

The Psychological Dependency Syndrome in Women of Taiwan

--An Exploration of Cinderella Complex

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Abstract

This study intends to investigate the Cinderella Complex, a psychological dependency syndrome, in female students of Taiwan. Cinderella complex is a state in which females willingly give over their own growth, preferring dependence to independence. *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence* by Collette Dowling (1981) was reviewed and critiqued to see how the "Cinderella Complex" is internalized so deeply in some females of Taiwan who hold onto the hope that there might be a "prince" appearing someday to rescue them. In this study, both the Cinderella complex questionnaire and in-depth interview were conducted to further reflect the Cinderella complex in females of Taiwan. Based on the interpersonal and social contexts, the results of questionnaire survey and interviews were compared and checked to analyze how the Cinderella complex was internalized in these women. The finding of this study shows that some females in Taiwan are influenced by Cinderella fairy tales and still wait for someone or something external to rescue or transform their lives. With the Cinderella complex internalized so deeply in their minds, these females believe that their submissiveness and obedience to the wills of others will help them win a "prince" with whom they would live happily ever after. Therefore, instead of acting out their own potential, they look for a man to lean on and something external to give their lives meaning.

Key words: Cinderella Complex, fairy tales, syndrome



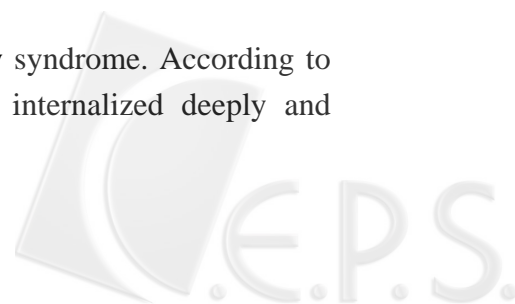
Cinderella Fairy Tales

The Cinderella fairy tales have been told around the world. They are stories about a beautiful but humble girl being victimized by her father's remarriage. Being mistreated by her evil stepmother and stepsisters, Cinderella has to be degraded and debased to wear shabby clothes, wash dishes, mop floors, and wait on them. However, with housewifely merits--beauty, submissiveness, obedience, passivity, etc., she wins a prince and lives happily forever. There are several common features in the most Cinderella stories. First, in most Cinderella stories, there must be a beautiful heroine having fallen from a position of high esteem. Second, there should be at least one evil parent and siblings mistreating the heroine. Third, there is a magical force helping the heroine. Fourth, there must be a restoration of the heroine's status from lower place to original or a promotion of even higher status. (Bettelheim, 1977). In addition, the heroine must have some housewifely merits to let the prince willingly swoop her up onto his white horse and live happily even after. The Cinderella fairy tales always end with the marriage of the prince and Cinderella, living happily afterwards. In these Cinderella plots, the man, here the prince, is regarded as rescuers. By marrying Cinderella, the prince saves Cinderella from her boring and daily domestic chores of cleaning and cooking and from the mistreatment of her family (Kelley 1994, 87-92). For Cinderella, by marrying the prince, she has her dream come true and is restored to her original place or even promoted to a higher place. In Cinderella fairy tales, there are some typical gender stereotypes, men are always ranked higher in wealth, occupation, status, power, and action, while the women can only utilize their beauty and feminine characteristics to attract a man to upgrade their social class.

Though Cinderella fairy tales are stories long time ago, afterwards there have been films, soap operas, and romance fictions produced based on Cinderella plots, These Cinderella fairy tales and plots leave women some psychology effects. Some women would dream of marrying a prince and living happily ever after. They believe that when their "prince" comes to their life someday, their miseries and troubles would be taken off their shoulders. Like Cinderella, being neglected and downgraded, they hope that by marrying their "prince," their mistreatment and misery could be justified, and righteousness would be rewarded. Therefore, in order to attract their Prince Charming, these women would do their best to dress like a "princess." They believe that having good appearance and clothing as well as having feminine characteristics would make themselves marriageable (Kelley 1994, 87-92).

