

**Predictors of Attitudes Towards Abortion in Lebanese Females**

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Art in Psychology – Emphasis: Clinical at Haigazian University.

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Haigazian University

May 2022

*DEDICATION*

*This dissertation is dedicated to all Lebanese women standing against women mortality, fighting for their rights of bodily integrity, and hoping for a woman-centered approach to medical health.*

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“Voices and images of other women and girls billow from the walls  
around you and you know them, their voices are your own, sharing something you cannot name,  
and you claim them: your witnesses, your delusions.”

**Catherine Klatzker**

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### **Abstract**

Despite the fact that abortion has been pronounced as a reproductive right for women, it still is illegal in Lebanon and in many other Arab countries. This study investigated three possible predictors of attitudes towards abortion in a group of Lebanese females: the religious orientation of the participant, the political idealization of the participant, and the feminist attitude of the participant. In addition, the study proposed an explanation of the relationship between these variables based on the System Justification Theory. This quantitative study followed a correlational design and the survey was administered through a questionnaire to a purposive convenience sample. The study used four instruments: Krauss & Hood's (2013) Circumplex Religious Orientation Inventory (CROI); Duckitt et al.'s (2010) Conservatism and Traditionalism scales from the Authoritarianism – Conservatism – Traditionalism (ACT) model; Morgan's (1996) Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale; and Taylor & Whitehead's Abortion Attitude Scale. The study predicted that 1) a high level of a committed/ unreflective religious orientation, that a high level of conservatism and that a low level of feminism will predict criminalizing attitudes towards abortion; 2) Feminist attitudes will predict attitudes towards abortion more strongly than both religious orientation and conservative political idealization in Lebanese females; 3) Lower levels of education in the participants will negatively predict attitudes towards abortion in Lebanese females; 4) Having an unemployed mother will negatively predict attitudes towards abortion in Lebanese females. The study tested these hypotheses using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 25) and the statistical tests ran were a standard multiple regression and two independent-samples T-Tests. The statistical analyses showed support for the first hypothesis only. The other three hypotheses were rejected. Hence, the study showed that attitudes towards abortion are affected by many predictors

including religious orientations, political idealizations, and feminist attitudes. Future studies can try to replicate this study and target its limitation by choosing a larger sample size, a random sample that is more representative of Lebanese women, and a counterbalanced survey that controls for order and carryover effects.

*Keywords:* Religious orientation, conservative political idealization, negative feminist attitude, attitude towards abortion, system justification theory.

### **Predictors of Attitudes Towards Abortion in Lebanese Females**

Classifications of yearly developments worldwide stipulate that women's life conditions continue to be affected by corruption and absence of decent governance in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region (Bouzghaia, 2020). From a corrupted governance, to a patriarchal and traditional middle-eastern social structure that still favor males over females in childrearing (Kikoski, 2000), and that aims to shape the child into a compliant, non-rebellious member of the society (Kikoski, 2000) women in the Middle-East are left with very little space and opportunity for growth and empowerment. A study conducted in Lebanon by Kikoski (2000), showed that women encompass 37 percent of the Lebanese work force with a major underrepresentation in the "the upper, decision-making reaches of business, civil service, academia, and especially elective office" (p.138). However, Kikoski (2000) highlighted that the young generation are in quest of equality and are forging new identities that move away from the traditional position of their parents. This is specifically true when it comes to their career ambitions, their desire to choose their future partners on their own instead of following through with their parents' arranged plans for marriage, and their yearning to practice an equal way of childrearing. These examples demonstrate how the young generation of Lebanese women in the 2000s were fighting for autonomy and equality, two of the most basic feminists' demands (United Nations, 2017). What about bodily integrity? How far are Lebanese women from fighting for their right of exercising control over their own body, and specifically of having access to legalized abortion? This study aimed to study predictors of attitudes towards abortion in Lebanese females.

In a debate concerning attitudes towards abortion, people either claim to be pro-choice if they are supportive of women having the choice of seeking legalized abortion or they claim to be pro-life if they have criminalizing views towards abortion (Butler, 2015). Nevertheless, it should

be mentioned that this dichotomization neglects to shed light on the people that base their opinion on the circumstances surrounding the abortion (Butler, 2015). This study aimed to go beyond those ideological stances, in order to truly understand reproductive rights. Smith (2005) explained the need to see beyond those stances:

To develop an independent position, it is necessary to reject the pro-life versus pro-choice model for understanding reproductive justice. Many reproductive advocates have attempted to expand the definitions of either pro-life or pro-choice depending on which side of this divide they may rest. Unfortunately, they are trying to expand concepts that are inherently designed to exclude the experiences of most women, especially poor women, women of color, indigenous women, and women with disabilities (p.134).

One of the women's human rights that feminists fight for is the right to bodily integrity (Feather, 2020). According to the United Nations (2017), bodily integrity is the "right of a woman or girl to make autonomous decisions about her own body and reproductive functions" (p.1). The right to bodily integrity entails that a woman is supposed to be able to seek legalized abortion if she chooses to since being pregnant affects her body and her entire life (United Nations, 2017).

According to the United Nations (2017), countries that legalize abortion have the lowest rate of abortions. This is an indication that by stigmatizing safe medical procedures that terminate pregnancies, laws that discriminate against abortion are putting women's lives at risk instead of succeeding at putting an end to abortions. It was shown by the World Health Organization (WHO) that in countries where induced abortion is illegal, most women with little financial resources do not get access to safe abortion (United Nations, 2017). More specifically, they

stated that three out of four abortions are unsafe in countries with laws discriminating against abortion while one out of ten abortions are unsafe in countries with no laws discriminating against abortion. Unsafe abortions have caused 47,000 deaths per year and there is no proof that indicates that illegalizing abortion will reduce the number of abortions performed (United Nations, 2017).

Knowing that abortion is illegal in Lebanon (Fathallah, 2019), this study intended to understand the reasons that are impairing women from fighting for their reproductive rights in this country by exploring the factors that lead people to stand for the illegalization of abortion.

Even though not all religions forbid abortion (Kaddour et al., 2002), religiosity has been repeatedly shown to predict negative attitudes towards abortion (Patel & Johns, 2009). The religious leaders' fear of advocating for premarital sex is one of the major factors underlining this predictive relationship (Kaddour et al., 2002). While Christianity is one of the religions that completely prohibit abortion, many nations that are primarily Christian such as France do not permit religion to dictate their reproductive health laws (Ely, 2019). However, the interchange of influence among Lebanese religious leaders and Lebanese politicians is a crucial factor in the course of policy making as far as the reproductive health laws are concerned in Lebanon (Kaddour et al., 2002).

Rye & Underhill (2019) found that individuals who follow religious ideals regularly also follow conservative ideals specifically on matters - such as abortion - that have an ethical side to it. Hence, another factor that has been repetitively shown to have predicted criminalizing views towards abortion is conservatism. Conservatism is defined as an ideology characterized by a devotion to traditional standards and an admiration of the authorities (Rye & Underhill, 2019). As abortion alleviates some of the costs of premarital sex and thus makes it less

problematic, conservatives might view it as a threat to the sacredness of the known societal traditions (Rye & Underhill, 2019).

According to Sherwin (1991) a feminist approach to abortion would naturally view the woman herself as the main object of importance when an aborting decision has to be made. Hence, a feminist approach to abortion cannot disregard the amount of oppression that women - particularly women from vulnerable environments - are facing due to the illegalization of abortion (Sherwin, 1991). Nevertheless, Sherwin (1991) clarified that when an abortion is in question, people who concentrate most their attention on the moral standing of the growing fetus and who choose to disregard the fact that a pregnancy has major repercussions on a woman's entire life, tend to have non-feminist ideologies that invalidate the experience of the pregnant women. When the pregnant woman's value is reduced to a fetus carrier, the approach is clearly one that stands against the values of feminism. Gender role attitudes, which are generally one manifestation of feminist attitudes (Frieze & McHugh, 1998) have been found to predict attitudes towards abortion (Wang & Buffalo, 2004).

### **Rationale of the Study**

The problem of abortion is not addressed in the literature the way it is addressed in this study. Researchers couldn't study abortion as a voluntary decision before it was legalized in the US and their research experienced a major shift after the legal changes (Dixon et al., 1984). Hence, the fact that abortion is still illegal in Lebanon sheds some light on the reason behind the little number of abortion-related research in this area of the world. There are no official statistics to determine the abortion rate in Lebanon with accuracy (CEDAW, 2014). The only study that targeted attitudes towards abortion in Lebanon found that most positive attitudes towards abortion were associated to those women who sought abortion after rape and that the smallest

proportion of positive attitudes towards abortion were associated to those pregnant women who sought abortion without telling their husbands (Fathallah, 2019). However, this was not enough to fully understand the social-cultural dynamics that are impairing women from accessing their reproductive rights in Lebanon. Therefore, the current study filled an important gap in the literature. Moreover, no suggestions were found by researchers in Lebanon as the topic has not been previously targeted with abortion being illegal in Lebanon.

### **Research Question**

The current study aimed to answer the following research question: What factors predict criminalizing attitudes towards abortion in Lebanese females?

### **Significance of the Study**

#### *Theoretical Significance*

The instrumentalization of women's bodies is behind the discrimination women survive during their access to health services which leads to maternal morbidity (UN, 2017). Shalev (2000) suggested that in order for us to reach a women-centered approach to reproductive health, we need to start enabling women to exercise their reproductive autonomy and to trust them in making decisions as far as their own reproductive health is concerned. Nevertheless, the right to reproductive autonomy won't be reached before women's status in society evolves. One way in which women's status in society can be changed is by freeing her from discrimination and judgement (Shalev, 2000). A study that investigates predictors of criminalizing views towards abortion helps shed light on the factors prejudicing against women empowerment. The UN Arab Human Development Report from 2002 stated, that the three shortages of liberty, empowerment of women, and information represent the key challenge to the progress in the Arab region (Darhour & Dahelrup, 2020). Therefore, the more knowledge we have, the more developed the

region that we live in becomes, and the more accessible it will be for our population to get the human rights they deserve.

### *Practical Significance*

Three successful methods were used in calling for legal reform in Turkey and one of them is research explaining more about abortion (Hessini, 2007). Hence this research could advocate for legal reform in Lebanon.

Moreover, understanding the factors that are impairing the process of women empowerment in Lebanon also has practical clinical significance. Studies suggested that the main psychosocial barrier that women who access post-abortion care experience is stigmatization (Mohamed et al., 2018). What these women need instead is a suitable stigma-free care that a decriminalized response would be able to provide (BMA, 2017). Therefore, criminalizing abortion has detrimental effects on some women's mental health as it reinforces their stigmatization and hence labels them as dishonorable, shameful, and revolting (Cook & Dickens, 2014). Deconstructing the patriarchal structure that we live in is a process that will eventually lead to better mental and physical wellbeing in women as it has been shown that women empowerment is positively correlated with better wellbeing in women (Fielding, 2013).

Furthermore, the controversy over abortion can be clouding for clinicians who are dealing with patients who have undergone an abortion. According to Dadlez and Andrews (2010), the argument that abortion kills the women who go through with them institutes a tactic used by the pro-life movement to enhance urgings about fetal rights. They consider that the purpose behind the post-abortion syndrome is to establish that abortion psychologically troubles women and to complicate any efforts to decriminalize abortion. Moreover, they argued that the post-abortion syndrome does not exist and that the psychological harms that are claimed to be an effect of

abortion are actually due to different causes (Dadlez & Andrews, 2010). These claims were confirmed by other studies such as the Swedish study on Posttraumatic stress among women. Lundell et al. (2013), found that the majority of the few women who developed a post-traumatic stress disorder after abortion did so due to previous traumas that were unrelated to the induced abortion. Another study by Major et al. (2000), stated that the majority of women who have undergone an induced abortion do not in fact go through any psychological difficulties. The authors went on and explained that the little percentage of women who do face psychological problems tend to have a history of a mental illness such as depression. Thus, debunking these myths that have been built around abortion is crucial for clinicians dealing with patients who have undergone an induced abortion. Having a clinician believe that the cause of his or her patient's psychological problems is the abortion when in fact it is not, can be misleading and counterproductive to the patient's treatment course and recovery.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### International Feminism

Women's convention is the main international human rights agreement that speaks on the discrimination against women (Shalev, 2000). This convention recognized the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as a committee whose main role is to oversee the execution of the Convention's agreements (Shalev, 2000). In the beginnings of the 80s, the CEDAW committee and international feminism got majorly acknowledged and so countries were forced to consider the modification of their cultural characteristics in a way that would fit the international standards of feminism (Bouzghaia, 2020).

