.19). In this hierarchical system, individuals have specific roles and different statuses based on their genders and ages (Ozbay, 1984, p.37).

On the other hand, the nuclear family is a structure observed especially in modernizing societies, consisting of parents and unmarried children (Gokce, 1990, p.45). In the nuclear family, unlike the traditional family, it is observed that the control and authority of family elders over family members are not as influential. Therefore, a more egalitarian structure and more democratic decision-making processes are seen compared to the traditional family (Sayin, 1990, p.11).

Different from the other participants, Bahar, who mentions growing up in a more traditional nuclear family, shares her esperiences:

> During elementary and middle school, in extended family gatherings, women and men used to sit separately. Men would sit at the table while women served and exited from there. Women would try to eat something at the kitchen table or in the kitchen after men had finished eating.

Tuba, stating that when behaviors deviating from traditional gender roles are displayed during extended family gatherings, the family finds it strange, says the following:

> In extended family gatherings, women and men used to sit separately. It seemed very odd to them when I sat with the men of the family and talked about politics and such. Not conforming to being like other girls and not serving was met with a very strange reaction.

In Turkey, in traditional families, men are typically assigned the role of working outside the home to provide for the family and regulating external relationships of the family (Kiray, 1984, p.72). On the other hand, women are usually given responsibilities for household chores and childcare (Ersoz, 1999, p.17).

In traditional families, authority, power, and the decision-making mechanism are generally concentrated in the male figure (Celebi, 1993, p.9). To understand where the authority lies, one can examine who holds decision-making power in various aspects within the family. Therefore, the individual who is actively involved in making decisions within the family can also be considered the authoritative figure (Ozen, 1991, p.145).

Simay has described the impact of traditional roles on women in her extended family as follows:

> There were women in my extended family who did not work and rarely left their homes due to not having jobs. I observed that they couldn't make any decisions without consulting their husbands. Later, I saw that women who couldn't stand on their own feet due to lack of education were also subjected to psychological violence. They already lacked self-confidence and were submissive.

In Turkey, especially in rural areas, traditional features still dominate family relationships. However, on the other hand, it is true that relationships in nuclear families are moving towards a more egalitarian level (Taylan, 2009, p.120).

It is clear that women who identify themselves as feminists having grown up in egalitarian nuclear families in their childhood experiences is not a coincidence. Ozcelik and Koyuncu Sahin (2023) have noted that children primarily learn their gender roles from their families in the early stages, emphasizing the importance of supporting egalitarian roles within families (Ozcelik & Koyuncu Sahin, 2023, p.59).

Except for Bahar, all other participants have indicated that they were raised in an egalitarian nuclear family. However, the majority of participants first encountered gender discrimination in extended family gatherings. Even in nuclear families that adopt more egalitarian roles and attitudes, there is a tendency to perpetuate culturally ingrained traditional gender roles during extended family gatherings. It is observed that girls, expected to assist with serving meals alongside their mothers, aunts, and female cousins during these gatherings, somehow recognize and feel the inequality at that young age.

This situation can be seen as data indicating participation in patriarchy and being part of this system, as mentioned in Downing and Roush's (1985) Passive Acceptance stage. However, at the same time, despite their young age, participants expressing awareness of this distinction and stating that they feel inequality and injustice emerge as an element not typically seen in passive acceptance.

Another shared theme in participants' experiences before encountering feminism was the gender discrimination they faced during early elementary school years. The majority of participants mentioned that, after spending their early childhood years in egalitarian families, they became aware of certain societal gender roles expected from girls when they started

elementary school. They expressed that mischievous behavior from girls was not well-received, and it was during their first years of primary school that they encountered advice such as girls should be well-behaved and calm.

Derya describes her energetic and perhaps mischievous cheerful childhood during elementary school years, but notes that she faced criticism because it did not conform to the structure of traditional gender roles in the following way:

> I was raised as a child expected to conform to patriarchy. Especially in elementary school, I was a bit mischievous, unconventional, not fitting into molds. Perhaps I had hyperactivity, but no one approached it that way. I was constantly pressured to be a well-behaved girl and labeled as a troublesome child.

Selen, describing herself as never being a quiet and obedient child, shared her experiences of being labeled as a naughty girl in elementary school. She recounted teachers' reactions to her behaviors as follows:

> When I played running games with boys during breaks, teachers would pull me aside and advise that girls should be well-behaved. I never understood the reason for this and remember feeling restricted.

Another form of gender discrimination that participants experienced during their elementary school years was related to the uniforms of schools in Turkey. There were rules mandating that female students wear skirts and male students wear pants, and some participants express discomfort with this requirement and discrimination during that time. The fact that girls couldn't wear the more comfortable pants and were obligated to wear skirts simply because they were girls was another area of discrimination for them.

Although this situation has changed in recent years with transformations in the education system in Turkey, during the dates corresponding to the participants' school years, the rules regarding attire were quite strict.

> In primary school, it was mandatory for girls to wear skirts. How absurd. The right to wear pants was granted to us much later, and finally, we felt comfortable. (Eda)

Another participant, Ceyda, not only had to encounter discrimination at an early age due to the obligation to wear skirts but also had to face discriminatory rules regarding women's body hair. While boys' leg hair was not considered a problem, she found it very absurd and unfair that girls were mocked for theirs during that time:

> We were forced to wear skirts at school, and my mom wouldn't let me remove my leg hair because I was still young. Once, the boy I liked made fun of me, saying I was hairy after looking at my legs. Ironically, his legs and arms were also hairy, but that wasn't a source of teasing for him.

Selen, growing up in an egalitarian family and describing herself as a child unafraid to speak up, shared an experience related to this issue:

> When I was in elementary school, girls wore skirts as part of the uniform, while boys wore pants. I had prepared a banner and organized a protest in elementary school, saying, "Girls want to wear pants too."

As mentioned in the study conducted by Taneri, Ulutas, and Akgunduz (2015), the dress code regulation in Turkey, which previously mandated skirts for girls and pants for boys, was changed in 2012. This research suggests that this alteration contributed to the process of individualization and liberation for students (Taneri, Ulutas & Akgunduz, 215, p.34). When we examine the discomfort expressed by the participants regarding the obligation to wear skirts, it is possible to interpret the ability of girls to wear pants as a form of liberation.

In general, when we look at the experiences of the participants before knowing what feminism is, we see that they often share childhood experiences. Even if they had not learned about the different roles for girls and boys in nuclear families, they witnessed different gender roles in extended family gatherings or school environments. They observed that when these roles were not adhered to, people reacted to them, and they received warnings.

4.2. Initial Experiences With Feminism

To better understand the participants' development of their feminist identity, when I asked them where and how they first heard the word feminist or encountered feminism, I received some similar responses. In this section, I first presented the participants' initial encounters with feminism, their thoughts and prejudices about feminism. Secondly, I shared the experiences of the participants during the period when they began to identify themselves as feminists. I explored when they started calling themselves feminists, how they acquired this

identity, the situations that helped them in the process of adopting this identity, and examined the common themes in these experiences.