Cinderella Complex

The Cinderella Complex is a psychological dependency syndrome. According to Collette Dowling, the Cinderella complex is a complex internalized deeply and



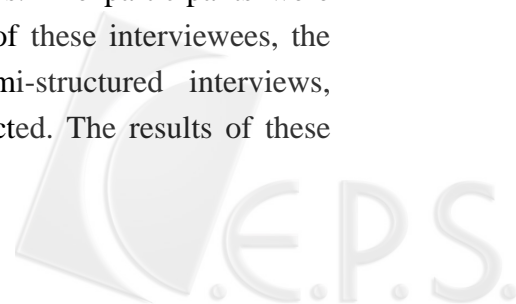
naturally in women's mind. Women with this complex would willingly give over their own growth, preferring dependence to independence. Besides, they feel that they need a man to lean on. In other words, women with the Cinderella complex have both the deep wish to be taken care of by others, either physically or psychologically (Dowling 1981, 21). Hence, like Cinderella, these women are always waiting for someone or something external to transform their lives. Dowling believes that the Cinderella complex makes women retreat from the full use of their minds, their potential, and their creativity.

According to Dowling, the Cinderella complex always happens on girls of sixteen or seventeen. Eager to be saved and taken care of, these girls, instead of going into colleges, hasten themselves into early marriages (64). There are some characteristics shared in the Cinderella complex.

1. Females have been educated that they are subservient and inferior to males.
2. Outwardly, many females keep a bravado image; inwardly, they lack of self-confidence and do not know how to deal with the ambivalence about their lives.
3. Unconsciously, these females long for a "prince" to save them and take care of them.
4. These females intend to idolize their fathers and desperately seek for males' attention.
5. These females define their identity in terms of their men's identity (Newfields 2003, 39)

Research Design

This study intends to investigate the Cinderella complex experienced by female students of Taiwan in relation to the origins in Taiwanese interpersonal and social context. With an eye to understanding these female students' inner and phenomenological worlds, Cinderella complex questionnaire and in-depth interviews were conducted. 408 female students in universities of central part of Taiwan filled out the Cinderella questionnaire. The questionnaire employed a 5-1 Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and the administration of the questionnaire was anonymous. Besides, purposeful sampling was used to obtain interview information about the Cinderella complex. Fifteen female students with the Cinderella complex willingly participated in the interviews. The participants were around 19-21 years old. In order to protect the identities of these interviewees, the pseudonyms were used. Through the open-ended semi-structured interviews, experience regarding to the Cinderella complex was collected. The results of these



observations and interviews were compared and checked to analyze and interpret the Cinderella complex experienced in female students of Taiwan. The research steps are shown as the following Figure 1.