When the right to bodily integrity is enforced by the country through access to legalized abortion, birth control, appropriate sex education and the illegalization of domestic abuse, women become empowered (Feather, 2020). The decision of ending a pregnancy is mainly that of the woman who's pregnant as it will affect her life the most (United Nations, 2017). Hence, according to the women's right to bodily integrity, women have to be allowed to seek legalized abortion upon their demand during the first trimester when the zygote is still made up of unindividualized cells (United Nations, 2017).

The abortion right was also pronounced by the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) that took place in Egypt in 1994. This conference highlighted a new model in discussing health and human reproduction. According to Shalev (2000), this model marked a newly developed link between human rights and health based on women empowerment. Shalev (2000), stated that after a long course of negotiation including 180 states,

the ICPD generated a Programme of Action that pronounced the right of women to their reproductive autonomy as a principle value in the creation of new reproductive health agendas. Three definitions were highlighted in Shalev's (2000) article on sexual and reproductive health: that of reproductive health, that of autonomy, and that of reproductive autonomy. Reproductive health is indicated by a perfect level of well-being that encompasses the individual's external and internal states as far as the reproductive system is concerned. Autonomy is defined as the right of a woman to be dealt with as an independent individual who has the right and the needed competence to make her own decisions as far as her own health is concerned. The right of women to their reproductive autonomy refers to the right of women to decide whether they want a child or not, to choose if they want to continue or end their pregnancy and to decide on their favorite technique of contraception.

### **Feminism in Lebanon**

Feminism in Lebanon went through four different waves. It started by demanding the right of women to vote and get educated and ended by fighting domestic violence and sexism for equality (Stephan, 2014). The fourth and current wave observed the development of a radical feminist discourse that materialized in Nasawiya, a feminist collective that lasted from 2009 till 2012. According to Moughalian & Ammar (2019), feminists' organizations shifted from being homogeneous and developed into smaller, more heterogeneous groups of radical feminists with different goals. Moughalian & Ammar (2019) added that this young generation of feminists was described by its "intersectionality" as it connected body autonomy, queer rights, sex positivity, and other movements to feminism. Two types of feminists' actors exist in Lebanon: Reformists and Radical feminists. The principal difference between the two is their perception of state funds with reformists trying to make the best out of them even if it means aligning their agendas with

the state's agendas and the radical feminists considering them a fraction of the patriarchal system they are trying to eradicate (Moughalian & Ammar, 2019).

Women's rights are still limited in Lebanon despite the fact that the Lebanese government endorsed the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), for their ratification excluded a couple of articles from the convention (Fathallah, 2019). According to Fathallah (2019) the excluded articles concern the "equal rights with respect to nationality of the children" (p.23), "equal rights, divorce rights, parenting, custody of children" (p.23) and the "administration of the convention and arbitration in the event of a dispute between state parties" (p.23). Nevertheless, Fathallah (2019) highlighted that in 2015, the UN CEDAW invited Lebanon to decriminalize abortion at least in cases where the pregnancy indicates a danger to the woman's life or health, in cases where the pregnancy follows rape and incest, and in cases of severe damage to the fetus. Subsequently, in 2018, multiple UN foundations requested from Lebanon to build a new national plan for sexual and reproductive rights (Fathallah, 2019).

Examining abortion and feminism in Lebanon is not fully feasible without considering the country's political and social system. According to Fathallah (2019), Lebanon has been suffering from an instability in the political system that has resulted in the emergence of a systematic corruption in the Lebanese population and a complete governmental detachment from social concerns. Fathallah (2019) added that the Lebanese population's most elementary rights and needs such as medical services, food and housing, schooling, and working are not being satisfied and that inequities are frequent across different social classes and genders. Highlighting the context in which women's rights organizations function is essential in comprehending why abortion has not yet been targeted by these organizations. Women's rights organizations in

Lebanon are still trying to call out for some of the more basic women rights that are not even considered controversial in our society, such as violence against women (Fathallah, 2019).

Abortion cannot take priority in a country in which the economy is fading, people are losing their jobs, poverty is peeking and the national dept is hitting a frightening rate (Kaddour et al., 2002).

Nevertheless, ever since the Lebanese revolution against corruption started on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October of the year 2019, Lebanese women have been joining the protests, and calling for sexual and reproductive rights. These actions render the likelihood of social development a more concrete hope than it used to be (Fathallah, 2019).

### **Abortion in the MENA Region**

“The Middle East and North African (MENA) region, stretching from Morocco to Iran, is highly diverse in levels of socio-economic development, political systems, health indicators, women’s status, official interpretations of Islam and individual religious expression” (Hessini, 2007, p.75). According to Hessini (2007), the diversity of the Islamic region has resulted in different schools of interpretation and thus in a noteworthy sum of different Islamic laws entitled Shari’a that are differently applied in each country of the MENA region. In his article on abortion and Islam, Hessini (2007), explained that the problem in religious leaders having an essential role in law reform is that our patriarchal society allocates the responsibility of interpreting religious texts solely to males as only males are allowed to assist as muftis. For example, a Mufti in Egypt argued that victims of rape should be able to access abortions and reconstructive hymen surgeries in order to preserve their virginity and maintain their desirability for marriage. While this Mufti saw that the main concern of a woman who survived rape is what renders her desirable for marriage - a social construct that was created by the same patriarchal and traditional society that this Mufti is a part of - a noteworthy group of women initiated a

movement in Egypt entitled the Women and Memory Forum that claims the right to interpret Islamic texts from a feminist lens (Hessini, 2007).

Moreover, the necessity for reproductive health services is growing each day in the MENA region as the age at which the population is practicing sexual activities is decreasing and the age at which the population is averagely getting married at is increasing. This expands the gap in which unwanted pregnancies mostly take place (Hessini, 2007). Hessini (2007) stated that statistically speaking, 10% of pregnancies are ended through abortion and 6% of maternal deaths in the region are caused by abortion.

Historically, abortion was accepted and prevalent in countries such as Egypt and Turkey until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is when the medical field became professional and it was no longer acceptable for abortion procedures to be completed by midwives. These procedures became reserved for physicians only (Hessini, 2007). Several meetings combining religious leaders and health professionals were held in the 1960s in the intention of initiating family planning programmes in the region (Hessini, 2007). A pan-Islamic conference that took place in 1965 in Egypt and another one that took place in 1969 in Kuala Lumpur permitted the practice of birth control for economic motives. The motives were characterized by the incapacity of the parents to provide for more children (Hessini, 2007). These conferences were an important development that contradicted previous Islamic interpretations that opposed abortion based on the Qur'anic exerts that state that Allah has a way of providing for everyone (Hessini, 2007). Another conference held in Morocco in 1971 on Islam and family planning stated that Islam: authorizes the use of birth control to expand the time between different births; prohibits sterilization except in cases of individual urgency; and bans abortion after month four of the pregnancy except in cases of imminence to the life of the pregnant women (Hessini, 2007).

There are two commonalities across the different countries of the MENA region: family planning has become incorporated in all the MENA region and abortion is not allowed in the MENA region after the fourth month of pregnancy unless the woman's life is at risk. Nonetheless, attitudes towards abortion before the fourth month of pregnancy are still divergent in different countries of the MENA region (Hessini, 2007). The countries are separated in three different categories based on their interpretation of Islam and on their previous colonial laws: some have liberal laws, some have somewhat restrictive laws, and some have very restrictive laws (Hessini, 2007).

The countries that have liberal laws in the MENA region are Tunisia and Turkey (Hessini, 2007). Change began in Tunisia when the old penal code was replaced in 1965 by a new one that permitted abortion on demand if: it was to be executed during the first trimester; the woman had a minimum of five living children; and a written consensus of both partners was acquired (Hessini, 2007). This was not enough as unsafe abortions continued to occur when the pregnant women were not able to meet the conditions set by the penal code (Hessini, 2007). Hence some women advocates demanded an amendment in the law. The amendment was accomplished in 1973 and the husband's approval was no longer required (Hessini, 2007). The new law "allowed abortion for health and social indications and in cases of fetal impairment in the first trimester when performed by a qualified physician in a public or private hospital or clinic, and after this period for risk to the woman's physical or mental health and fetal impairment" (Hessini, 2007, p.79). Hence Tunisia was the first country in the MENA region to follow a liberal law that allows abortion without it requiring spousal approval or marriage, to oppose polygamy, and to give men and women equal rights of divorce due to their progressive way of interpreting Islam (Hessini, 2007). On the other hand, Turkey introduced a law in 1983

allowing abortion on demand before ten weeks of pregnancy and for medical causes before 24 weeks of pregnancy (Hessini, 2007). Turkey also required spousal or parental approval in the practical implementation of the procedure. However, the requirement was not introduced in the law in order to avoid taking any criminal action in case an abortion was performed without a spousal or a parental consent (Hessini, 2007). The countries that have somewhat restrictive laws in the MENA region are: Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Palestine (Hessini, 2007). Morocco, Palestine and Saudi Arabia allow abortion when a woman's life and health are at stake (Hessini, 2007). Algeria and Jordan allow abortion when a woman's life and each of her mental and physical health are endangered (Hessini, 2007). Kuwait and Qatar allow abortion when a woman's physical and mental health are at risk and in cases of fetal impairment (Hessini, 2007). The countries that have very restrictive laws in the MENA region are: Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Syria, Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Iran, and Sudan (Hessini, 2007). These countries only allow abortion when a woman's life is at stake (Hessini, 2007).

### **Abortion in Lebanon**

“The Lebanese Penal Code established in 1943 both outright prohibits abortion under all circumstances and bans the selling of substances used to induce abortion” (Fathallah, 2019, p.23). According to article 539 of the Penal code, abortion is illegal in Lebanon and according to article 541 of the Penal code, the price that a woman has to pay for inducing an abortion is imprisonment for a period of six months to three years (CEDAW, 2014). The law also punishes the individual performing the abortion (Kaddour et al., 2002). However, article 545 states that the woman who gets an abortion to preserve her honor gets a diminished sentence along with the individual who aborted her (Fathallah, 2019). Reasons for conserving a woman's honor include pregnancy resulting from premarital sex and pregnancy caused by rape (Fathallah, 2019).

“Presidential Decree No. 13187, dated October 20, 1969, reaffirms the prohibition of abortion but modifies the Penal Code by permitting it if needed to save the pregnant woman’s life (therapeutic abortion)” (Fathallah, 2019, p.23). A therapeutic abortion is one that is agreed upon by two physicians besides the attending doctor himself (Fathallah, 2019). All three physicians must examine the woman and agree that an aborting procedure is the only way to save the woman’s life (Fathallah, 2019).

A certain country’s abortion law is a mirror of its gender roles, the type of relationship between the government and the country’s religious leaders, and the way its policymaking system operates (Kaddour et al., 2002). Hence, Lebanon’s illegalization of abortion reflects both the tight relationship between Lebanon’s government and its religious leaders and the way the policymaking system does not take into consideration the needs of its community (Kaddour et al., 2002). This is translated by the way the Lebanese government depends on the country’s religious leaders and sectarianism for empowerment and the way the religious leaders maintain their power over the county’s policies through their relationship with the Lebanese politicians (Kaddour et al., 2002). One possible reason behind the resistance to legalizing abortion is the maintenance of Lebanon’s patriarchal society. The kind of society that is required for the patriarchy to remain is one in which females lack power even over their own bodies (Kaddour et al., 2002).

Despite the fact that the criminalization of abortion creates a huge health concern in Lebanon, there still is a considerable lack in: attempts to change this law and in research examining the negative impacts of this law on the Lebanese population (Kaddour et al., 2002). This lack creates the illusion that abortion is not a problematic issue in our community, which is far from correct (Kaddour et al., 2002) as it has major consequences on both the health

professionals and the Lebanese women (Fathallah, 2019). Instead of accepting or refusing abortion surgeries according to what they believe in, health practitioners either feel pressured to refuse aborting clients due to its illegalization or feel pressured to fake records of having performed abortions to protect themselves from the law (Fathallah, 2019). Moreover, instead of having the choice to seek abortions as an individual right, Lebanese women are not only risking legal action to be taken towards them if they seek abortion, but they are also having to deal with the physician's stigma. Most of the physicians' stigma is apparent as their main motivation to abort is the preservation of the current social norms and not the advocacy for women's rights (Fathallah, 2019). Hence, Lebanese women and health practitioners are continuously risking imprisonment by seeking and performing abortion and policy makers are sustaining the community's chaotic state by constantly ignoring illegal action (Kaddour et al., 2002). The abortion problem is trapped in a vicious cycle: policy makers who neglect the implementation of the law and recipients who are benefiting from the loose application of the established policies (Kaddour et al., 2002).