The first part of this section consists of the participants' experiences regarding when and how they first heard the word feminist or encountered feminism. Here, it is possible to see the role of the media as a common theme. Since the participants are close in age, their childhood periods correspond to the early 2000s. Since there was no social media in the early 2000s, the existing media was followed through television and newspapers. Some participants mention that they encountered feminists through the media.

The media stands out as one of the primary domains where a sexist perspective becomes visible, featuring content and roles assigned to women in advertisements, programs, or series. Timisi (2010) discusses how the media can produce a system of meaning that either perpetuates or challenges gender inequalities across generations (Timisi, 2010, p.87).

Ceren mentioned that she first learned about feminists from a news segment about FEMEN on television. As stated on their website, FEMEN is an international women's movement known for its bold topless activists, slogans, and flowers. FEMEN, aiming to completely defeat patriarchy, defends that they are a globally impactful organization challenging traditional roles and liberating women through topless protests (About Us – FEMEN, n.d.).

> When I was little, I had seen FEMEN's actions on the news on TV. That was the first time I encountered the concept of feminism. The reporters were saying things like feminists were undressing again. I remember feeling it was very shameful. But later on, I realized that, in the end, they had captured the attention of the media and people, managing to make their voices heard. It was a biased news coverage.

News stories created by the media at that time, which reinforced biases against feminists, led Ceren to develop prejudices against feminists. However, despite this, Ceren later learned what feminism is and developed a feminist identity. Now, her perspective, which once condemned and judged FEMEN, is leading her to justify the organization.

Another participant shared a similar experience related to what they saw on television in the 2000s:

When I was a child, I used to see those stereotypical feminist female characters in TV series and movies. In the 2000s, almost every series on Turkish television had a character who hated men, was overweight, and they would label her as a feminist. They would caricature and mock her – how toxic is that? We all watched it. (Eda)

In their research, Goldberg, Gottesdiener, and Abramson (1975) found evidence of there are negative stereotypes about feminists. The belief that feminists are unattractive or physically unappealing is one example of these stereotypes (Goldberg, Gottesdiener & Abramson, 1975, p.110). According to Williams and Wittig (1997), these stereotypes can make it challenging for individuals to embrace a feminist identity because being associated with a group characterized by negative stereotypes is not something people desire (Williams & Wittig, 1997, p.890).

In their research on the representation of women on Turkish television, Unlu and Aslan (2017) revealed that participants found the behaviors of women on television overly exaggerated, believing that they were constantly exposed to women with characteristics they would not encounter in real life (Unlu & Aslan, 2017, p.204). While I have not come across a specific study on the representation of feminist women in Turkish dramas, I would like to note that especially in the early 2000s, we witnessed caricatured feminist characters on television. The idea that characters lacking physical attractiveness and possessing no traits other than hating men and making rebellious statements reinforced prejudice against feminists is not surprising.

Some participants shared experiences indicating that the stereotypical feminist image perpetuated by the media also finds resonance in society. They mentioned being accused of being feminists by people around them, especially when they engaged in disobedient behavior, went against the rules, or spoke out against injustice or inequality.

When I used to object to things as a child, they would say, "Don't act like a feminist." It's probably used as a term associated with rebelliousness in general. (Merve)

Tuba describes that her introduction to feminism was directly through these prejudices. She recounts discussions within the extended family about her female cousin who behaved more freely and independently in the following way:

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> I have a cousin who moved abroad after university, and she was an activist. I recall my relatives saying things like, "She's a feminist, living independently like a man," as if these traits were something to be ashamed of. That was the first time I heard feminism.

Looking at shared experiences, it can be observed that some participants were introduced to feminism at an early age through stereotypes and prejudices perpetuated by the media and society. People who label girls speaking out against injustice and not conforming to traditional gender roles as feminists were introduced feminism to them for the first time.

The second part of this section aimed to learn when participants started to define themselves as feminists by asking them about the event or moment that led them to adopt a feminist identity, and to understand why and how this happened.

In Downing and Roush's (1985) model, the second stage is called the Revelation Stage, where women experience this stage in different ways. Some become aware of discrimination in consciousness-raising groups, while others reach this awareness after a major crisis in their lives. The readiness level and openness to change of the individual are crucial for this stage to occur (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.698).

Some participants mentioned that they acquired their feminist identities during their high school years. Here, the significance of feminist marches on International Women's Day, March 8th, and events organized in schools for this day cannot be overlooked:

> In the early years of high school, there used to be events celebrating International Women's Day on March 8, where students recited poems in schools. Our republican teachers would have us read poems by female poets and such. That's when it started to catch my interest. (Simay)

International Women's Day was first celebrated in 1911 and has been observed for more than a century since that day. The day is not specific to any country, group, or organization and is collectively celebrated by all groups worldwide. In Turkey, the March 8th gathering was first organized in 1921 and celebrated as "Working Women's Day." In 1975, it was taken to the streets for the first time by the Progressive Women's Association, founded under the leadership of Beria Onger. Although the day was not celebrated during the years 1980-84, it resumed in 1984 to commemorate the rights gained by women and to remind society of the rights that still need to be achieved (Yazici, 2020, p.1665). March 8th is a day when the women's resistance

makes its voice heard, resisting the artificial roles and duties imposed on their bodies, will, and existence within the dominant discourse (Yazici, 2020, p.1670).

Another participant who mentioned encountering feminism through March 8 shared her experiences:

> I first encountered feminism during an International Women's Day march when I was in the 10th grade. I really liked a slogan there: "Let the father come, let the husband come, let the state come, let the police come! We are determined to rebel, we want freedom!" Seeing so many women come together and raise their voices against the patriarchy had a profound impact on me. (Derya)

8 March Women Marches in Turkey are events where feminists can be most visible, express their presence, and, despite police violence and government efforts to obstruct, take to the streets and squares every year with significant participation and enthusiasm. It stands out as a crucial day for women to become acquainted with the idea of feminism and feminists. Some prominent slogans from the women's march include: "We are not silent, we are not afraid, we do not obey," "Men, do the ironing at home," "Women's murders are political." From this, it can be inferred that women are aware of and resist the silence role imposed on them by patriarchy (Yazici, 2020, p.1666).

Some participants shared that they developed their feminist identity during their high school years. However, it is essential to underline that none of these participants who adopted a feminist identity in high school encountered this idea through their education at high school or through a feminist teacher. For instance, Ceren mentions that she started using social media during her high school years and gained awareness spontaneously through social media during this period:

> In high school, especially as I saw what women were going through on social media, my awareness increased. A woman who wanted a divorce was killed, another was killed for not cooking, yet another for not taking care of the child – it was a place where women were killed for various reasons. Seeing these, I was somehow compelled to advocate for women's rights, and that's when I started defining myself as a feminist. (Ceren)

The phenomenon of femicide, which is the most severe and lethal form of violence against women, was first coined in 1976 by South African author Diana E. H. Russell. It is used to describe men killing women solely because they are women (Spinelli, 2011, p.17).