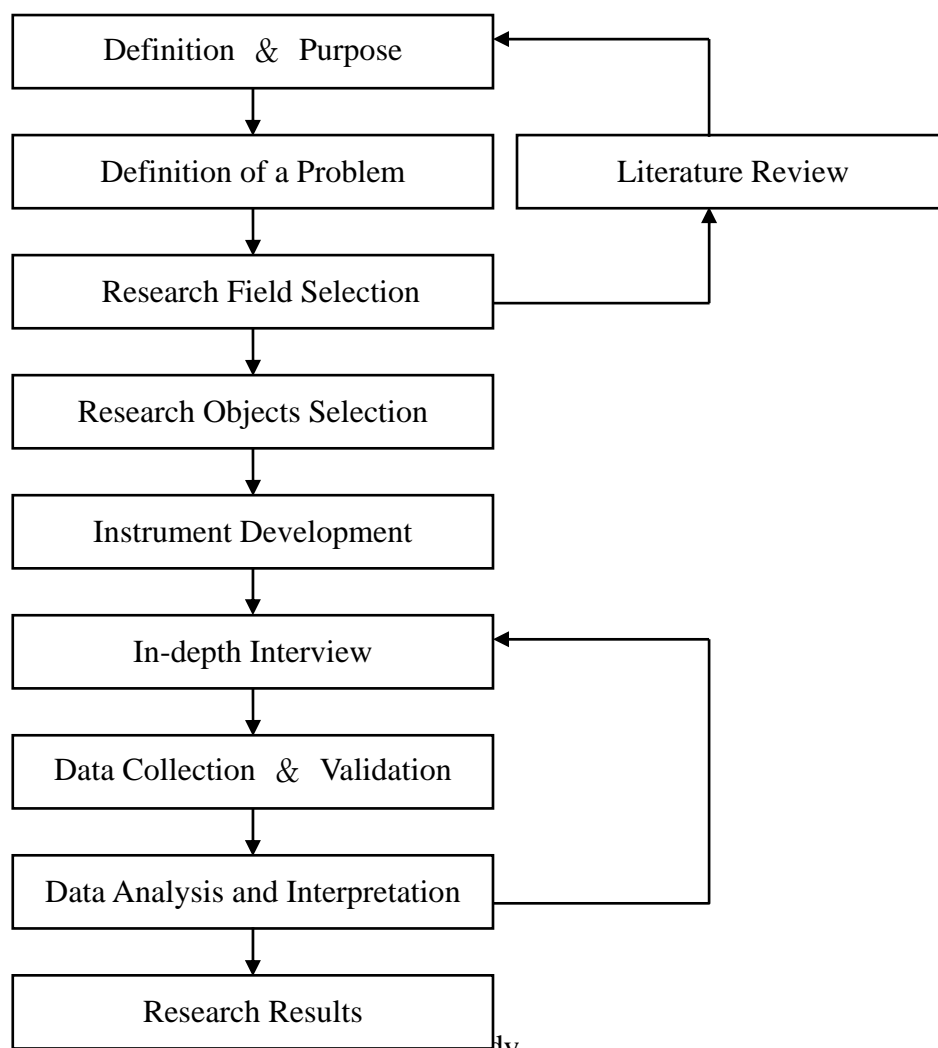


Figure 1. Research Steps of the Study

Results

The finding of this study shows that some female students in Taiwan are influenced by fairy tales and still wait for someone or something external to rescue or transform their lives. With the Cinderella complex, instead of acting out their own potential, they look for someone or something external to give their lives meaning.

After the administration of the Cinderella complex questionnaire to 408 students, the results of the survey were analyzed. The survey results are briefly discussed as follows.

With respect to Statement 1, as Figure 2, “I would like to have a pair of Cinderella’s glass slippers,” 2.5% of female students strongly agree with this statement. 21.6% of female students agree with this statement. 28.2% of female students have no comments. 35.6 of female students do not agree with this statement, and 12.3% of female students strongly disagree with this statement. To sum up, we can learn that 24.1% of female students would like to have a pair of Cinderella’s glass slippers.

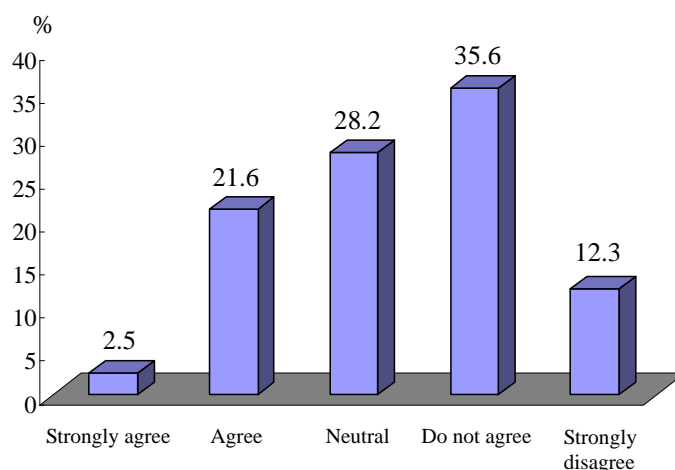


Figure 2. I would like to have a pair of Cinderella’s glass slippers

As for Statement 2, as Figure 3, “I feel that I am a person without self-confidence,” 2.5% of female students strongly agree with this statement. 8.6% of female students agree with this statement. 23.9% of female students have no comments. 36.8% of female students do not agree with this statement, and 28.2% of female students strongly disagree with this statement. To sum up, we learn that 11.1% of female students feel that they are females without self-confidence, while 65% of females have self-confidence.