Accurate statistics revealing abortion prevalence in Lebanon are virtually non-existent (Fathallah, 2019). A couple of studies have tried to estimate an approximate number in the region. A study that tried to examine the number of abortions in all the MENA countries stated that there were 177,298 abortions in Lebanon from 1995 to 2000 from which 85 women died due to unsafe abortions (Hessini, 2007). Another study revealed that 36% of the pregnancies in developing countries are unwanted and 20% of these unwanted pregnancies will be aborted (Kaddour et al., 2002).

### **Risks of Illegal Abortion in Lebanon**

A Study that examined the effect of illegalizing abortion in Lebanon specifically stated the socioeconomic background was one of the predictors of the ability of the women to access safe abortions (Fathallah, 2019). Hence, women with less economic resources are more likely to seek an unsafe abortion (Fathallah, 2019). Another predictor of a Lebanese woman's access to safe abortion is her marital status as being single makes the woman more likely to face stigma and more likely to be shamed by the people she seeks help from in the Lebanese community (Fathallah, 2019). Additionally, illegalizing abortion also burdens health professionals by putting them under the pressure of being imprisoned and by limiting their access to scientific research regarding abortion (Fathallah, 2019). In addition to the social stigma and the legal consequences highlighted in the previous research, legalizing abortion also leads to "severe medical complications such as sepsis, hemorrhage, uterine perforation and reproductive tract infections" (Kaddour et al., 2002, p.56). Furthermore, there is an economic burden that stems from illegalizing abortion, for the procedure is not covered by medical insurance and the person who is performing the abortion charges for both the procedure and for risking imprisonment (Kaddour et al., 2002). An estimation of the cost of an abortion procedure was found to vary between \$300 and \$1200 depending on whether the procedure will take place in a private clinic or a hospital room (Kaddour et al., 2002).

The illegalization of abortion in Lebanon might not be as much of a barrier for Lebanese women to access safe abortion as it is in other MENA countries. However, the process of accessing safe abortion is still nowhere near simple (Fathallah, 2019). The process of accessing safe abortion has become a privilege depending on the woman's capacity to discuss with partners, to find allies, and to secure physicians who are willing to help which further highlights

the patriarchal Lebanese society that favors inequalities between people with different socioeconomic resources (Fathallah, 2019). Hence women who do not have their partner's approval, who have little socioeconomic resources and no allies are the most vulnerable and at a high risk of not having access to safe abortion.

### **Predictors of Attitudes Towards Abortion**

This study took into account both the many previous models that highlighted demographical variables in explaining reasons behind attitudes towards abortion (Wang & Buffalo, 2004) and Reiss' (1980, 1986) theory that suggested a link between sexual attitudes and social-cultural factors (Wang & Buffalo, 2004). The theory explained the role of social-cultural factors in determining people's sexual attitudes by asserting a link between social-cultural factors and people's attitude towards gender roles and by asserting another link between gender roles' perceptions and people's sexual attitudes (Wang & Buffalo, 2004). The theory was further tested and supported in Wang & Buffalo's study (2004). Additionally, the data of the General Social Survey (GSS) -a periodical national study that assesses people's attitudes towards abortion – highlights the importance of “education, gender-role attitudes, fundamentalists beliefs, and motivation to have children” in determining attitudes towards abortion (Wang & Buffalo, 2004, p.102).

Predictors of attitudes towards abortion could thus be divided into demographic and social-cultural variables. Demographic variables cover sex (Hall & Ferree, 1986) and education (Hall & Ferree, 1986). Social- cultural variables cover fundamentalist beliefs (Patel & Johns, 2009; Wang & Buffalo, 2004), attitudes on gender-roles (Wang & Buffalo, 2004), and liberal-conservative attitudes (Hall & Ferree, 1986).

Sex is an assumed predictor of attitudes towards abortion. Many studies suggest that females appreciate egalitarian gender roles more often than their male counterparts (Patel & Johns, 2009). The differences in attitudes towards abortion between men and women was noteworthy and maintained in many different countries and through many different studies (Loll & Hall, 2018). Nevertheless, other studies have found that this variable has had inconsistent results overall (Wang & Buffalo, 2004).

Education is a more certain predictor of attitudes towards abortion as it enriches people's knowledge levels and also aids in developing people's beliefs into egalitarian ones with a higher tolerance towards sexual materials (Wang & Buffalo, 2004). Higher levels of education lead to more supporting attitudes towards abortion, for education has been associated with more feminist attitudes (Patel & Johns, 2009). Those with advanced levels of education seem to show a declined enthusiasm for children, and accordingly an increased acceptance of abortion (Wang & Buffalo, 2004). Glick, Lameiras and Castro (2002) have shown through their research that the educational level is the most powerful predictor of the least sexist attitudes (Patel & Johns, 2009).

Religiosity shown by fundamentalist's beliefs has been made known to be a predictor of attitudes towards abortion (Wang & Buffalo, 2004) as it is said that lower levels of religiosity predict more positive attitudes towards abortion and higher levels of religiosity predict more negative attitudes towards abortion (Patel & Johns, 2009). This relationship was confirmed and replicated in 1983 by Legge, in 1979 by McIntosh, Alston and Alston and in 2005 by Hess and Rueb (Taylor & Whitehead, 2014). However, it is not obvious to assume in a country such as Lebanon as there are so many diverse religious affiliations and interpretations when it comes to the permissibility of abortion (Fathallah, 2019). « Lebanon is considered one of the most

religiously diverse countries in the Middle East, with 18 officially recognized religious groups, including 4 Muslim groups and 12 Christian groups plus Jewish people and the Druze » (Badaan et al., 2019, p.4). While Druze and Christian religions do not allow abortions, the Islamic religion is not necessarily against it (Fathallah, 2019). Many different interpretations regarding the permissibility of abortion were brought up in the Islamic religion and these resulted in a total of four different positions when discussing abortion prior to ensoulment (Hessini, 2007). Some scholars believe that abortion is allowed; some state that it is only permitted in specific situations; some think that it is not recommended; and some are positive that it is not allowed (Hessini, 2007). Thus, as Druze and Christian beliefs are clear predictors of opposing attitudes towards abortion, there still is a wide range of different interpretations regarding abortion in the Islamic religion (Hessini, 2007).

Peterson and Mauss (1976) suggested that conservatism and liberalism could be one of the factors predicting attitudes towards abortion as people in each side of the continuum tend to base their beliefs on different moral foundations (Day et al., 2014). The five moral foundations that have been previously proposed by researchers are « harm, fairness, ingroup, authority, and purity » (Day et al., 2014, p.1560). Liberals are more likely to base their attitudes and beliefs on the moral foundations of harm and fairness. Conservatives are more likely to base their attitudes and beliefs on the moral foundations of ingroup, authority, and purity (Day et al., 2014). Hence, liberals are more likely to support the pro-choice stance and conservatives are more likely to support the pro-life stance (Poteat & Mereish, 2012).

Gender role attitudes is another highlighted predictor of attitudes towards abortion in the literature. Indeed, some studies confirmed this relationship by suggesting that those who approve of a traditional role for women to follow are less likely to claim to be prochoice than those who

endorse equality in women's roles (Wang & Buffalo, 2004). However, some studies have suggested that this variable has mixed results on attitudes towards abortion (Patel & Johns, 2009). Attitudes towards women and women roles are considered a part of a larger continuum that contains attitudes towards feminism (Frieze & McHugh, 1998). Feminists are fighting for women's autonomy in all aspects of life, including reproductive autonomy (Alex & Hammarstrom, 2004). For feminists, abortion is part of a broader issue that tackles a woman's right to have complete authority over her own body (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004). Hence, opinions on abortion are representative of a major feminist concern that has been at the heart of the feminist agenda for years (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004).

### **System Justification Theory**

One theory that could further explain how the suggested social- cultural variables of religiosity, political conservatism and feminism could predict attitudes towards abortion is the System Justification Theory proposed by Jost and Banaji in 1994 (Jost, 2018). By « system », the authors mean any « social, economic, or political arrangements in which multiple individuals (and/or groups) are embedded » (Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014, p.414). The theory suggests that human beings preserve and support the system they're exposed to through a motivated process of justification of the setbacks included in the system (Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014). The intensity of the motivation in each individual depends on many different internal and external variables (Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014). Internal variables consist of epistemic, existential and relational individual differences and external variables consist of situational circumstances and threats that trigger the motivated process (Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014).

This motivated process is one that could manifest itself unconsciously through actions such as stereotyping, maintaining inequality and embracing certain religious and political beliefs

that the system is built on (Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014). One of the most remarkable assumptions entailed by this theory is that sometimes members of vulnerable groups are to a certain extent responsible of the difficulties they suffer from. By justifying the injustices of the system and thus maintaining them, members of vulnerable groups unconsciously do so in the hopes of attenuating some of the emotional afflictions imposed on them (Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014). Hence, this theory is key in understanding why some women would find it more instinctive to help maintain the injustices they face than to fight for their own rights. More specifically, the system justification theory is instrumental in explaining why some women will choose to criminalize abortion and preserve its illegalization when it has severe risks from high financial costs to women mortality instead of choose to fight for what has been pronounced a reproductive right for women.

### ***System Justification and Religiosity***

Furthermore, system justification theory is enmeshed in religiosity. As it was reaffirmed by the terror management theory, in cases of elevated mortality prominence, the preservation and the rationalization of the worldview is supposed to be heightened, thus reducing acceptance of contrasting opinions and social, cultural, and political substitutes (Jost et al., 2003). Motivated by their fear of death, people tend to justify and endorse the criminalization of abortion when it is declared by a religion that helps them transcend death metaphorically (Jost et al., 2003).

### ***System Justification and Conservatism***

System justification theory is further implied in conservatism. It was found that conservatism is positively correlated with high levels of system justification (Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014). Jost et al. (2003) claim that fear and ambiguity are fundamentally connected to the central beliefs of political conservatives in fighting social change and in defending inequity.

Hence motivated by their urge to cope with triggered feelings of fear, political conservatives tend to justify the hegemony of some groups of people over other groups of people by asserting paternalistic ideas that implicate that a group of dominant people are needed to guide and supervise a group of subordinate people (Jost et al., 2003). Moreover, motivated with urges to cope with feelings of uncertainty, conservatives tend to justify the known and the traditional structures by highlighting the avoidance of failure that could be engendered by notions that are new and liberal (Jost et al., 2003). Therefore, Lebanese conservatives are more likely to feel comfortable maintaining the law on abortion as it is in order to avoid the anxiety that comes with the uncertainty of new laws.

### ***System Justification and Feminism***

System justification theory is implicated in each one of the predictor variables in this study. One way of justifying the inequality between gender roles is by stating that even though powers are not wielded equally, they are balanced as women employ their power in the home environment and men employ their power in the work environment (Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014). This process of justification that is motivated by the urge to diminish the emotional distress caused by the inequality between gender roles is indeed contributing to the restriction of women empowerment in the workforce. Thus, as feminism became a menace to the apparent rightfulness of the system (Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014) and hence increased perceived injustices and felt emotional afflictions, some women may choose to oppose feminism – more specifically, the legalization of abortion as it is one the major demands of feminism.

### **Hypotheses**

Based on the above discussed review of literature, the following are the four investigated hypotheses of the study:

- 1) A high committed/unreflective religious orientation (as measured by the circumplex religious orientation inventory) as well as a high conservative political idealization (as measured by the conservatism and traditionalism scales from the Authoritarianism -Conservatism - Traditionalism (ACT) model) and a negative feminist attitude (as measured by the liberal feminist attitude and ideology scale) will negatively predict attitudes towards abortion (as measured by the abortion attitude scale) in Lebanese females.
- 2) Feminist attitudes (as measured by the liberal feminist attitude and ideology scale) will predict attitudes towards abortion (as measured by the abortion attitude scale) more strongly than both religious orientation and conservative political idealization in Lebanese females.
- 3) Lower levels of education in the participants will negatively predict attitudes towards abortion in Lebanese females.
- 4) Having an unemployed mother will negatively predict attitudes towards abortion in Lebanese females.