In Turkey, the concept of femicide is also referred to as honor killings or honor crimes. We Will Stop Femicides Platform of Turkey, established to combat femicide in Turkey, has been sharing data on murdered women and suspicious deaths of women since 2008. According to the We Will Stop Femicides Platform of Turkey, the only year in the past 15 years when the number of murders decreased was 2011, the year the Istanbul Convention was signed. Since then, the number of femicides has increased, with 315 femicides and 248 suspicious deaths of women reported in 2023 (2023 Annual Data Report, n.d.).

Mainstream media tends to normalize male violence against women, and violence and abuses against women and children often fail to become serious news items (Dursun, 2010, p.23). As a result, platforms, feminist organizations and women's assemblies have turned to social media to discuss and raise awareness about femicides and women's issues in Turkey. Everyone using social media in Turkey is likely to come across these news stories, contributing to drawing attention to women's issues in this manner.

Selen mentions that she encountered feminism through the education provided by a socialist organization she joined in high school:

> I had joined a socialist organization in high school. I can say I became a feminist when I first heard about this concept. Because I already had this idea of equality; I just didn't know it had a name. When I learned that it had a name, that other women were facing issues related to it, and that they were fighting together, I was already a feminist.

Even though there was not a supportive educational atmosphere for feminism, Eda actually developed a feminist identity in an opposite environment. She shares her experience and story of becoming a feminist when she spoke up against a high school teacher making sexist jokes and misogynistic comments:

> I had a teacher who discriminated a lot between female and male students, and I spoke up against him. One day, we were arguing in one of his classes, and he said to me, "You're a feminist," and started laughing. I said, "If not staying silent against people like you is feminism, then yes, I'm a feminist."

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Bahar, explaining the significant influence of her conservative family structure on her development of a feminist identity, shares her story of adopting a feminist identity during high school independently of school and education, in the following way:

> Unfortunately, the family I grew up in had a mindset that regarded women as second-class beings. When I witnessed the experiences of those women in that environment, I said to myself, "Yes, I am a feminist." This corresponds to my high school years.

McNamara and Rickard (1992) discussed that women at different stages of feminist identity development may require different approaches. For example, being part of a community and receiving education about feminist activism can play a supportive role in advancing women to more advanced stages of feminist development (McNamara & Rickard, 1992, p.187).

One of the most common factors in the process of acquiring a feminist identity is education. One participant shared that they encountered feminism in late middle school through a text taught in a textbook, realizing she could identify herself as a feminist from then on:

> In middle school, we read a text about the pink tax in our English textbook. It was about the same products being sold at a higher price when they were colored pink. That's where I first started to notice something related to gender-based discrimination and learned about feminism. (Ceyda)

A pattern observed among participants is that some began to identify as feminists during their university years. Moradi and Phillips (2002) point to studies indicating that awareness-raising groups have a positive impact on acquiring a feminist identity (Moradi & Phillips, 2002, p.32). Especially in many studies, we can see a direct relationship between education and acquiring a feminist identity, as well as gaining awareness of gender equality (Bargad & Hyde, 1991; Williams & Wittig, 1997; Duncan, 1999; Frederick & Stewart, 2018).

Introducing their students to feminism and gender equality in classes opened by university professors with a feminist perspective has been encouraging for some participants to define themselves as feminists.

> In university, thanks to a feminist professor in a class, who was a social psychologist, I got introduced to feminism. I learned at that time that this change

can begin with the language. Because language directly influences our thought processes. I can say that I became a feminist around that time. (Gamze)

Another participant mentioned that the political and activist atmosphere at university and getting to know feminist women were directly related to her acquisition of a feminist identity:

I came across the idea of feminism precisely in a university course. Leftist organizations were very active at Istanbul University. I met feminists there in a forum. After that process, I started defining myself as a feminist. (Merve)

University not only through course content but also by providing the opportunity for individuals to live alone in different cities can play a liberating role. For example, Tuba mentioned that she grew up in a small town and could only move to Ankara, a big city, to attend university. After moving to Ankara, she felt more liberated, and university life helped her connect with her feminist identity:

The period during which I reflected on being a feminist started in university. I had taken courses on feminist translations and women's studies. Actually, I integrated more with this idea when I moved away from the city where my family was and started living independently in another city.

Some participants expressed that learning what feminism is during high school and university comes too late. According to them, gender equality education should be included in the curriculum, and creating this awareness from the beginning of schooling would be a much better way to adopt a feminist identity. Participants who initiated their process of acquiring a feminist identity through a university course, International Women's Days, a high school teacher, or leftist organizations mentioned that women who cannot access higher education live without being aware of feminism, and this is saddening.

Looking at the experiences shared by participants, the pattern that emerges regarding the first encounter with the term "feminist" is often associated with pre-existing biases against feminism, typically formed during childhood. Participants tend to learn the true meaning of feminism and identify themselves as feminists during their high school and university years, influenced by political environments, International Women's Day marches and commemorations, or gender-related courses taken at university. These patterns align with existing literature. Individuals learning the meaning of feminism, meeting other feminist

women, and being exposed to feminism directly contribute to the development of their feminist identity.

In a study demonstrating the positive impact of exposure to feminism on developing a feminist identity, Gerstmann and Kramer (1997) indicated that discussing gender-related topics in classes is directly associated with acquiring a feminist identity (Gerstmann & Kramer, 1997, p.347). Similarly, Myaskovsky and Wittig (1997) found that having positive thoughts about feminism and being exposed to feminism are associated with developing a feminist identity (Myaskovsky & Wittig, 1997, p.879). Bargad and Hyde (1991) state that having a supportive environment influences the development of a feminist identity. They specifically mentioned that women who have feminist women in their surroundings and communicate with them tend to develop a feminist identity (Bargad & Hyde, 1991, p.196).

4.3. I was sad that we needed feminism, but I wasn't feeling alone anymore: Exploring feminism and sisterhood

When we look at Downing and Roush's stages of feminist identity development, the Embeddedness-Emanation, or the third stage, is the period when women first experience feminist solidarity. According to the model, during this period, women who feel secure in sisterhood and no longer feel alone exhibit anger towards patriarchy and discrimination (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.701). When I asked participants about how their emotions and thoughts changed during the period starting with acquiring a feminist identity, I received responses that both parallel the model and deviate from it.

Similarities to the model included the participants' almost unanimous feelings and thoughts of relief, indicating that they no longer felt alone. Knowing that there were other women who had experienced similar things and had spoken out was a new, empowering, and reassuring experience for them:

> I no longer felt alone. While discovering feminism might be a traumatic experience for some, it wasn't the case for me. I was very excited and felt a desire to learn more. I started to get closer to and spend more time with women who, like me, were interested in feminism and equality, engaging in discussions and conversations together. (Simay)

Hauskeller (2022) argues that, even though not all women may identify as feminists, and some feminists may not identify as women, feminism cannot achieve its goals among

feminists without strong solidarity. The absence of solidarity can turn feminism, aiming to change power structures in society to end patriarchal oppression, into a deadlock both in theory and practice (Hauskeller, 2022, p.103).