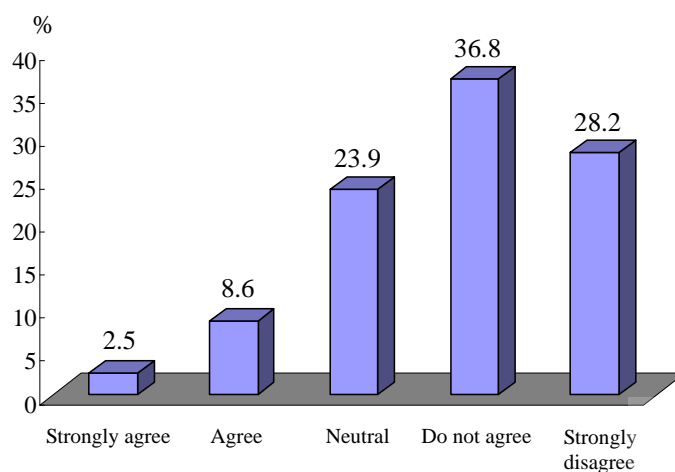


Figure 3. I feel that I am a person without self-confidence

In Statement 3, as Figure 4, “I believe that someday my Prince Charming would show up and lead me to a happy new life,” 4.9% of female students strongly agree with this statement. 22.7% of female students agree with this statement. 32.5% of female students have no comments. 32.5% of female students do not agree with this statement, and 7.4% of female students strongly disagree with this statement. To sum up, we learn that 27.6% of female students believe that their Prince Charming would show up and lead them to a happy new life, while 39.9% of females do not believe their Prince Charming would show up and lead them to their happy new life.

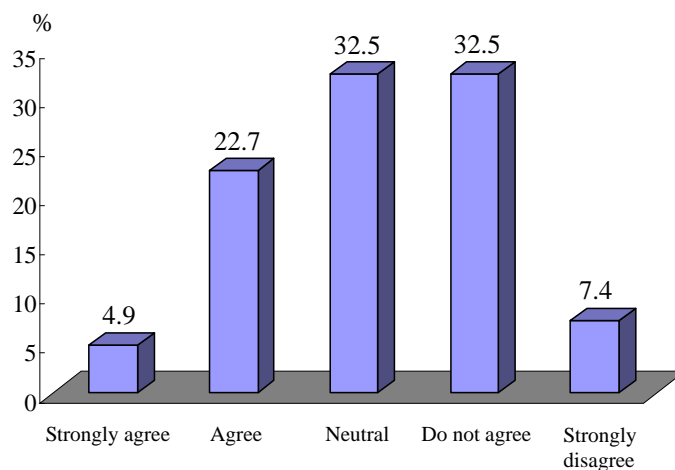


Figure 4. I believe that someday my Prince Charming would show up and lead me to a happy new life

In Statement 4, as Figure 5, “I feel everything I do is meaningless. But I believe that someday someone would show up to change my fate,” 1.8% of female students strongly agree with this statement. 13.5% of female students agree with this statement. 18.4% of female students have no comments. 44.8% of female students do not agree with this statement, and 21.5% of female students strongly disagree with this statement. To sum up, we learn that 15.3% of female students feel everything they do is meaningless, but they believe someone would show up to change their fates.

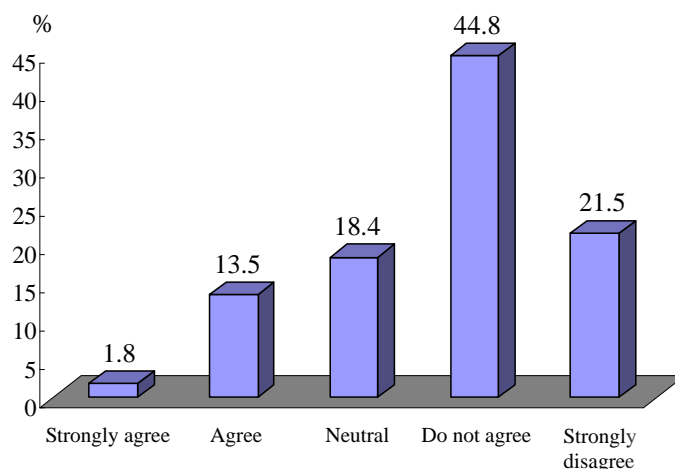


Figure 5. I feel everything I do is meaningless. But I believe that someday someone would show up to change my fate

In Statement 5, as Figure 6, “I believe that when I am in trouble, someone would show up and get me out of trouble,” 3.1% of female students strongly agree with this statement. 19% of female students agree with this statement. 33.7% of female students have no comments. 34.4 of female students do not agree with this statement, and 9.8% of female students strongly disagree with this statement. To sum up, we learn that 22.1% of female students believe that when they have trouble, someone would show up and get them out of trouble, while 44.2% of females do not believe that.