## Chapter 3

### Method

#### Design

This is a quantitative study that followed a cross-sectional correlational design. It aimed to predict a relationship between the predictor variables of committed/unreflective religious orientations, negative feminist attitudes, and conservative political idealizations on the outcome variable of attitudes towards abortion. The survey was done through a group-administered questionnaire.

#### Participants

The sample that we initially hoped to aim for in this study consisted of  $N= 759$  participants as it was calculated using G power, knowing that we had eight predictor scores - one for religiosity, three for feminism, two for political conservatism, and two for demographics- and that we were expecting a small effect size, an alpha level of  $\alpha = .05$  and a power of .80. However, as this number was difficult to attain practically, the study achieved a sample size of  $N=112$  knowing that 109 was the calculated sample size using G power for a medium effect size with eight predictor variables, an alpha level of  $\alpha = .05$  and a power of .80.

We adapted a convenience, purposive, and snowball sampling method. The inclusion criteria of the participants were the following: they must be 18 years or older; they must be women; they must have an access to a university level education; and they must be competent in the English language. Hence, the population in the study consisted of Lebanese females who had access to a university level of education. Choosing this specific female population is based on the fact that they are the educated generation that is the most resourceful and that is assumed to be

the one that will hopefully fight for change in the near future. By using a sample fully composed of females, we could help control for the possible effect of gender on attitudes towards abortion (Patel & Johns, 2009). Hence understanding what factors predict the ongoing criminalizing views towards abortion vs. what factors predict empowering attitudes towards abortion in this specific population is key for its success in this fight.

Consent of participation in this research (See Appendix B) study was taken from all participants and referrals were made in case of adverse impact. As far as the risk benefit ratio of the study was concerned, the risk in this study was mainly limited to some participants getting triggered only in cases of previous negative experiences of abortion. Nevertheless, the results of the study could help destigmatize abortion in the long run and more importantly are a step forward in calling for legal reform regarding abortion laws in Lebanon. On a simpler note, this study offered these women the opportunity to state their opinion on a very much present issue that is still considered a taboo in our society. Hence, even if it was only by filling a questionnaire anonymously, participating in this research would have given them a space to share their inner thoughts on the matter. Finally, the results of this study are going to start filling a gap in our research databases when it comes to abortion in Lebanon.

### **Instruments**

The current study used four instruments: Krauss & Hood's (2013) Circumplex Religious Orientation Inventory (CROI) to measure the construct of religious orientation (See Appendix F); Duckitt et al.'s (2010) Conservatism and Traditionalism scales (See Appendix H) from the Authoritarianism – Conservatism – Traditionalism (ACT) model to measure the construct of political conservatism; Morgan's (1996) Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale (See Appendix G) to measure the construct of feminists' attitudes; and Taylor & Whitehead's

Abortion Attitude Scale (See Appendix E) to measure the construct of abortion attitudes. The scales were all reproduced in the appendix as a permission was obtained from the authors to both use their scales and reproduce it in the appendix. The scales were used in the English language as the participants were competent in the English language. The demographic section included: age, occupation, level of education (undergraduate studies or graduate studies), and occupational status of the mother (employed or unemployed). The instruments mentioned above, together with the demographic section, a consent of participation and a note including possible referral contacts constituted the survey that was used in the study.

### *Circumplex Religious Orientation Inventory*

The first predictor variable in this study was the committed/unreflective religious orientation as it is described in the Commitment- Reflectivity Circumplex (CRC) model by Krauss and Hood in 2013. According to the CRC model, religious orientations differ in the level of 1) dedication and commitment, and 2) reflectivity. “Therefore, an orientation could be categorized into one of four quadrants: Committed/Reflective (e.g., life-long learners), Committed/Unreflective (e.g., dogmatic and economic models), Uncommitted/Reflective (e.g., religious and spiritual struggles, and doubt), and Uncommitted/Unreflective (e.g., socially obligated and communal benefits)” (Isaak et al., 2017, p. 2). Krauss and Hood (2013) put forward a scale that measures the quadrants proposed in the CRC model: The Circumplex Religious Orientation Inventory (CROI) (Aghababaei et al., 2019). Each quadrant proposed in the CRC model is represented by one or more subscales of the CROI (Aghababaei et al., 2019).

The CROI is a five-point Likert scale with 10 subscales: Centrality, personal, gain, punishment, obligation, social, doubt, tentativeness, dialog, and interest (Isaak et al., 2017). The centrality subscale measures how central and crucial religion is to an individual (Isaak et al.,

2017). The personal subscale measures the extent to which an individual seeks religion to receive consolation, security and forgiveness (Isaak et al., 2017). The gain subscale measures the extent to which an individual would seek religion as a mean of gaining personal benefits such as prosperity (Isaak et al., 2017). The punishment subscale measures the extent to which an individual would seek religion to avoid God's punishment (Isaak et al., 2017). The obligation subscale measures the extent to which an individual would seek religion due to societal pressures (Isaak et al., 2017). The social subscale measures the extent to which an individual would seek religion in order to form social connections and to belong (Isaak et al., 2017). The doubt subscale measures the extent to which an individual appreciates his or her religious doubt, skepticism and unsureness (Isaak et al., 2017). The tentativeness subscale measures the degree to which a religious or a non-religious individual is unsure about the validity of his or her beliefs (Isaak et al., 2017). The dialog subscale measures the degree to which an individual realizes that his or her religiosity is affected by his or her life experiences (Isaak et al., 2017). The interest subscale measures the degree to which individuals value acquiring and discussing religious knowledge (Isaak et al., 2017). The social and the obligation subscales measure the uncommitted and unreflective quadrant (Aghababaei et al., 2019). The doubt, tentativeness, and dialog measure the uncommitted reflective quadrant (Aghababaei et al., 2019). The interest subscale is used to measure the committed reflective quadrant (Aghababaei et al., 2019). The personal, centrality, gain, and punishment subscales are used to measure the committed unreflective quadrant (Aghababaei et al., 2019) (See Appendix F).

In this study the term "synagogue" was substituted by "Mosque/ Religious societies" to account for the different Lebanese religious sects. In addition, to avoid one of the major limitations of this instrument which is its length, this study only used the subscales that helped

measure the committed/unreflective quadrant. Considering the complexity of this variable in Lebanon, Krauss and Hood's (2013) CROI appeared to be one of the most appropriate instruments available as it captures the multi-dimensionality of the construct measured in a way that applies to all the different religious sects available in Lebanon. Moreover, the CROI is an instrument that has been validated cross-culturally in the US with Christian samples (Isaak et al., 2017) and in Iran with a Muslim sample (Aghababaei et al., 2019). The CROI has been shown to be both reliable and valid (Isaak et al., 2017). "The average Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the CROI ( $\alpha = .85$ ), indicate consistent and good overall reliability" (Isaak et al., 2017, p.6) The obligation subscale uniquely displayed satisfactory instead of good reliability (Isaak et al., 2017). The structure of the CROI was tested and it showed a satisfactory fit of " $\chi^2 (1845) = 5534.27$ ,  $CFI = 0.83$ ,  $PCFI = 0.79$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.06$ " (Isaak et al., 2017, p.6) The scale's construct validity has been shown through the appropriate correlations between the subscales and the Intrinsic, Extrinsic personal, Extrinsic social, and Quest measures (Isaak et al., 2017).

### ***Conservatism and Traditionalism Scales***

The second predictor variable in this study was political conservatism as it was described by Altemeyer (1981) in a theory of conservatism entitled Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA). Political conservatism has two core aspects that define it: opposition to change and endorsement of inequality (Jost et al., 2013). One manifestation of conservatism is the authoritarian personality (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski & Sulloway, 2013). According to Adorno et al. (1950), an authoritarian personality is one that has been brought on by a strict punitive parenting style that caused generations to suppress resentment toward authority figures and to substitute it with an inflated regard and idealization of authority and inclinations to hold the victims of the society accountable and penalize non-conformists (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski & Sulloway, 2013).

Altemeyer's (1981) Right-Wing Authoritarianism is characterized by (a) an elevated level of compliance to recognized and valid authorities; (b) a broad aggressiveness fixed at individuals who are perceived to be rejected and punished by the authorities ; and (c) a high level of endorsement to traditional conventions that seem to be recognized by the community (Jost et al., 2003).

However, a couple of issues have been previously highlighted in Altemeyer's RWA construct: it was hypothesized to be a personality dimension and it was said to be a unidimensional construct (Duckitt et al., 2010). It was later on found that the RWA is best considered as a social attitude measurement and that it was indeed multidimensional (Duckitt et al., 2010). Altemeyer's research recognized three notions that were covered by the RWA items: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. These three components were later on developed to become the three different dimensions of what is currently identified as a multidimensional construct and they were respectively replaced by the terms: conservatism, authoritarianism and traditionalism (Duckitt et al., 2010). Authoritarian submission or conservatism is best defined as an unquestioned submission to authorities (Duckitt et al., 2010). Authoritarian aggression or authoritarianism is best described as a preference for a firm and punitive authority figure (Duckitt et al., 2010). Conventionalism or traditionalism is best described as a preference for the traditional societal norms and morals (Duckitt et al., 2010).

The current study was based on the Authoritarianism – Conservatism – Traditionalism (ACT) model developed by Duckitt et al. in 2010. The predictor variable was measured using the conservatism and the traditionalism scales (See Appendix H). The traditionalism scale reflected the opposition to change - which is described as the first core definition of political conservatism (Jost et al., 2013). The conservatism scale echoes the endorsement of inequality - which is

described as the second core definition of political conservatism (Jost et al., 2013). The scales have decent psychometric properties. Both scales have shown good reliability scores in all five samples studied by Duckitt et al. (2010). The highest reliability correlates were found in the New Zealand sample with a Cronbach alpha of .85 for the conservatism scale and a Cronbach's alpha of .92 for the traditionalism scale (Duckitt et al., 2010). The lowest Cronbach alpha for Conservatism was found in the Romanian sample with an alpha of .74 (Duckitt et al., 2010). The intercorrelations showing a moderate correlation between authoritarianism and traditionalism but a strong correlation between each one of these two with conservatism confirmed Feldman's model that highlights conservatism as the foundation of the RWA construct (Duckitt et al., 2010). Moreover, discriminant validity has been recognized through the expected correlations that the authors predicted for each factor (Duckitt et al., 2010).

### ***Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale***

As it was mentioned in the literature review above, sex- role attitudes have been shown to be correlated to abortion attitudes. Sex-role attitudes are considered to constitute a part of feminist attitude (Morgan, 1996). Hence, the third predictor variable in this study was feminist attitude with feminism meaning beliefs and behaviors that aim to put an ending to the subordination of women as it was described by Condor in 1986 (Morgan, 1996). The scale used to measure feminist attitudes is the Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale (LFAIS) (See Appendix G). The feminist ideology that is reflected in the scale used in this study is the liberal feminist ideology (Morgan, 1996). The instrument "simultaneously assesses beliefs about gender roles, feminist goals and issues, and feminist ideology" (Morgan, 1996, p. 362). Individuals that support feminism seek a society without any traditionally determined gender roles (Morgan, 1996). Moreover, they have goals that aim to reach equality and secure women's rights (Morgan,

1996). Furthermore, their ideology is based on 1) the recognition of discrimination and subordination, 2) on their yearning to fight it through collective action, and on 3) the urge to share and acknowledge the different life experiences that women undergo by building a sisterhood (Morgan, 1996).

LFAIS is a six-point Likert scale that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree without a neutral midpoint (Morgan, 1996). The LFAIS has a good reliability score with a Cronbach's alpha of .94 (Morgan, 1996). Moreover, it was shown that the measure has good convergent and divergent validity as it strongly correlated with other feminism items with a coefficient ranging from .61 to .68 and it weakly correlated with indicators of divergent validity (Morgan, 1996). Furthermore, as the LFAIS has been composed and tested with a middle-class educated sample (Morgan, 1996), it is most probably best suited for a sample with these characteristics which is not a problem in the current study. In the current study the terms "United States" and "America" will be replaced by "Lebanon".