Selen, stating that she pursued equality and justice during her childhood and adolescence, and preferred not to conform to traditional gender role expectations, shares that she began to feel normal when she learned what feminism is. Learning that the problem lies not in her own existence but in patriarchy has greatly relieved her, and finding women who think and feel like her has been an empowering experience:

> I finally felt normal for the first time. When I learned about feminism, I realized that my thoughts weren't actually unconventional, and there were many other women like me with similar beliefs, which made me very happy. Feeling sisterhood was very comforting. Knowing that there are many women who would defend my cause if something happened to me in this country reassured me—I am not alone.

Similar to Selen, another participant, Ceyda, who shares similar feelings, mentions that she felt normal for the first time when she encountered feminism and feminists:

> I no longer felt like a freak; I realized there are other outspoken women who think like me, and I was right. I felt a sense of belonging, felt safe. (Ceyda)

Another participant, who struggled to make sense of her experiences and found it challenging to conform to the patriarchal order until she encountered feminism, shares the relief she experienced through the discovery of sisterhood:

> I felt relieved; I saw that I was not alone. (Gamze)

The concept of women's solidarity, the sense of sisterhood, appears to signify a safe harbor, relief, and a sense of not being alone for the participants. At this point, the notion of global sisterhood in the literature can be mentioned. Global sisterhood refers to the idea of dialogue and solidarity among women who are perceived as a culturally unique and homogeneous group with shared interests, perspectives, goals, and similar experiences in the face of male oppression (Siegel, 2007, p.51). In other words, global sisterhood is an understanding based on the perception that, due to the impact of globalization, borders become transparent, and in a shrinking world, the patriarchal system dominates all women worldwide, benefiting men from this dominance (Ramazanoglu, 1998, p.19).

> Knowing that I have a lot of sisters who have faced the same problems and come together to fight against them also gave me strength, to be honest. (Eda)

Women are bound together by a non-historical understanding that advocates the similarity of their oppressions and, consequently, their struggles. Therefore, the uniqueness and solidarity of women are at play, as they are oppressed under patriarchal pressures regardless of race, class, and cultural differences (Naghibi, 2007, p.77). Consequently, global sisterhood emerges through women's shared resistance against male-centrism, irrespective of their differences in race, class, or culture (Morgan, 2016, p.35).

> I said, "I am not alone," and I felt safe and happy; not being alone was very comforting. (Bahar)

Merve, who blamed herself for the harassment she experienced before adopting a feminist identity, shared her experience with feminism as follows:

> I thought, I am not the problematic side. I said, I am not alone anymore. When I thought about past experiences, I was very relieved, realizing that I was not the guilty one; it was the system. Solidarity gave me confidence and strengthened me.

Derya, who had a similar experience with Merve, also said the following:

> In high school, just before encountering feminism, I experienced sexual harassment. My teachers, including my family, blamed me, saying, 'What were you doing there at that hour?' For a long time, I thought it was my fault. Feminism actually freed me from this guilt. No, I was the victim; I was not at fault at all.

Merve and Derya share a common experience of thinking that the problem lies within themselves, despite being victims of abuse, due to the teachings of the patriarchal system and victim-blaming. Discovering feminist solidarity, learning the concept of consent, understanding the definition of abuse, realizing that similar situations have happened to other women, and understanding that it is the fault of the perpetrator, not the women, has been a liberating experience for them. In this sense, women's solidarity can also strengthen individuals in terms of psychological resilience.

The discovery of sisterhood corresponding to Downing and Roush's (1985) third stage involves discussing similar experiences. Women experiencing this stage are said to begin forming emotional connections with other women who resemble themselves. This bond allows women to step into a supportive environment, gaining a new perspective, and empowering themselves with their newfound identity (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.701).

Some participants expressed feelings of anger towards the existing patriarchal system during this period:

> I was angered. I was surprised at how they could make us accept patriarchy to this extent, and why all women weren't in revolt. (Ceyda)

In the feminist identity development model proposed by Downing and Roush (1985), the second stage, called the revelation stage, suggests that women may experience the emergence of anger when they realize the impact of patriarchy on women and their own lives. It is noted that they feel deceived by the order of the universe and the world, experiencing a sense of betrayal (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.700).

> I got very angry. I was angry that women had to fight such a battle for a hundred years. I was angry about why women had been systematically oppressed by men. (Bahar)

Some other participants also express the disappointments and anger they experience during this process:

> I was angered by men being a privileged group. I am still angry. (Eda)

> I got very angry at first. I was especially angry about how they treated me differently within the family compared to my brother. (Merve)

When participants realize the treatment they receive from patriarchy and understand that it has been a longstanding oppression for centuries, most of them form a similar pattern by expressing their anger and sadness about this situation.

Some emotions that are not explicitly mentioned in Downing and Roush's model but have been expressed by certain participants have also emerged. Some participants have shared that, during this process, they experienced deep sadness instead of feelings of anger.

> On one hand, I felt very sad because I sensed that we were forced into such solidarity. The fact that this struggle had to emerge saddened me. My feelings

were very complex; ''unfortunately'', I said, "At least there is solidarity." (Gamze)

This sadness may also carry occasional feelings of disappointment and hopelessness:

At first, I was saddened. It's very painful to have to fight such a battle in the 21st century. In this era, while humanity could be discussing very different things, we are still talking about the need for equality between men and women. (Eda)

Looking at the family structures of the participants, we see that almost all of them come from families that are more egalitarian than the Turkish society. The majority of the participants reported that the idea of feminism and equality was already supposed to be there for me, stating that feminism was not a surprising idea for them. Therefore, I did not observe a pattern in any of the participants, such as feeling guilty about being part of patriarchy, mentioned in the first and second stages of Downing and Roush, before defining themselves as feminists (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.700). I found that they were already aware of this inequality in some way from a very young age and were uncomfortable with it always.

The shared experience of the participants has emerged as an evaluation of sisterhood, characterized by no longer being alone and finding security in belonging to a community. Reid and Purcell (2004) found in their study that women exposed to feminism experienced a greater sense of "we-ness" than those who were not exposed (Reid & Purcell, 2004, p.766).

During the period when participants became acquainted with feminist solidarity and feminist identity, the most common experience was the relief and sense of normalcy they felt, no longer feeling alone. Secondly, the emerging emotion was the anger and disappointment they felt towards the patriarchal order.

4.4. Having a feminist identity in Turkey

To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the participants' local society and geography on their processes of acquiring a feminist identity, I asked participants about their experiences of being a feminist in Turkey. Thus, my aim was to closely examine the problems women share in Turkey and how feminism is experienced by participants in the context of Turkey.

Observing that studies on feminist identity in the literature are mostly conducted with women in Western countries and seeing recommendations (Ng, Dunne & Cataldo, 1995, p.569;

Henderson-King & Stewart, 1997, p.424; Fischer et al., 2000, p.28; Frederick & Stewart, 2018, p.276) suggesting the exploration of the subject in different cultures, led me to believe that data collected from Turkey, which cannot be considered a Western country, could be significant.

In this section, some patterns and differences related to the experience of being a feminist in Turkey have emerged. Firstly, I highlighted the similarities and differences in responses regarding the impact of living in Turkey on feminist enlightenment. Subsequently, I examined the situations that participants, as feminist women living in Turkey, believe they have faced in terms of gender discrimination and how they cope with this discrimination within the context of their feminist identities.