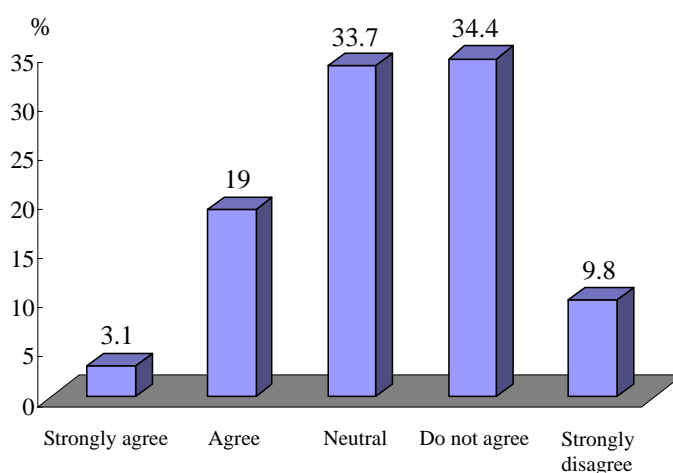


Figure 6. I believe that when I am in trouble, someone would show up and get me out of trouble

In Statement 6, as Figure 7, “I’m afraid to live independently,” 6.7% of female students strongly agree with this statement. 27% of female students agree with this statement. 0.6% of female students have no comments. 30.7 of female students do not agree with this statement, and 12.3% of female students strongly disagree with this statement. To sum up, we learn that 33.7% of female students are afraid of live independently, while 43% of females are not afraid of that.

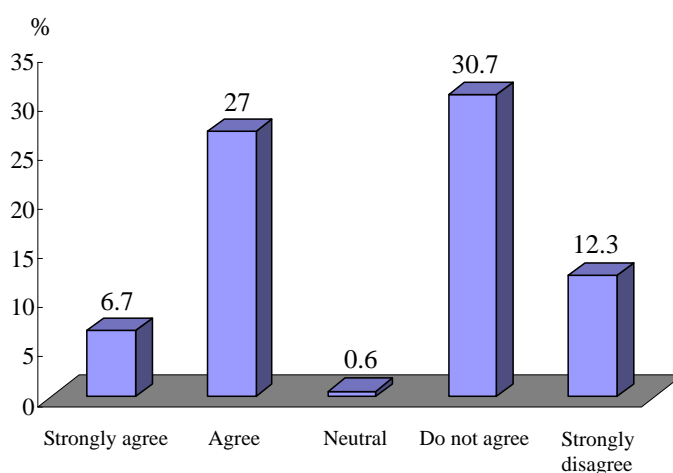
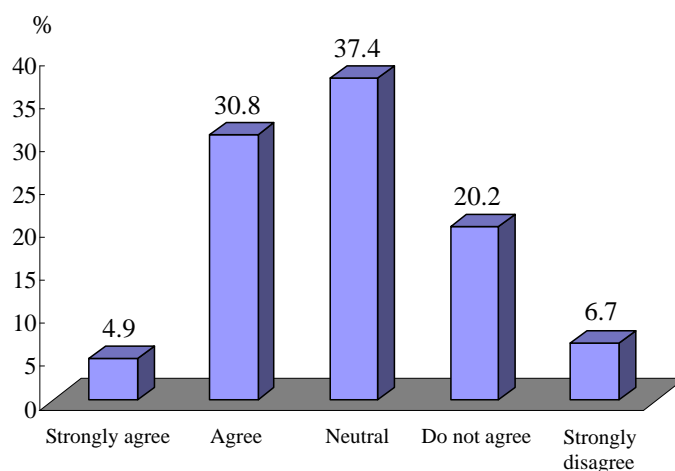


Figure 7. I'm afraid to live independently

In Statement 7, as Figure 8, “I’ve expected to be taken care of,” 4.9% of female students strongly agree with this statement. 30.8% of female students agree with this statement. 37.4% of female students have no comments. 20.2 of female students do

not agree with this statement, and 6.7% of female students strongly disagree with this statement. To sum up, we learn that 35.7% of female students have expected to be taken care of, while 26.9% of female have not expected to be taken care of.