### *Abortion Attitude Scale*

The outcome variable in this study was attitude towards abortion and it was measured by Taylor & Whitehead's (2014) four-points Likert scale that ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree without a neutral midpoint (See Appendix E). The higher the score, the less favorable the attitude is towards abortion. The scale exhibited a good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .92 (Taylor & Whitehead, 2014). Moreover, the scale correlated with Hess and Rueb's abortion attitude scale in which the higher the score, the more favorable the attitude is towards abortion, indicating the scale's concurrent validity,  $r(92) = -.81, p < .01$  (Taylor & Whitehead, 2014). Taylor and Whitehead's scale appear to be an appropriate choice as it 1) has good psychometric properties, 2) uses general non-practical terms that could be easily understood and 3) has no

neutral point which is more appropriate to the nature of the pro-choice vs pro-life dilemma (Taylor & Whitehead, 2014). Taylor and Whitehead's scale was tested on college students (Taylor & Whitehead, 2014) which was not an issue as the participants of the current study were also university students.

### **Procedure**

A pilot study was carried out on 20 participants in the aim of verifying the feasibility of the main study by evaluating the inclusion criteria of the participants, the recruitment process of the participants, the testing of the survey including the scales and the demographic variables chosen, and the coaching of the research assistants that might be aiding in the data collection. A consent of participation was obtained after the aim of the pilot study was clearly explained to the participants. Furthermore, the participants were asked for feedback regarding their understanding of the items used in the hope of singling out any items that might not reflect the construct appropriately in the Lebanese culture when written in English.

Participants were kept anonymous as abortion is a taboo topic and some women might have feared being judged by the researcher for their opinions. The participants might have undergone abortion themselves. The researcher was sensitive to the fact that some participants might be triggered if they had previously undergone an abortion under difficult circumstances. Therefore, surveys began with a participant information letter (See Appendix A), an informed consent, which included a contact email or number for the researcher that could be used in case the participant had any questions or comments regarding the study and a section including referral contacts of a couple of professional psychotherapists in case of adverse impact. Surveys took around 20 minutes to fill and they were read by the participants themselves.

Surveys were physically handed out on the Haigazian University (HU) campus - the researcher's current university. Surveys were also distributed online in order to try and reach a bigger sample size and participants who fit the inclusion criteria mentioned above were allowed to participate. The online participants were reached through snowball sampling and through social media advertising. A social media post explaining the aims of the study by the researcher was advertised for (See Appendix D). In case the researcher had research assistants' aid in the data collection process, the research assistants were trained on the exact procedures that needed to be followed in order to maintain the participants' anonymity such as handing out sealable envelopes with each survey.

The described procedures above were executed once the researcher received the approval of the Social and Behavioral Sciences' (SBS) Ethics (See Appendix C) Committee of Haigazian University.

### **Pilot Study Results**

The researcher received the approval of the SBS Ethics Committee and conducted the pilot study on a group of 20 participants. The steps described under the procedure section above were followed. Participants who were interviewed about their understanding of the items singled out one item of the Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale (LFAIS). The item that was repeatedly misunderstood was the following: "Lebanon should pass the Equal Rights Amendment". Hence, in this study the item was written with an explanation in between brackets after the word pass such as follows "Lebanon should pass (approve of) the Equal Rights Amendment".

To confirm the internal reliability of each of the scales, Cronbach's alpha was generated on SPSS. The Committed Unreflective Religious Orientation quadrant consists of the four following subscales of the Circumplex Religious Orientation Inventory: Personal subscale, Centrality subscale, Gain subscale, and Punishment subscale. The reliability coefficient of the personal subscale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.867. The reliability coefficient of the centrality subscale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.965. The reliability coefficient of the gain subscale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.842. The reliability coefficient of the punishment subscale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.925. The conservative political ideology is measured by two scales: the conservatism and the traditionalism scales of the Authoritarianism -Conservatism -Traditionalism model. The reliability coefficient of the conservatism scale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.854. The reliability coefficient of the traditionalism scale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.862. The reliability coefficient of the Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale (LFAIS) had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.944. The reliability coefficient of the Abortion Attitude Scale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.850.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

This research study aimed to set forth the multiple factors behind different abortion attitudes. The study proposed four hypotheses and tested them using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 25). This chapter presents the reliability findings of the four scales used in the study and it demonstrates the statistical findings of the statistical analyses conducted to test for the hypotheses.

#### **Descriptive Statistics and Normality**

The study's dependent variable was the participant's attitude towards abortion. It is a continuous variable measured by the Abortion Attitude Scale (AAS).

The study had three independent variables, all of which are also continuous. The first predictor variable was the level of committed/unreflective religious orientation of the participant as measured by four subscales of the Circumplex Religious Orientation Inventory (CROI): The personal subscale, the centrality subscale, the gain subscale, and the punishment subscale. The second predictor variable was the level of conservative political idealization of the participant as measured by the Conservatism and Traditionalism scales from the Authoritarianism - Conservatism - Traditionalism (ACT) model. The third predictor variable was the feminist attitude of the participant as measured by the Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale.

The study had two demographical categorical variables. The first demographical variable was the occupational status of the mother of the participant and it is comprised of two categories: employed and unemployed. The second demographical variable was the education level of the

participant and it also had two categories: In the process of completing or completed an undergraduate degree and in the process of completing or completed a graduate degree.

The assumption of normality for 'attitude towards abortion' scores was not satisfied, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ( $p < .05$ ). See table 1 for descriptive statistics and Shapiro Wilk's p value.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics & Normality*

AAS	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Shapiro Wilk
	112	21.83	20.50	7.798	12	48	.000

**Correlation Matrix**

The Pearson correlations of the main study variables shown in table 2 below helped demonstrate how the three predictor variables proposed are indeed correlated with one another and with the outcome variable.

**Table 2***Pearson Correlations for main study variables*

	AAS	CROI_CU	LFAIS	ACT
AAS	1.000			
CROI_CU	.650***	1.000		
LFAIS	-.709***	-.606***	1.000	
ACT	.755***	.736***	-.765***	1.000

*Note.* AAS = Abortion Attitude; CROI\_CU = Committed/Unreflective Religious Orientation; LFAIS: Feminist Attitude ; ACT = Conservative Political Idealization; \*\*\* = statistically significant at  $p < .001$  level.

### **Reliability Testing**

The reliability coefficients were calculated for each of the scales used in this research. To confirm the internal reliability of each of the scales, Cronbach's alpha was generated on SPSS. The Committed Unreflective Religious Orientation quadrant consists of the four following subscales of the Circumplex Religious Orientation Inventory: Personal subscale, Centrality subscale, Gain subscale, and Punishment subscale. The reliability coefficient of the personal subscale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.893. The reliability coefficient of the centrality subscale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.967. The reliability coefficient of the gain subscale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.891. The reliability coefficient of the punishment subscale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.905. The conservative political ideology is measured by two scales: the conservatism and the traditionalism scales of the Authoritarianism -Conservatism - Traditionalism model. The reliability coefficient of the conservatism scale had a high level of

internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.862. The reliability coefficient of the traditionalism scale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.910. The reliability coefficient of the Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale (LFAIS) had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.950. The reliability coefficient of the Abortion Attitude Scale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.925.

Table 3 displays the difference between Cronbach's alpha coefficients in previous literature and in the current study.

**Table 3**

*Cronbach's Alpha: Comparison between the Literature and the Current Study*

Scale	Previous Cronbach's Alpha	Current Cronbach's Alpha
Personal Subscale	[.80 - .90]	.893
Centrality Subscale	[.91 - .95]	.967
Gain Subscale	[.72 - .87]	.891
Punishment Subscale	[.73 - .85]	.905
Conservatism Scale	.85	.862
Traditionalism Scale	.92	.910
Abortion Attitude Scale	.92	.925
Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale	.94	.950

## Hypotheses Testing

### *Hypothesis One*

Hypothesis one stated that “a high committed/unreflective religious orientation as well as a high conservative political idealization and a negative feminist attitude will all negatively predict attitudes towards abortion in Lebanese female university students”. A standard multiple regression was conducted in order to test for hypothesis one. The multiple regression was used to

predict attitudes towards abortion based on a 1) committed/unreflective religious orientation, a 2) conservative political idealization and a 3) negative feminist attitude.

The data met seven of the eight assumptions of a multiple regression. The data met the first two assumptions as the dependent variable is continuous and there are three independent continuous variables in the model. The data met the assumption of the independence of residuals (Durbin-Watson value = 1.72). A linear relationship has been established between the dependent and independent variables collectively as the residuals on the scatterplot almost formed a horizontal band. Moreover, a linear relationship was established between the dependent variable and each of the three independent variables as the points on the partial regression plots appeared to be close to the line. There was homoscedasticity, as assessed by the visual inspection of the plot of studentized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values. Tests to see if the data met the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Committed unreflective religious orientation, Tolerance = .45, VIF = 2.20; Negative feminist attitude, Tolerance = .41, VIF = 2.44; Conservative political orientation, Tolerance = .30, VIF = 3.36). The histogram of standardized residuals indicated that the data contained approximately normally distributed errors, as did the normal P-P plot of standardized residuals, which showed points that were not completely on the line, but close. An analysis of standard residuals was carried out on the data to identify any outliers, which indicated that participant 26 was a potential outlier. An analysis of the Leverage values was carried out on the data to identify any high leverage points, which indicated that participant 75 (Leverage value = .23) is a potential high leverage point. An analysis of the Cook's Distance values was carried out on the data to identify any highly influential points, which indicated that participants 26 (Cook's Distance = .26) and 75 (Cook's Distance = .11) are potential highly influential points. The multiple regression model

statistically significantly predicted attitudes towards abortion,  $F(3, 108) = 60.202, p < .001$ ,  $\text{adj. } R^2 = .62$ . Hypothesis 1 was supported as all three variables added statistically significantly to the prediction,  $p < .05$ . Regression coefficients and standard errors can be found in Table 4 below.

**Table 4***Multiple Regression Results for Attitudes towards Abortion*

AAS	B	95% CI for B		SE B	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
		LL	UL				
Model						.63	.61***
Constant	32.25***	16.11	48.40	8.14			
CROI_ComUnr	.07*	.01	.13	.03	.18*		
LFAIS	-.06**	-.10	-.02	.02	-.23**		
ACT	.13***	.60	.20	.03	.40***		

*Note.* Model = “Enter” method in SPSS Statistics; B = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; SE B = standard error of the coefficient;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient; R<sup>2</sup> = coefficient of determination;  $\Delta R^2$  = adjusted  $\Delta R^2$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

***Hypothesis Two***

Hypothesis two stated that “negative feminist attitudes will predict attitudes towards abortion more strongly than both religious orientation and conservative political idealization”. Hypothesis two was tested using the same multiple regression that was generated in order to test for hypothesis one.

Hypothesis two was not supported as a conservative political idealization with a standardized coefficient of .40,  $p < .001$  appeared to predict attitudes towards abortion more strongly than both negative feminist attitudes with a standardized coefficient of -.23,  $p < .01$

and religious orientation with a standardized coefficient of .18,  $p < .05$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. (See table 1 above.)

### ***Hypothesis Three***

Hypothesis three stated that “lower levels of education in the participants will negatively predict attitudes towards abortion”. A one-way ANOVA test was initially conducted to test the third hypothesis as the variable “level of education” consisted of four different groups: In the process of completing an undergraduate degree ( $n = 24$ ); Completed an undergraduate degree ( $n = 23$ ); In the process of completing a graduate degree ( $n = 18$ ); Completed a Graduate degree ( $n = 47$ ). The differences between these education level groups was not statistically significant,  $F(3, 108) = 0.981, p = .405$ . Therefore, the results together with the sample size prompted the researcher to regroup participants into two different groups instead of four: In the process of completing or completed an undergraduate degree; In the process of completing or completed a graduate degree. At that point, an independent-samples t-test was run to determine if there were differences in abortion attitudes (AAS scores) between the two independent groups suggested above.