Firstly, a shared pattern emerged in participants' experiences of being feminists in Turkey, particularly the conscious marginalization of feminists, along with the policies of the existing government.

Simay describes how feminists are labeled as a minority and a marginal group in Turkey as follows:

> I see that feminist movement is slowly decreasing and shrinking like a small group after the AKP era. It feels like feminism is being treated as if it were a political party, and there is an attempt to corner it into such a narrow space. In my opinion, I believe feminists are being marginalized.

Ceyda, expressing her belief that feminists are marginalized, says the following:

> Living in Turkey has made me a more angry feminist, I believe. As feminists, we are being marginalized and victimized in Turkey.

Another participant describes being subjected to hatred and marginalization from those around them due to their egalitarian ideas and expressions.

> After becoming a feminist, I have been labeled and judged by some, seen as too extreme. (Simay)

Some participants mentioned the use of the term "feminazi," which they observed being applied to them as well, when discussing the marginalization of feminists in Turkey. This usage not only serves as a label intended to insult and demean feminists in Turkey but also appears in the literature.

The term Nazi has been employed in modern times as a derogatory term, commonly used to target, mock, criticize, and offend individuals or groups, often related to their physical appearance, behavior, gender, political, or religious views (Allan & Burridge, 2006, p.89).

Recently, the term "feminazi" has emerged in the media and social media as a frequent insult and derogatory term. This discourse labels feminist women as radical and extreme. When examining the words used in conjunction with feminazi on the internet, terms such as humorless, lesbian, leftist, liberal, radical, and fat are frequently seen. This usage collectively denigrates feminists, implying that they lack a sense of humor, are lesbians, leftists, liberals, radicals, and overweight. It reflects a derogatory usage that collectively belittles feminists, implies that they are not physically attractive, and denigrates their ideologies (Horan, 2019, p.11).

> The majority of society calls us "feminazi." In Turkey, we can't explain what feminism is and what it wants. We constantly have to deal with prejudices and labels against feminism, and I think it's something that belittles and hurts feminists. I think feminism has a long way to go in Turkey. (Derya)

Another participant who encountered the accusation of being a feminazi shares the following:

> I used to say that sexism start with the language. When I said these things, they called me a 'language fascist,' they called me a feminazi. (Selen)

The widespread use of this term seen in other countries worldwide, intended to demean and label feminists, has also become prevalent in Turkey. Especially among younger generations using social media, the term has gained popularity. As some participants feel, this usage tends to marginalize and ostracize feminists who advocate for women's rights.

Another participant, who believes that feminists in Turkey are systematically and actually marginalized as part of a right-wing government policy, shared the following:

> In the last 20-25 years, traditional thoughts and patriarchy have been openly nurtured by the ruling party (AKP). Feminists here have become a group associated with a certain political view and ethnic identity, belittled and degraded. If a woman is a feminist, she must be Kurdish, Alevi, leftist, or something that she shouldn't be. (Bahar)

Bahar also described that this political atmosphere has a significant impact on society. She mentioned that even educated men in Turkey carry internalized misogyny, seeing women as second-class citizens. She pointed out that this internalized misogyny is fueled by the rhetoric of lawmakers in the parliament containing misogyny and is directly supported by the government. Policies encouraging misogynistic views are pursued, enabling the direct marginalization of feminists.

Like Bahar, Tuba also spoke about the deep-rooted nature of patriarchy and misogyny in Turkey. Therefore, she shared that the widespread acceptance of feminism in Turkey is much more challenging than in Western countries. She expressed feeling that there is an underlying misogyny in almost everyone, even if they are not consciously aware of it.

> The government is not already pursuing a feminist or egalitarian ideology. On the contrary, they are trying to promote an ideology that strengthens misogyny.

Gamze states that the majority of Turkey consists of conservative individuals, and she mentions that conservative thinking tends to be resistant to change and inclined to preserve its own rules. She says that the idea of feminism is just beginning to become acquainted with society, and therefore, it is perceived as a threat to their traditional lifestyles by a large part of the community:

> Most people are afraid of change and prefer to hold on to their own beliefs. Therefore, feminism might be progressing very slowly, therefore being vilified and targeted in Turkey.

Selen, mentioning that being a feminist in Turkey requires courage, describes how government policies that stigmatize feminists as extremists now lead to harsh police interventions and violence even during the International Women's Day marches.

> I can no longer participate in the March 8 Marches. Feminists are treated so poorly; I witnessed the police dragging women by their hair on the ground. This wouldn't happen in a more liberal country. Here, feminists are the unwanted and unaccepted others.

In the study conducted by Ramsey et al. (2007), individuals who identified themselves as feminists were found to have a more positive perception of feminism compared to those who did not identify themselves as anything or defined themselves as non-feminists. Thus, the marginalization and labeling applied to feminists in society can be seen as a factor that hinders

individuals who do not identify as feminists from developing positive thoughts about feminism (Ramsey et al., 2007, p.614). At this point, participants believe that the insults or marginalization they faced regarding their feminist identities did not distance them from their feminist identity. However, they think that these prejudices hinder the outreach of feminism to others.

When discussing the meaning of being a feminist in Turkey, a common point among the participants is the reinforcement of feminists' marginalization, particularly through the policies of the conservative and right-wing government, labeling them as an unwanted group.

Secondly, I explored the difficulties of having a feminist identity and how they cope with these challenges.

Some participants mentioned that not personalizing these biases and attempting to understand the other side proved to be effective in adapting to their feminist identities:

> I quickly adapted to it because I realized that such attacks were not about my personality. I am actually a figure in that environment that prompts self-reflection and questioning of one's truths, which is why I am being attacked in this way. Change is discomforting, and I am trying to understand that. (Simay)

Similar to Simay, Ceyda also shares that she continues her struggle without personalizing the anger, aiming to integrate it with her feminist identity:

> While adapting to my feminist identity, I learned not to personalize the hatred and to understand that it stemmed from the other person, not from me. (Ceyda)

In the synthesis stage mentioned as the fourth stage by Downing and Roush (1985), it is described as the period when women are aware of oppression and discrimination, and they channel their energy efficiently while coping with this discrimination. In this stage, women who have now embraced a feminist identity are said to exhibit a more realistic and positive approach, avoiding putting all men under the umbrella of discrimination and without risking their psychological well-being (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.702). Some participants directly point to the signs of this stage and share the following:

> Now, I don't get so angry anymore. I've stopped constantly trying to correct those around me. Instead, I'm getting closer to people who think like me. (Selen)

> I channel my energy into areas where I believe I can make a difference. I don't bother explaining things to someone who approaches with hate and is not open to change. (Eda)

Ceren and Gamze say they particularly experience this change and integration in their romantic relationships as follows:

> After this feminist awakening, I felt much more liberated in my relationships. I started to surround myself with more egalitarian people. (Ceren)

> First, I tried to embrace feminism in my romantic relationships. I gravitated towards men who behaved and thought more equally. (Gamze)

Participants believe that the political atmosphere in Turkey, having a conservative right-wing government, and supporting policies against gender equality make it challenging for feminists in Turkey. They think they face more difficult conditions than women living in relatively liberal Western countries. However, all these prejudices and stigmas about feminists have not deterred participants from their feminist identities. On the contrary, as mentioned in Downing and Roush's synthesis stage, they have been encouraged to find new ways to integrate with this identity. The most common coping mechanism that emerges is accepting that the anger expressed towards feminists is not about their personalities but a natural reaction to change. Secondly, participants tend to create a more egalitarian social environment and connect with like-minded individuals, enabling them to integrate with their feminist identities.