In Statement 8, as Figure 8, I've expected to be taken care of
 In Statement 9, as Figure 9, "I believe that in order to attract my Prince Charming, I have to keep feminine characteristics, such as consideration, attentiveness, submission, obedience, etc.," 8.6% of female students strongly agree with this statement. 30.7% of female students agree with this statement. 44.2% of female students have no comments. 11.0% of female students do not agree with this statement, and 5.5% of female students strongly disagree with this statement. To sum up, we learn that 39.3% of female students feel that in order to attract their Prince Charming, they have to keep their feminine characteristics, while 16.5% of females do not agree with that.

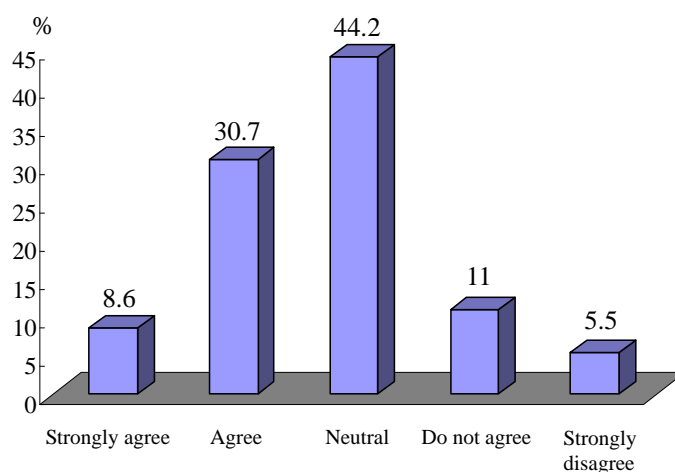


Figure 9. I believe that in order to attract my Prince Charming, I have to keep feminine characteristics, such as consideration, attentiveness, submission, obedience, etc

In addition, Person correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships among the research variables. The Pearson correlations among all variables are shown in Table 1. Several facts are revealed in the correlation matrix. Statement 1 ("I would like to have a pair of Cinderella's glass slippers.") is

significantly and positively correlated with Statement 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 except Statement 8 (“I believe that in order to attract my Prince Charming, I have to keep feminine characteristics, such as consideration, attentiveness, submission, obedience, etc.”). Statement 2 (“I feel that I am a person without self-confidence.”) is significantly and positively correlated with Statement 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 except Statement 5 (“I believe that when I am in trouble, someone would show up and get me out of trouble.”) and 8 (“I believe that in order to attract my Prince Charming, I have to keep feminine characteristics, such as consideration, attentiveness, submission, obedience, etc.”). Statement 3 (“I believe that someday my Prince Charming would show up and lead me to a happy new life.”) is significantly and positively correlated with Statement 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Statement 4 (“I feel everything I do is meaningless. But I believe that someday someone would show up to change my fate.”) is significantly and positively correlated with Statement 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Statement 5 (“I believe that when I am in trouble, someone would show up and get me out of trouble.”) is significantly and positively correlated with 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8 except Statement 2 (“I feel that I am a person without self-confidence.”). Statement 6 (“I’m afraid to live independently.”) is significant and positively correlated with Statement 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8. Statement 7 (“I’ve expected to be taken care of.”) is significantly and positively correlated with all the other variables except Statement 8 (“I believe that in order to attract my Prince Charming, I have to keep feminine characteristics, such as consideration, attentiveness, submission, obedience, etc.”). Statement 8 (“I believe that in order to attract my Prince Charming, I have to keep feminine characteristics, such as consideration, attentiveness, submission, obedience, etc.”) is significantly and positively correlated with Statement 3, 4, 5, and 7 except Statement 1 “I would like to have a pair of Cinderella’s glass slippers,” Statement 2 (“I feel that I am a person without self-confidence,”) and Statement 6 (“I’m afraid to live independently.”).