The data met four of the six assumptions of an independent-samples t-test. The data met the first three assumptions as the dependent variable is continuous, the independent variable is categorical with two groups, and there is independence of observations. There was homogeneity of variances for abortion attitude scores for both groups, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ( $p = .212$ ). The data did not meet the assumption of absence of outliers. As assessed by an inspection of a boxplot for values greater than 1.5 box-lengths from the edge of the box, there were four outliers: case two, three, four, and 14. The data did not meet the assumption of normality. As assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ( $p < .05$ ), attitudes towards abortion scores were

not normally distributed for any of the two groups of the education level. However, the independent-samples t-test is considered "robust" to violations of normality and since  $N > 20$ , the analysis did not have to be interrupted. Attitudes towards abortion were more positive in those who were in the process of completing or those who have completed an undergraduate degree ( $22.53 \pm 8.03$ ) than in those who were in the process of completing or those who have completed a graduate degree ( $21.32 \pm 7.65$ ), a non-statistically significant difference of 1.21 (95% CI, -1.75 to 4.17),  $t(110) = .808$ ,  $p = .421$ . See table 5, 6 & figure 1 below. The third hypothesis was not supported and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

**Table 5**

*Difference between Groups on AAS Scores*

AAS	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
completing or completed an undergraduate degree	47	22.53	8.032	1.172
completing or completed a graduate degree	65	21.32	7.647	.948

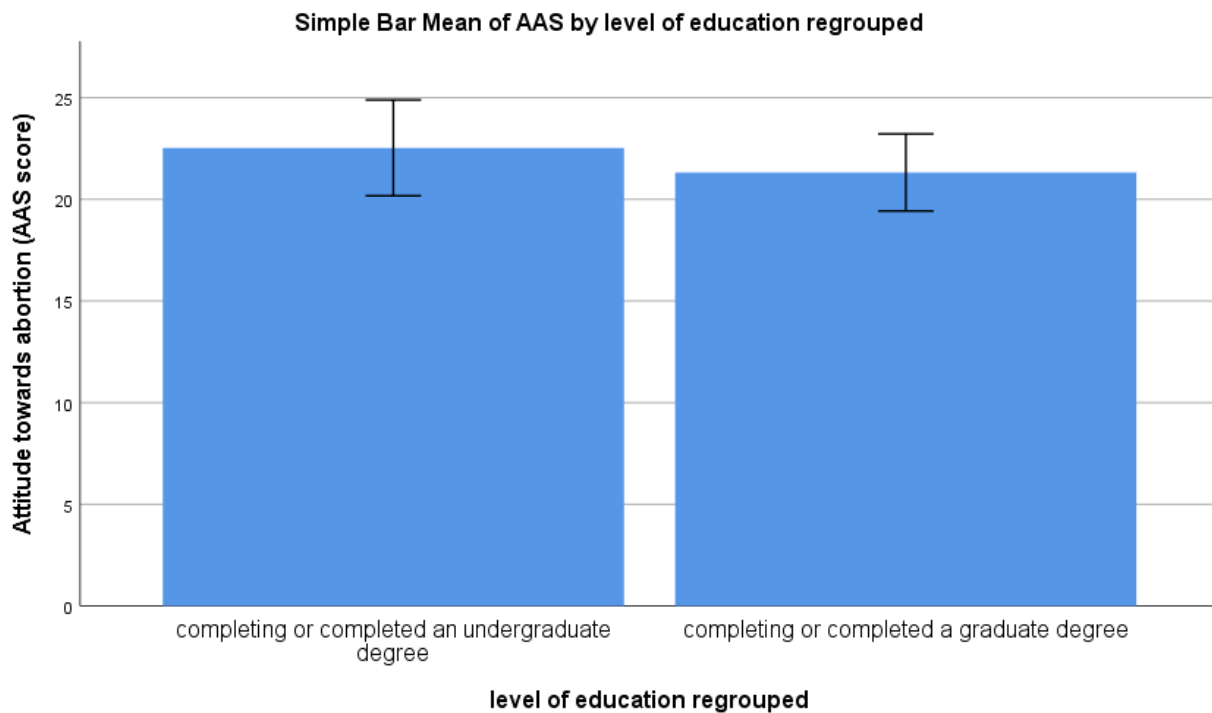
**Table 6**

*Independent-Samples T-Test Results*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.578	.212	.808	110	.421	1.209	1.495	-1.755	4.172
Equal variances not assumed			.802	96.316	.425	1.209	1.507	1.798	4.201

**Figure 1**

*Bar Chart of the Results of the Independent-Samples T-Test*



#### ***Hypothesis 4***

Hypothesis 4 stated that “having an unemployed mother will negatively predict attitudes towards abortion”. An independent-samples t-test was run to determine if there were differences in abortion attitudes (AAS scores) between participants whose mother is employed and those whose mother is unemployed.

The data met four of the six assumptions of an independent-samples t-test. The data met the first three assumptions as the dependent variable is continuous, the independent variable is categorical with two groups, and there is independence of observations. There was homogeneity of variances for abortion attitude scores for both groups, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ( $p = .553$ ). The data did not meet the assumption of absence of outliers. As assessed by an inspection of a boxplot for values greater than 1.5 box-lengths from the edge of the box,

there were four outliers: case two, four, five and 10. The data did not meet the assumption of normality. As assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test, attitudes towards abortion scores were normally distributed for participants with unemployed mothers ( $p > .05$ ) and were not normally distributed for participants with employed mothers ( $p < .05$ ). However, the independent-samples t-test is considered "robust" to violations of normality and since  $N > 20$ , the analysis did not have to be interrupted. Attitudes towards abortion were more positive in those participants whose mother is unemployed ( $22.75 \pm 7.13$ ) than in those participants whose mother is employed ( $21.07 \pm 8.30$ ), a non-statistically significant difference of 1.68 (95% CI, -1.25 to 4.61),  $t(110) = 1.137$ ,  $p = .258$ . The fourth hypothesis was not supported and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. See table 7, 8 & figure 2 below.

**Table 7**

*Difference between Groups on AAS Scores*

AAS	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Unemployed	51	22.75	7.130	.998
Employed	61	21.07	8.296	1.062

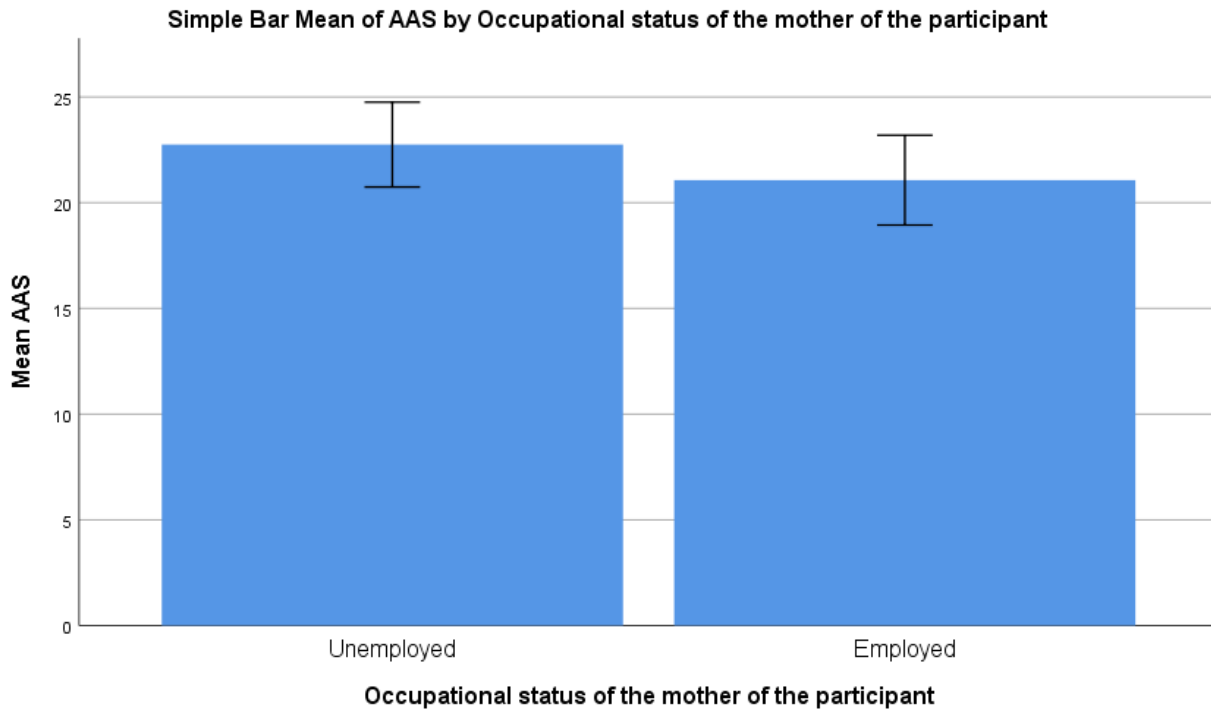
**Table 8**

*Independent-Samples T-Test Results*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.355	.553	1.137	110	.258	1.680	1.478	-1.249	4.608
Equal variances not assumed			1.152	109.907	.252	1.680	1.458	-1.209	4.569

**Figure 2**

*Bar Chart of the Results of the Independent-Samples T-Test*



## Chapter 5

### Discussion

This study aimed at investigating predictors of attitudes towards abortion in Lebanese females. It presented four hypotheses regarding possible predictors of attitudes towards abortion and their relationship with the outcome variable. One of the hypotheses was supported and the other three were rejected. The results shown in Chapter 4 will be discussed in this chapter and compared to previous literature on attitudes towards abortion. This chapter will also contain clinical implications, limitations of the current study, and recommendations for future research.

### **Committed/Unreflective Religious Orientation, Conservative Political Idealization & Feminist Attitudes**

#### *Hypothesis 1*

The statistical results in the previous chapter supported the first hypothesis stating that a high committed/unreflective religious orientation as well as a high conservative political idealization and a negative feminist attitude will all negatively predict attitudes towards abortion in Lebanese females. These conclusions are complementary with prior literature.

According to previous literature, lower levels of religiosity predict more positive attitudes towards abortion and higher levels of religiosity predict more negative attitudes towards abortion (Alston & Alston, 2005; Hess & Rueb, 2005; Legge, 1979; McIntosh, 1979; Patel & Johns, 2009; Wang & Buffalo, 2004). The current study took a slightly different approach to religiosity since Lebanon has many diverse religious affiliations and interpretations when it comes to the permissibility of abortion (Fathallah, 2019). Hence, in the purpose of finding a variable that is applicable to all the 18 officially recognized religious groups in Lebanon, the study did not

simply look at the level of religiosity - as the same level might look different in different religious groups – but it decided to look at an individual’s religious orientation instead. The scale used is one that aimed at addressing the multidimensional complexity of a religious orientation and the construct of interest became the individual’s religious orientation as it is described in the Commitment- Reflectivity Circumplex (CRC) model by Krauss and Hood in 2013. As it was mentioned in the methodology chapter, the CRC model highlights four quadrants that differ in their level of commitment and reflectivity. The two quadrants that appeared to reflect a high level of religiosity were the Committed/Reflective quadrant and the Committed/Unreflective quadrant. As an individual with a reflective religious orientation is more likely to doubt and question religious commands than an individual with an unreflective religious orientation (Krauss & Hood, 2013) the quadrant that seems to imitate a higher level of religiosity the most is the Committed/Unreflective quadrant. The latter religious orientation is measured with four subscales of the Circumplex Religious Orientation Inventory (CROI) - the scale that was put forward by Krauss and Hood in 2013 to measure the quadrants proposed in the CRC model. Therefore, the current study’s result stating that a high level of a Committed/Unreflective religious orientation statistically predicted negative attitudes towards abortion is similar to findings in existing literature.

Moreover, according to previous literature, liberals are much more likely to support the pro-choice stance and conservatives are much more likely to support the pro-life stance (Poteat & Mereish, 2012). Thus, the current study’s result stating that a high conservative political idealization statistically predicted negative attitudes towards abortion is similar to findings in existing literature.

Furthermore, according to many studies in previous literature, those who approve of a traditional role for women to follow are less likely to claim to be prochoice than those who endorse equality in women's roles (Wang & Buffalo, 2004). As attitudes towards women and women roles are considered a part of a larger continuum that contains attitudes towards feminism (Frieze & McHugh, 1998), this study tried to establish a link between the broader concept of feminism and attitudes towards abortion. The current study's result stating that a negative feminist attitude statistically predicted negative attitudes towards abortion is in line with findings in existing literature.