4.5. Access to education and financial independence as a priviligde: Intersectionality of feminist identity in Turkey

Fischer and the others (2000) state that intersectionality involves factors such as race, ethnicity, culture, class, and sexual orientation influencing feminist identity (Fischer et al., 2000, p.28).

I aimed to uncover whether there is a relationship between participants' demographic characteristics (ethnicity, class, education level, religious beliefs, political views, sexual orientation, etc.) and their feminist identities, and if so, in which areas this relationship manifests.

In this section, the theme of access to education and socio-economic independence, emphasized by almost all participants and stated as the most significant privilege, emerges

prominently. The majority of participants mentioned that without access to education, it would be impossible for them to encounter feminism and define themselves as feminists. They also expressed that women who can stand on their own financially, meaning they are not dependent on others, can integrate more easily with a feminist identity.

Another similarity that emerged is the participants' thoughts on being an LGBTIQ+ individual in Turkey. Only two participants identified as bisexual, while others identified as heterosexual. However, heterosexual participants talked about it being a privilege in Turkey and how LGBTIQ+ individuals are marginalized and othered based on their sexual identities. Finally, regarding ethnicity, the vast majority of participants mentioned being of Turkish ethnicity and considered being part of the majority group in Turkey as an advantage.

Considering that almost all participants encountered feminism during their school experiences, the impact of having access to education on feminist identity and its definition as an advantage by most participants is not a surprising result. Simay, coming from a middle-class family and being a graduate student, considers herself fortunate in terms of economic independence and education:

> I feel somewhat lucky and privileged when I compare myself to others because I can earn my own money and pursue education. There are girls who cannot go to school, children forced into early marriages… Unfortunately, in such an environment, I do feel privileged.

Ceren also spoke about the privilege of receiving education and earning her own money:

> Especially women who earn their own money and have completed their education can defend their rights much better, in my opinion. Because an uneducated woman can easily be silenced and made to obey. In this regard, I am in a privileged position.

Gamze, especially emphasizing the supportive nature of the environment she lives in for adopting a feminist identity, stated:

> Being from a middle-class family privileged me. But if I had a life that was closer to the Turkish average—more conservative, lower socio-economic and education status—it would probably hinder my becoming a feminist.

Parallel to others, Ceyda also discusses how economic status and education are directly related to her feminist identity:

> My family is from the upper-middle class, I am the only child, and I went to a private school. All these allowed me to encounter feminism much earlier. These were, of course, privileges.

Eda and Tuba also talks about the importance of economic power as a woman and feminist:

> The level of education, especially economic freedom, is the most crucial factor in my opinion. A woman without economic freedom cannot end even an abusive marriage she is unhappy in. (Eda)

> I believe education is the most important. Because, at some point in education, we encounter feminist ideas in one way or another. (Tuba)

Merve explained the relationship between education and economic independence with feminism as follows:

> Education and economic freedom are significant advantages. If I couldn't access education or earn my own money, I probably wouldn't have even encountered feminism.

Similarly, Derya emphasizes that coming from a middle-class background has influenced her level of education and feminist identity:

> Economically, I was privileged compared to many others; thanks to my family, I could go to school, educate myself, and get to know feminism.

Bahar, raised in a conservative family environment, explains the factors she considers to be the most important elements of her feminist identity as follows:

> If I couldn't earn my own money, I wouldn't be able to voice my feminist thoughts. Education and economic power are the most empowering things.

Making readings related to education and feminism is known to be an important factor in women acquiring a feminist identity (Frederick & Stewart, 2018, p. 269). Although none of the participants directly took courses on feminism or gender equality during their high school education, they regarded their university education, where they encountered these ideas and

connected with other feminists, as the most crucial stage in their journey towards feminism. Similarly, coming from a middle-class family facilitated their access to education and, by completing university education, helped them become professionals who could stand on their own feet. They emphasized that this is a significant and empowering situation in Turkey.

The participants, perceiving the discrimination and marginalization faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals in Turkey as very similar to the treatment feminists receive, discuss how these sub-identities are subjected to similar pressures. However, they mention that LGBTIQ+ individuals may experience greater victimization.

> If my sexual orientation were different, life would be much harder, especially in Turkey. I think being heterosexual is a priviliged in Turkey because you can be killed just for being LGBTIQ+. (Ceren)

Gamze emphasizes the significance of the feminist movement for LGBTIQ+ individuals in Turkey in the following way:

> If I were a lesbian woman instead of heterosexual, then being a feminist would probably be a necessity for me. Because for LGBTQ individuals, the feminist movement may be the only lifesaving escape in this country.

Bahar, stating that feminists and LGBTIQ+ individuals are oppressed under the same pressure, says the following:

> If I were a LGBTIQ+ individual, my voice might have been even stronger because I am already from an oppressed group. I would be fighting against another form of oppression. Even though our chains may be different, we all share the same struggle, equality.

Eda also mentions how her bisexual identity puts her in a disadvantaged group in Turkey:

> My family is unaware of my bisexuality. I have to live it in secret. Moreover, queers are already a disadvantaged group in Turkey. I think the queer struggle and the feminist struggle progress very parallelly.

Unlike Eda, Tuba states that she does not see her bisexual identity as a political identity and considers it a part of her personal life so her bisexual identity does not intersect with her feminist identity.

The concept of intersectionality refers to the presence of a common theme when recognizing multiple interlocking identities. These identities are significant factors associated with socio-cultural power and privilege, shaping individuals' experiences and identities in life (Shields, 2008, p.303).

When examining the experiences and thoughts of the participants I shared above, it becomes apparent that there is a perception that LGBTIQ+ individuals, like feminists, are a marginalized group subjected to discrimination by the same oppressive force. Additionally, considering the pattern where participants mention coming from the middle class and currently being able to sustain their livelihood as a privilege, it is possible to infer an association between class and feminist identity.

Apart from these factors, when looking at the participants' shared perspectives on the impact of their political stances and ethnic identities on their feminist identities, it is observed that those with a Turkish ethnic identity consider it an advantage, perceiving it as a majority and socially accepted ethnic element in Turkey. Two participants who are half Kurdish and half Arab descent state that they do not closely identify with their ethnic backgrounds and do not engage in a political struggle based on ethnicity, indicating that ethnicity does not have an impact on their feminist identity. However, some participants of Turkish ethnicity acknowledge that feminist women of Kurdish ethnicity face additional discrimination, marginalization, and even hatred.