Table 1. Pearson Correlation Among All Statements

Statement	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	0.247**	0.313**	0.158*	0.180*	0.265**	0.253**	0.147
2		0.165*	0.269**	0.131	0.315**	0.181*	0.003
3			0.512**	0.458**	0.207**	0.491**	0.369**
4				0.451**	0.194*	0.350**	0.201*
5					0.250**	0.382**	0.255**
6						0.476**	0.049
7							0.372**

* is the p-value less than 0.05

** is the p-value less than 0.01

To triangulate the quantitative data obtained in the Cinderella complex questionnaire, the in-depth interviews were conducted to further explore these females' Cinderella complex. The responses from the voluntary interviewees were transcribed, analyzed, and synthesized. Some excerpts of the interviews are as follows.

It is found that some interviewees are eager to be taken care of by someone else.

*I am afraid to take the responsibility of my life. If it is possible, I would like to find a man to support my life. (F3)

*If there is any chance, I hope there is a man who can in charge of my life. It's not easy to live independently in Taiwan, you know. (F4)

Besides, they believe that after getting married, they would have a happy new life.

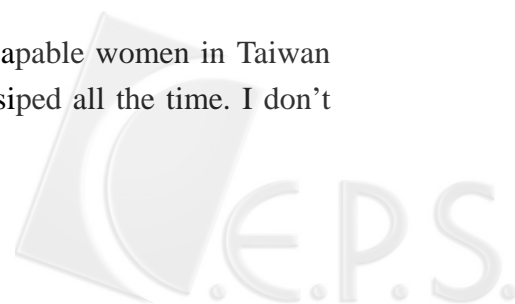
* I expect to marry my Mr. Right and start my happy new life. Isn't it nice to have someone get you out of trouble and lead you to happiness? (F12)

* My Mom always told me to find a man to get married and be a merry housewife. (F2)

Besides, they believe that being too independent, they would lose their Prince Charming and be criticized by others all the time.

*It's nice to get a job, but it would be better to find a good and rich man to get married. I would like to stay at home and take care of the family. It's not easy for females to fight in the society. If you succeed but remain single, people would say that you are tough. If unfortunately you get a divorce, people would criticize you.... (F6)

*I don't want to be a strong woman. You see, most capable women in Taiwan got a divorce.... They have been criticized and gossiped all the time. I don't want to be them, rich but lonely. (F9)



Discussion and Conclusion

From the above results of questionnaire and interviews, obviously, gender stereotypes are deeply internalized in these female students with the Cinderella complex. Since childhood, both men and women have been bombard by stereotyped gender images in romance fictions and popular medias (Dubino 1993, 105-108; Cheypator-Thomson, You, and Hardin 2000, 99). These gender images have been consciously or unconsciously incorporated into these female students' gender prescriptions governing their behaviors and into expectation of others. Being deeply influenced by the gender stereotypes, these female students with the Cinderella complex believe that their feminine behaviors, such as being nurturer, concerning more over personal relationship, and being caregivers for children and household would help them win their prince. (Vogel, Wester, Heesacker, and Madon 2003, 511). Hence, they are satisfied with being a sweet, conforming, and dependent little girl instead of being a strong, assertive, and independent girl (Hitchcock & Tompkins, 1987). Because in Taiwanese culture, there is no encouragement for women's independence and assertiveness, consequently, these females would gradually lose their skills in dealing with their environment and their problems. In turn, they seek for their men to solve their problems and their lives. In the result, they cannot build up their own identity but instead build up their identity in terms of their men's identity. These women are willing to subordinate themselves to win a man to rely on.

According to Dowling, the reasons why these women are willingly to subordinate themselves to men could be that they have never trained to have the idea of taking care of themselves, speaking up for themselves, or even asserting themselves (Dowling, 4). Instead, they are trained to avoid independence; that is, they have "the wish to be saved." It is nice to have their career, but if there is a chance to meet their Prince Charming, they would rather to marry up and to be protected by their "prince."

These female students with Cinderella complex worry that their independence and unfemininity would let them end up alone and be uncared for. The Cinderella fairy tales instill the ideology that women should know their place. Women should be feminine, while men should be masculine. Being dependent has been identified with feminine characteristic; therefore women have accepted this attitude for themselves for so long (Dowling, 101). However, dependence would cause the feelings of fear. Hence, afraid of change, women would in turn expect to find their Prince Charming to give them love, protection, security, or even identity (Dowling, 57-59; 140-144; Kelley 1994, 87-92). As a result, in order to seek for a Prince Charming, with the help of their feminine characteristics, these women would do their best to dress them up to make themselves marriageable.



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