### *Hypothesis 2*

The statistical results in the previous chapter did not support the second hypothesis stating that negative feminist attitudes will predict attitudes towards abortion more strongly than both religious orientation and conservative political idealization. The variable that appeared to predict negative feminist attitudes the most is the conservative political idealization which was interesting to see as no previous study attempted to compare the effect of these three variables on attitudes towards abortion. Initially the current study hypothesized negative feminist attitudes to have the biggest effect on attitudes towards abortion since according to literature on feminism, feminists consider abortion to be a part of a broader issue that tackles a woman's right to have complete authority over her own body (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004). Hence, even though the abortion right is considered to be a woman's right according to an individual who agrees with the full agenda of feminism, it is worth noting that the abortion right is only one of many rights that define feminism. More specifically, the abortion right could possibly be one of the most controversial rights that feminism is founded on. It would be interesting to look at research concerning controversial demands of feminism to see if the abortion right is indeed considered to

be one of them internationally or if this is only the case in countries with similar cultural properties to Lebanon's. Additionally, it should be noted that this finding could simply be unreliable due to the current study's small sample size - one of the limitations that will be discussed below.

## **Education Level**

### ***Hypothesis 3***

The level of education was one of the demographic variables used in this study to test for the third hypothesis that stated that lower levels of education in the participants will negatively predict attitudes towards abortion. This hypothesis was not supported by the statistical results of the study, which goes against what was previously suggested in the literature.

According to previous literature, education was considered a certain predictor of attitudes towards abortion as it was confirmed repeatedly (Patel & Johns, 2009; Wang & Buffalo, 2004). It is worth noting that, as education was said to be one of the strongest predictors of attitudes towards, the researcher regrouped the initial four categories under level of education into two groups in the hopes of seeing some statistical significance that resembles the prior literature. Initially the groups were: In the process of completing an undergraduate degree; Completed an undergraduate degree; In the process of completing a graduate degree; Completed a Graduate degree. When regrouped the categories became: In the process of completing or completed an undergraduate degree; In the process of completing or completed a graduate degree. However, this did not lead to any statistically significant results.

One reason that led to the non-statistically significant findings of the statistical test that was run to test for the latter hypothesis is the small sample size adopted in the current study.

Another important reason could be that the sample excluded non-English speakers, and with it those who did not have access to a university level of education. A more inclusive sample could have highlighted more major differences as far as different levels of education are concerned. Additionally, the difference between undergraduate studies and graduate studies is not always so great.

### **Occupational Status of the Mother**

#### ***Hypothesis 4***

The occupational status of the mother was another demographic variable used in this study to test for the fourth hypothesis that stated that having an unemployed mother will negatively predict attitudes towards abortion. Again, the hypothesis was not supported by the statistical results of the study and that goes against what was previously suggested in the literature.

Existing literature stated that having an employed mother has shown to predict more feminist beliefs in the daughters (Morgan, 1996). This finding brings into question what was previously suggested concerning feminism and abortion. The hypothesis in question was assumed based on the link between feminism and abortion rights. However, abortion is only one of many defining rights of feminism. Additionally, as we have seen from the confirmation of our first hypothesis, abortion attitudes appear to be predicted by many variables including religious orientations and conservative political idealizations. Hence, the multiple layers behind abortion attitudes complicates assumptions that are based on a definitive link between having a positive feminist attitude and having a positive abortion attitude. Moreover, this finding could be caused by the small sample size used in the study.

### **System Justification Theory**

The statistical results supported the first and main hypothesis of the study. A link has been shown between the committed/unreflective religious orientation, the conservative political idealization, the negative feminist attitudes and the negative abortion attitudes. The literature review under chapter 2 has already established a possible link between each one of the predictor variables and the system justification theory. The theory proposed behind the logic of this study has indeed been shown to explain how the suggested social- cultural variables could predict attitudes towards abortion.

Based on the system justification theory, people who follow a committed/unreflective religious orientation might justify the criminalization of abortion in an attempt to help maintain the perceived righteousness of religion. This is the case because religion helps these people in alleviating most of their anxiety. It takes away their fear of death by suggesting the possibility of afterlife and it decreases their feelings of perceived injustices in the world by suggesting that those who do wrong will be punished for their wrong-doings by a higher power. Moreover, based on the system justification theory, people who adopt a conservative political idealization might justify the criminalization of abortion in an attempt to maintain the already established hierarchical order of their society and the perceived righteousness of the authority in place. With an urge to escape the uncertainty that accompanies change, political conservatives will indeed stand against the decriminalization of abortion as it opposes what has been already established by previous authority. Furthermore, based on the system justification theory, people who have negative feminist attitudes might justify the criminalization of abortion in an attempt to help maintain the perceived righteousness of the established gender norms of our society. Processing that there is gender inequality is painful for women. Thus, motivated by their need to diminish

the emotional frustration that comes with inequality, women can stand against feminism and the decriminalization of abortion as it is a reminder of their own inconveniences.

### **Conclusion**

Attitudes towards abortion are affected by many predictors including religious orientations, political idealizations, and feminist attitudes which implicates the complicated nature of this construct. This complicated nature might as well be the reason why taking a stand towards abortion is so controversial. Nonetheless the relationship between the proposed variables of the study is made less complicated by the system justification theory that helped put together a logic behind their connection.

In addition, it would be helpful to check out research concerning controversial demands of feminism to understand if the abortion right is considered to be a critical feminist demand internationally or if this is mainly due to Lebanon's socio-political factors which affected the development of feminism in Lebanon.

### **Clinical Implications**

This study was a step taken towards a women-centered approach to reproductive health that stands against the maternal morbidity caused by the lack of access to safe medical procedures. A study that investigated predictors of criminalizing views towards abortion shed light on the factors prejudicing against women empowerment. Building a transparent research database despite the decriminalization of abortion in Lebanon helps in freeing women from discrimination which is an important step in helping her reach her right to reproductive autonomy.

Another clinical implication is one concerned with the direct mental and physical wellbeing of women in our society. As criminalizing abortion reinforces women's stigmatization, it has damaging effects on their mental health. Hence, research studies advocating for women empowerment in Lebanon is a step towards better mental and physical wellbeing of women in our society.

The most forward clinical implications are found in therapy effectiveness. Debunking myths that surrounded abortion - such as the post abortion syndrome - can be helpful for clinicians that are dealing with patients who have undergone abortion and with patient who are having a hard time accepting the decision of a loved one to go through with an induced abortion. It is effective to the patient's treatment course when the clinician is a step ahead as far as the possible predictors behind specific attitudes are in question. Knowing what these predictors are helps the clinician in understanding how the patient's false beliefs came to be, and subsequently it helps the clinician know how to challenge these false beliefs that have turned into self-limiting behaviors in the patient.

### **Policy Implications**

Research explaining more about abortion could help in advocating for legal reform in Lebanon as it previously did in Turkey (Hessini, 2007). Understanding that the criminalization of abortion neither changes the citizens' personal beliefs on abortion nor helps reduce the prevalence of abortion cases is key to seeing the absurdity behind it. The only thing that the decriminalization of abortion actually helps in achieving is preventing women from accessing safe medical procedures which leads to maternal morbidity.

### **Limitations of the Current Study**

One of the main limitations of this study was the small sample size. The research initially aimed to achieve a sample size of  $N=325$ , which represented the midpoint of the range [109 – 759], knowing that 109 is the calculated sample size using G power for a medium effect size and 759 is the calculated sample size using G power for a small effect size. The current research was only capable of reaching the calculated sample size for a medium effect size. Hence any possible small effect was not visible in our sample. However, the sample size was enough for the statistical tests that were run to be valid (Winter, 2013).

The study failed to counterbalance the scales of the survey as it was proposed in the methodology chapter due to a lack in funding. The survey monkey website used in collecting data required a specific balance for counterbalancing that was not available to the researcher. The lack of control for order and carryover effects is a limitation of the study.

Another limitation was that the sample was collected using a convenience sampling method that excluded non- English speakers which limits the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the current study's aim was to understand the factors that predict criminalizing attitudes towards abortion in the population that is most likely to seek change in the future. This population is assumed to be a female population that has access to a university level of education. Women are more concerned with abortion than males as they are the ones who experience it. Women who have access to education are simultaneously the most concerned and the most resourceful in seeking change in the future. Having access to education equips these women with the resources they need to 1) understand that they deserve change, 2) to know how to go about seeking change, and 3) to reflect on any inner obstacles that are preventing them from calling for women rights. Additionally, this research was not funded and

was conducted during the current Lebanese economic crisis which limited the researcher's capacity to translate the scales.

### **Future Research Recommendations**

Future studies can try to replicate this study with a larger sample size that brings to light small effect sizes. It would also be helpful to see future abortion attitudes studies with an access to a random sample that fully respects the ethical principle of Justice and that gives an equal opportunity to every individual no matter what their level of English is to participate. A counterbalanced survey that controls for order and carryover effects is another recommendation for future research.

Additionally, it would be interesting to see future studies include the full CROI and compare abortion attitudes across the four different quadrants. More specifically, a comparison between the committed/reflective quadrant and the committed/unreflective quadrant might bring to light the importance of doubt in one's religious orientation. Such research could further highlight the importance of doubt in any human idealization as it possibly transports individuals from a black or white mindset to a grey moderate mindset that is more capable of grasping human differences. A reflective approach to religiosity could be the key for Lebanese women to start fighting for their reproductive rights.

Abortion attitudes appear to be affected by multiple different factors which tends to complicate its understanding. A model that fully explores attitudes towards abortion in this area of the world might be helpful in further understanding the reason behind the controversiality of this topic.

Future research concerning controversial demands of feminism is accommodating as it helps us figure out if the abortion right is one of the critical feminists' demands that even some of the people who consider themselves to be feminists have difficulty agreeing with, or if this is mainly the case in countries with similar cultural properties to Lebanon's.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Participant Information Letter**

Dear Ms./Mr.

I am Lara Mneimneh, a student at Haigazian University from the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences. I am currently carrying out a research study titled Predictors of Attitudes Towards Abortion in Female University Students in Lebanon advised by Dr. Hanine Hout.

You are being asked to take part in this study since (you are a Lebanese female who is competent in the English language).

Kindly read the below information to decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

#### **Purpose of the Research Project**

This research study aims at shedding some light on the multiple factors behind different abortion attitudes. The study fills an important gap in the literature in Lebanon as the studies available are not enough for us to fully understand the status of abortion attitudes in our country. This study will contribute towards the partial fulfillment of my academic study requirements at Haigazian University.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

- If you choose to participate in this research study, you will be asked to fill in a questionnaire. Your participation will involve completing a survey that entails statements that you will have to rate based on agreement and a demographic form for approximately

20 minutes. Participation in this project is voluntary. You are free to withdraw anytime without having to give any reason for your withdrawal.

**What are my rights?**

- Participation in this study is completely voluntary, anonymous and confidential. Your name or any other identifying information will not be asked.
- Data you provide along with data from all participants in the present research will be stored in aggregate in a password protected folder on the personal laptop of the researcher. The data will be analysed and reported in aggregate. Only the principle investigators of this study will have access to the compiled data which will be stored for a period of 10 years post data. During this time, you have the right to inspect the data.
- You have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time for any reason. Your decision to refuse participation or withdraw will not involve any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Discontinuing participation in no way affects your relationship with Haigazian University.
- This research study has been reviewed and has received clearance from the Haigazian University ethics committee . If you have any further concerns about your rights as a research participant, please, do not hesitate to contact the SBS ethics committee (email: SBS.Ethics@haigazian.edu.lb).

**What are the risks and benefits of participation?**

- Participation in this study does not involve any physical risk or emotional risk to you beyond the risks of daily life. As far as the risk benefit ratio of the study is concerned, the

risk in this study is mainly limited to some participants getting triggered only in cases of previous negative experiences of abortion. However, this study will offer these participants the opportunity to state their opinion on a very much present issue that is still considered a taboo in our society.

- You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research; however your participation does help researchers better understand abortion attitudes as it will be filling a major gap in our literature by exploring the possible barriers that are limiting women's reproductive rights in this country.

### **Contact information**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research you may contact:

Student:

Name: Lara Mneimneh

Affiliation: MA Student in clinical Psychology at Haigazian University

Email: [lmneimneh@students.haigazian.edu.lb](mailto:lmneimneh@students.haigazian.edu.lb)

Adviser:

Name: Hanine Hout

Affiliation: Ed. D. Chair of the Social and Behavioral Science Department

Email: [Hanine.hout@haigazian.edu.lb](mailto:Hanine.hout@haigazian.edu.lb)

## Appendix B

### Participant Consent

#### Predictors of Attitudes Towards Abortion in Females in Lebanon

Please read the following statements and place a check mark in the boxes adjacent to them.