A participant identifying her political stance as socialist expresses that her socialist identity is intertwined with her feminist identity, stating:

> I believe a socialist should already be a feminist, or I wouldn't be surprised if a
> feminist is also a socialist. After all, both are struggles for equality. (Ceyda)

When examining participants' sharing regarding the impact of demographic characteristics on feminist identity, it can be concluded that sexual orientation and socioeconomic status, i.e., class, intersect with feminist identity. However, for a more in-depth exploration of other factors, detailed explanations can be provided in the recommendations section for future researchers.

4.6. What do feminists want and how do they contribute to change

In the active commitment stage, the final phase of Downing and Roush's model (1985), the existence of a feminist identity that is now established and integrated with the individual's

identity is discussed. This stage represents the phase where individuals take action for social change and begin to contribute personally to the feminist movement. The authors, mentioning that very few feminists reach this stage, also note that cyclic transitions to previous stages can sometimes be observed in the stages of feminist identity development (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.702).

Participants shared similar themes regarding their contributions to feminism and their ideas about the changes they want to see. Initially, all participants expressed the vision of an ideal world where gender inequality and violence against women do not exist, and there is no need for feminism. When asked about their contribution to this change, some participants mentioned contributing personally and socially in their relationships. Others stated that they are trying to make a difference both in social relationships and through activist actions.

Bahar and Eda state that their ideals envision a world that no longer requires feminism and where equality is already inherent:

> I imagine a world where we no longer need feminism. A world where everyone is treated equally and has the opportunity to be equal. (Eda)

> I wish everyone believed in equality so that feminism wouldn't exist anymore. I want a world where women don't have to fight to be equal to men. (Bahar)

Selen expresses that the state and government policies are the forces that should ensure this equality as follows:

> I hope for the government to ensure equality. I want a system that will intervene and punish the perpetrators when something happens to women.

Similarly, Derya believes that there should be a system where women are not blamed for what happens to them when they become victims of certain situations:

> I dream of a world where women are not blamed when they experience abuse or violence, where they do not feel guilty and helpless. A world where they are not victims of traumatic events and can assert their rights.

Another common pattern that emerges is the importance participants place on gender equality education as a means to achieve a feminist world:

> We must encounter the idea of equality and feminism at the earliest stages of education. Feminist parents should become widespread.

Like Derya, Ceyda also advocates for feminist ideas in the education system:

> We should add the concept of gender equality to education right away because we need to educate people from a young age so that they grow up to be egalitarian.

Merve, who is a teacher by profession, believes that change should begin in the school environment:

> First, education needs to change. Textbooks and school education still teach traditional roles. Even most teachers are sexist; these need to change. The education system needs to change fundamentally; it should be much more inclusive. (Merve)

When asked about the contributions they believe they offer to society to achieve a feminist world, it was possible to find some responses suggesting that some participants could be in the fifth stage defined by Downing and Roush.

Some participants mentioned their involvement in projects related to women's rights in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Others stated that during their university education, they engaged in activities to reach middle and high school girls, aiming to convey their ideas and support for equality to these girls. Some participants, describing their activist lives during university, mentioned their participation in women's rights protests and attendance at meetings in women's councils.

 Participants who didn't actively engage in activism talked about trying to contribute in their social circles and personal lives. They mentioned creating awareness about changing sexist language in the workplace and friend groups, interacting with egalitarian individuals, and continuing to engage in feminist readings in their personal lives.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this research, I aimed to investigate the feminist identity development of feminist women living in Ankara, Turkey. Conducting semi-structured interviews for this purpose, I engaged in face-to-face meetings with 10 feminist women, aged between 23 and 30, working in various sectors. Taking into consideration Downing and Roush's five-stage feminist identity development model, I endeavored to reveal the process through which feminists in Turkey acquire this identity by asking specific questions. In this section, I evaluated the experiences of feminist women living in Ankara, Turkey, highlighting both the similarities and differences with Downing and Roush's model.

Firstly, common themes related to patriarchy and gender inequality are observed in the experiences of women in Turkey before acquiring a feminist identity. Downing and Roush refer to this period as the passive acceptance stage, suggesting that during this time, women were either unaware of discrimination or believed that this discrimination worked in their favor (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.698). The experiences of the participants do not align with the initial stage of the model. Participants express awareness that different roles are assigned to girls and boys in family and school settings from childhood, and they silently feel discomfort with this discrimination. They report that gender roles are more equal, especially within nuclear families, while they are more traditional in extended families in Turkey. Participants note that they noticed this distinction even in early childhood. Instances of discomfort with discrimination are evident, particularly when boys' misbehavior or active behavior, interest in sports, are supported, while girls are expected to be obedient and calm, or situations where wearing skirts in school uniforms is enforced.

In some studies conducted to test Downing and Roush's model, data indicating parallelism with the passive acceptance stage have been obtained. For example, in Witte and Sherman's study (2002) examining the relationship between self-silencing and feminist identity development, the higher levels of self-silencing among women in the passive acceptance stage are supportive evidence for the model (Witte & Sherman, 2002, p.1081). Considering that the participants of this research identify as feminists, it is important to evaluate the possibility that their perspectives on the pre-feminist period might be influenced by their feminist ideology. To align with the model, it might be necessary to conduct research with women who have not yet encountered feminism, possibly making this stage in the model comparable.

Secondly, the focus is on how women in Turkey encounter feminism and begin to identify as feminists. In Downing and Roush's model, the second stage, known as the revelation stage, involves women becoming aware of discrimination, experiencing anger, and accompanying this is a sense of guilt for having adapted to patriarchy in their previous lives (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.699). Several participants have mentioned feeling anger against the system when they learned about feminism. Nearly all participants expressed feeling relieved, secure, and happy to know that they were no longer alone when they learned what feminism is. Moreover, most participants mentioned finding it sad that there is a need for this struggle. In contrast to the studies in the literature, it has been revealed that some participants encountered societal and media prejudices associated with the term feminism and the concept of feminism during their early childhood. Participants, who later learned what feminism truly entails and dispelled these prejudices, indicate that they developed their feminist identities during high school and university years.

However, when looking at the research results, it is evident that participants' discovery of feminism and exploring women's solidarity coincide with the same period. Therefore, the second and third stages have been jointly considered for the sample of this study. The third stage, defined by Downing and Roush as the embeddedness-emanation stage, is noted for women getting closer to and showing solidarity with women who think alike and experience similar issues (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.701). Parallel to this two stages, most participants have expressed sadness when learning about feminism, as it necessitates such a struggle. The idea that discrimination and patriarchy are systematic issues has both saddened them and meeting women who think like them has made them feel safe. The existence of a supportive environment and the presence of like-minded women around them align with the positive impact on women's feminist identities, as suggested by the results in the literature. (Bargad & Hyde, 1991; Myaskovsky & Wittig, 1997; Reid & Purcell, 2004).

At the same time, women have stated that during the process of adapting to this new identity, they attempt to change sexist situations around them, distance themselves from environments where they cannot effect change, and start building relationships with like-minded individuals who believe in equality. Some participants have mentioned receiving criticism from their surroundings after becoming feminists, being perceived as extremists. However, instead of personalizing this situation, they believe that such comments are just a resistance to idea of change. They assert that the discrimination or hate speech they face for being feminists is not a problem within themselves but originates from patriarchy.

In parallel with the findings, Moradi and Subich (2002) emphasized in their study that women with a feminist identity experience less distress in the face of sexism compared to women in the passive acceptance stage, highlighting the positive impact of a feminist identity in combating sexism (Moradi & Subich, 2002, p.44). In light of all this data, traces of the fourth stage defined by Downing and Roush as Synthesis can be observed. In this stage, it is noted that women integrate their new feminist identities and a positive and realistic identity related to being women with their own identities. During this stage, it is believed that women channel their energy and time into creative and productive activities while simultaneously combating discrimination (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.702). Looking at this stage, it is seen that the majority of participants have experienced similar emotions and thoughts.

In the model proposed by Downing and Roush, the final stage known as the active commitment stage is described as the phase where women actively contribute to change by using their skills to create the equal world they want to see. It can be said that taking action for women's rights defines this stage (Downing & Roush, 1985, p.702). The majority of participants have stated that they make efforts in their personal and social lives for this change. They contribute by warning people against sexist language, speaking out against sexism in workplace environments, and not remaining silent on issues related to women's rights. Some participants have mentioned contributing to activist movements, taking roles in NGOs, or giving presentations to raise awareness at universities and high schools. Most participants have also mentioned continuing to engage in feminist readings, emphasizing that increasing their own awareness is a contribution in itself. Ng, Dunne, and Cataldo (1995) emphasized that women in the active commitment stage reject traditional roles and strive for social and societal transformation while actively combating discrimination (Ng, Dunne & Catolda, 1995, p.568). Looking at this data, it is evident that the majority of participants have experienced the fifth stage as well.

As noted in the literature, a considerable amount of time has passed since Downing and Roush proposed their model in 1985, and it is believed that research in different cultures and backgrounds could shed light on different outcomes (Fischer et al., 2000; Downing Hansen, 2002; Moradi & Phillips, 2002; Reid & Purcell, 2004). To access detailed information about this, the intersection of participants' demographic variables with their feminist identities has been emphasized. The theme of access to education and economic freedom, considered a privilege by all 10 feminist participants living in Ankara, Turkey, has emerged. Participants, who come from middle-class families, believe they have more egalitarian families than the

general society, and mostly hold a secular and liberal worldview, have emphasized the importance of economic independence to survive as women and to raise their voices in Turkey. Similarly, participants believe that if they had not had access to education, they probably would not have encountered feminism. Additionally, most participants consider being a heterosexual woman in Turkey advantageous, and they have noted that LGBTIQ+ individuals face additional discrimination and hatred due to their sexual orientations.

When evaluating the process of being a feminist woman in Turkey, participants particularly discussed the impact of politics on the feminist movement, especially in the last 20 years. They talked about the influence of the conservative and traditional roles systematically imposed on society by the Erdogan-led AKP government, in power since 2002, leading to the emergence of women's and feminist hatred. They mentioned that feminists are treated like a left-wing party, subjected to police violence on March 8th events, and marginalized and ostracized as a minority group. Kourou (2020) examined the right-wing populist and anti-feminist policies pursued by the AKP government in Turkey in her study. Kourou (2020) discusses the recent rise of the anti-feminist movement as a counter-movement to the fourth wave feminism, stating that issues such as population decline, moral panic, the corruption of the family, and the endangerment of children-future generations-are attributed to women. It is observed that the AKP, with its right-wing populist discourse of "saving the nation," supports traditional roles and seeks to spread anti-feminism (Kourou, 2020, p.231).

5.1. Concluding Remarks

As a feminist living in Turkey, I initiated my research with the aim of shedding light on the processes of women who have chosen to identify as feminists in Turkey. I believed that the widespread acceptance of feminist ideas was a prerequisite for living in a more equal and free society, and I conducted my research with 10 feminist women living in Ankara, hoping it would contribute to this goal. Throughout this process, I utilized the five-stage feminist identity development model developed by Downing and Roush for use in feminist therapy, evaluating my findings in the context of both this model and the factor of living in Turkey.

The findings indicate that women first encounter feminism during their high school and university years. I concluded that educators who prioritize women's rights and introduce feminist theory to their students play a significant role in women's process of acquiring a feminist identity. Participants, who initially associated the term "feminist" with judgments such as "rebellious" or "hating men" during childhood, found that these societal biases were only

dispelled by educators who taught them what feminism truly meant or by leftist organizations organized in high schools. Participants expressed the belief that high school and university are too late to be introduced to these ideas, emphasizing the need for teaching and internalizing gender equality concepts at an early age, ideally during primary school years.

After education, I encountered the notion that socio-economical status is the most crucial factor. Coming from the middle class and obtaining a profession through education emerged as one of the key elements for encountering and adapting to a feminist identity, enabling one to earn their own income without relying on others.

Although none of the participants considered themselves politically as activists, a common theme emerged regarding the significant influence of politics on their lives. They perceived that feminist women face prejudices in almost every aspect of life, including school, family, work, social life, and romantic relationships. They believed that the increasingly conservative political atmosphere in Turkey has led to a rise in women's hatred. Participants expressed concerns about the growing number of femicides, news of violence against women, and the perception that perpetrators are protected by the state. They concluded that feminism in Turkey is still a struggle for survival and emphasized the need for better promotion of feminism in society and its further development for meaningful change.

5.2. Future Research

Firstly, considering the diverse ethnic groups living together in Turkey, it is important to note that the sample of this research is predominantly composed of Turks. Turks constitute the majority in Turkey and are not perceived as an identity subjected to discrimination. For instance, conducting in-depth studies on the feminist identity of Kurdish women in places where Kurds are politicized and discriminated against, such as in southeastern provinces, may yield different results.

Secondly, the importance of economic power and education were the most frequently emphasized topics in the participants' processes of acquiring a feminist identity, and all participants were individuals from an educated group, having at least a university education. Considering the significance of economic class and education, conducting this research with feminist women from different socio-economic classes could yield different results in the process of acquiring a feminist identity, enriching new studies.

Thirdly, all participants in this study are single women. Reaching married feminist women could enrich the results, as the experiences of married women with feminism and gender discrimination may differ.

Except for two bisexual female participants, all participants in this study are heterosexual women. A study involving LGBTIQ+ individuals could provide broader information on the intersection of feminist identity with sexual orientation and sexual identities.

Finally, in this study, I delved deeply into the processes of feminist identity formation and the relationships with their feminist identities among women living in Ankara, Turkey, who identify themselves as feminists. This study reveals that women's relationship with and awareness of patriarchy begin in the family and extend to all areas of life, both within the family and in school, during the preschool years. It underscores the importance of women learning what feminism truly is in their process of acquiring a feminist identity and the creation of educational and social environments where they can acquire this knowledge. We see the significance of access to education and the establishment of economic conditions and an egalitarian atmosphere for women's empowerment. Recognizing the importance of reaching more women with the idea of feminism, dismantling societal biases associated with feminism, and fostering solidarity among women is crucial. I hope that this study sheds light on future research on feminist identity and provides researchers with new perspectives.

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