- I have volunteered to participate in this research project conducted for purposes of study. My participation is voluntary and does not involve payment of any kind.
- I agree to participate in this research project conducted for purposes of study. My decision is voluntary and does not involve payment of any kind.
- I know that I can choose to withdraw from participation any time without any penalties or consequences whatsoever. I also hold the right to decline to respond to any question(s) that I may feel uncomfortable with.
- My participation involves answering a questionnaire of approximately 20 minutes.
- I have been assured that the researcher will maintain my identity confidential.
- I have been assured that the information from this survey will be used for the purpose of academic study only.
- I have received the assurance that this research study has been duly reviewed and approved by the Haigazian University ethics committee.
- I agree that the data gathered be kept in a secure location under the care of the study investigators for a period of 10 years.
- I have been assured that I can access my data (if identified) at any time.

- I have read, listened and fully understand the explanation given to me. All my questions have been satisfactorily answered.
- I, therefore, choose to voluntarily participate in this research study.
- I have received a copy of this consent form co-signed by the researcher.

Participant consent

Investigator

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

## Ethics Approval Letter



## HAIGAZIAN UNIVERSITY

## Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences Ethics Committee

Type of Review:	Initial, Expedited
Study title	Predictors of Attitudes Towards Abortion in Female University Students in Lebanon
Study ID	HM.10.21
Principal investigator(s): <i>Name, title, institution, contact information (email and phone number)</i>	Lara Mneimneh, MA Student Clinical Psychology, Haigazian University (961)81753045 <a href="mailto:LMNEIMNEH@students.haigazian.edu.lb">LMNEIMNEH@students.haigazian.edu.lb</a>
Advisor	Dr. Hanine Hout, Thesis Advisor Haigazian University <a href="mailto:Hanine.hout@haigazian.edu.lb">Hanine.hout@haigazian.edu.lb</a> (961) 349-239 ext.331

Documents reviewed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Proposal submission form</li><li>- Participant information letter</li><li>- Participant consent form</li></ul>
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Lara Mneimneh, MA Student November 17, 2021

Clinical Psychology, Haigazian University\_LMNEIMNEH@students.haigazian.edu.lb

Dear Ms. Mneimneh,

The SBS Research Ethics Committee reviewed the following protocol:

The SBS Research Ethics Committee approved the above study from November 17, 2021 to November 17, 2022 inclusive. The documents listed were reviewed, and approved for use in this protocol.

Please note that any change in the study methods, design and / or instruments should be cleared by the committee before its application.

Once the study is complete a closure report should be sent to the committee. Regards

SBS Research Ethics Committee



**Appendix D****Social Media Post**

You are invited to participate in my research study concerning attitudes towards abortion in Lebanon by filling this questionnaire.

My research study aims to increase our understanding of the factors behind different attitudes towards abortion in Lebanon. As a female individual residing in Lebanon, you are the perfect candidate to share with us your own perspective on the issue in question.

The questionnaire takes around 20 minutes to fill. Your identity will remain anonymous and your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and findings could lead to greater public understanding of abortion attitudes in Lebanon.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions that you have.

Thank you,

Lara Mneimneh

## Appendix E

### Abortion Attitudes Scale

#### Taylor & Whitehead Abortion Attitude Scale (2014)

The following are questions about your own attitudes and opinions regarding abortion. There are no right, or wrong answers and all answers are completely anonymous. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

1. Abortion is not acceptable under any circumstances.
2. Abortion is acceptable if the mother's health is endangered.
3. If a woman finds out her baby will be born with a defect, she has the right to abort the child
4. The human foetus is a living being and therefore should be protected by law.
5. Abortion is murder.
6. A woman has a right to choose to have an abortion.
7. Parental consent should not be required for an abortion to be performed.
8. I believe abortion goes against all morals.
9. It is better to have the baby and put it up for adoption than an abortion.
10. Abortions should be partially covered by insurance companies.
11. Abortion services should be offered through the university under confidentiality.
12. Depending on the circumstances of conception, a female has the right to determine the best course for the life of her foetus.

Strongly agree = 1

Agree = 2

Disagree = 3

Strongly disagree = 4

**Appendix F****Religious Orientation Scale****Krauss & Hood's Circumplex Religious Orientation Inventory (CROI) (2013)**

All reversed scored items will be followed with an asterisk \*

**Personal subscale**

1. Prayer is NOT a very good way to seek guidance. \*
2. God comforts and shelters me.
3. God might watch me, but he does NOT help me. \*
4. God protects me if I pray.
5. God helps me if I ask him.
6. I do NOT turn to God more when I have problems. \*

**Centrality subscale**

1. The meaning I give my life comes from religion.
2. Religion is the driving force in my life.
3. I find the purpose of my life in religion.
4. Religion is NOT the most important thing in my life. \*
5. There are many things in my life that are more important than religion. \*
6. Religion is NOT a big part of my life. \*

**Gain subscale**

1. If I become more faithful, God would improve my health.
2. Praying to God is a good way to help my career.

3. If I am Faithful, God will help me be successful in life.
4. God does not reward the faithful with improved health. \*
5. Prayer is a good way to get what I want.
6. God would not improve my career if I became more faithful. \*

**Punishment subscale**

1. I have obligations to God that if NOT respected will cause bad things to happen to me.
2. Bad things happen in life to those who do NOT worship God
3. I'm scared that if I would NOT go to church/mosque/religious societies God would cause something bad to happen.
4. God would cause bad things to happen to me if I became less faithful.
5. If I don't do certain things, God will cause bad things to happen to me.
6. Making fun of religion will NOT affect your health.\*

## Appendix G

### Feminism Scale

#### The Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale: Domains and Items

##### Gender Roles

1. It is insulting to the husband when his wife does not take his last name.R
2. If the husband is the sole wage earner in the family, the financial decisions should be his.R
3. When they go out, a man and woman should share dating expenses if they both have the same income.
4. As head of the household, the father should have final authority over his children.R
5. Both husband and wife should be equally responsible for the care of young children.
6. The first duty of a woman with young children is to home and family.R
7. A man who has chosen to stay at home and be a house-husband is not less masculine than a man who is employed full-time.
8. An employed woman can establish as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who is not employed.
9. A woman should not let bearing and rearing children stand in the way of a career if she wants it.
10. Women should be more concerned with clothing and appearance than men. R

##### Goals of Feminism

##### *Global Goals*

11. Women should be considered as seriously as men as candidates for the Presidency of the Lebanon.
12. Access to education is a crucial part of gaining equal rights for women.
13. Although women can be good leaders, men make better leaders.R
14. A woman should have the same job opportunities as a man.
15. Boys and girls should be able to be whatever they want to be provided that they have the skills and training the job demands.
16. Equality between the sexes is a worthwhile goal.
17. Men should respect women more than they currently do.
18. Stereotypes of men and women hurt everyone.
19. Men and women should be able to freely make choices about their lives without being restricted by their gender.
20. Childrearing, whether done by men or women, needs to be valued more by society.

*Specific Political Agendas*

21. There are circumstances in which women should be paid less than men for equal work.R
22. Many women in the work force are taking jobs away from men who need the jobs more.R
23. Homemakers deserve to earn social security benefits for their work in the home.
24. The government has not given enough attention to providing quality low-cost daycare to parents.
25. It is our society's responsibility to provide good daycare for children.
26. Abortion is an issue of women's rights.
27. A woman should not have to get permission from important people in her life in order to get an abortion.

28. Doctors need to take women's health concerns more seriously.
29. If men were the sex who got pregnant, more reliable and convenient birth control would be available.
30. Legislation is needed to ensure that a woman can keep her job after she has a baby.
31. Lebanon should pass (approve of) pass the Equal Rights Amendment.
32. There are too few admirable roles for women on T.V.
33. It is reasonable to boycott a company's product if you think that their commercials are sexist.
34. Violence against women is not taken seriously enough.
35. There is no such thing as rape between a man and his wife.R
36. Sexual harassment is a serious problem in Lebanon's workplaces.
37. The prior sexual conduct of a rape victim should be admissible as evidence in court.R
38. Gay and lesbian couples should be able to publicly show their affection for one another, for instance by holding hands while walking.
39. Gay and lesbian couples should be provided with "spousal privileges" such as the extension of medical insurance to one's partner.
40. A woman who has many sexual partners is not necessarily a slut.

### **Feminist Ideology**

#### *Discrimination and Subordination (Historical and Current)*

41. Even though some things have changed, women are still treated unfairly in today's society.
42. Women have been treated unfairly on the basis of their gender throughout most of human history.

43. The achievements of women in history have not been emphasized as much as those of men.
44. Men have too much influence in Lebanese politics compared to women.
45. People who complain that pornography treats women like objects are overreacting.R
46. Men still don't take women's ideas seriously.
47. Women are already given equal opportunities with men in all important sectors of their lives.R
48. Women have fewer choices available to them as compared to men.
49. Women in Lebanon are treated as second-class citizens.
50. All men receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male domination.

*Collective Action (Strategies for Change)*

51. Women need to unite and work together to achieve equal political and social rights in this country.
52. A "women's movement" is basically irrelevant to the most vital concerns of our society.R
53. The government should definitely play a role in helping to improve women's status in society.
54. A radical restructuring of society is needed to overcome status inequalities between the sexes.
55. Women can best overcome discrimination by doing the best that they can at their jobs, not by wasting time with political activity.R
56. While women may be right to be unhappy about some aspects of their roles in society, they are wrong in the way they are protesting.R
57. Most group protests only serve to make the public see the protestors as fanatics.R

58. In order to change inequities between the sexes, we have to do more than just treat men and women fairly in our own lives.
59. Most group protests fail to result in any real change.R
60. If we leave well enough alone, eventually men and women will be treated fairly.R

**The Sisterhood (The First 5 Items Worded for Female Respondents)**

61. What happens to women generally in this country will have something to do with what happens in my life.
62. Things that are true of my life as a woman are true for most women.
63. When I hear about a woman who was raped, I think "that could have been me."
64. When I talk to other women I frequently feel as if we have a lot in common just by being female.
65. As women, we particularly need to support legislation that helps other women.
66. Women really cannot trust most other women with their boyfriends or husbands.R
67. One should never trust a woman's account of another woman.R
68. It is a shame when a woman neglects her female friends for her male friends.
69. Women have a bond with one another that is stronger than women's bond with men.
70. The only thing that women have in common is the fact that they can give birth to children.R

Items are scored with a six-point Likert-scale format including strongly agree (6), agree, agree slightly, disagree slightly, disagree, and strongly disagree (1). Items are coded such that a high score on the scale indicates strong feminist attitudes. R: indicates that when coded the score of the item needs to be reversed.

## Appendix H

### Conservatism and Traditionalism Scales

#### Duckitt et al's (2010) Conservatism Scale

1. \*It's great that many young people today are prepared to defy authority (R).
2. \*What our country needs most is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity.
3. \*Students at high schools and at university must be encouraged to challenge, criticize, and confront established authorities (R).
4. \*Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn.
5. \*Our country will be great if we show respect for authority and obey our leaders.
6. \*People should be ready to protest against and challenge laws they don't agree with (R).
7. People should be allowed to make speeches and write books urging the overthrow of the government (R).
8. The more people there are that are prepared to criticize the authorities, challenge and protest against the government, the better it is for society (R).
9. People should stop teaching children to obey authority (R).
10. The real keys to the "good life" are respect for authority and obedience to those who are in charge.
11. The authorities should be obeyed because they are in the best position to know what is good for our country.
12. Our leaders should be obeyed without question.

#### Duckitt et al's (2010) Traditionalism Scale

1. \*Nobody should stick to the "straight and narrow." Instead people should break loose and try

out lots of different ideas and experiences (R).

2. \*The “old-fashioned ways” and “old-fashioned values” still show the best way to live.

3. \*God’s laws about abortion, pornography, and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late (Not included in original version of Traditionalism scale).

4. \*There is absolutely nothing wrong with nudist camps (R).

5. \*This country will flourish if young people stop experimenting with drugs, alcohol, and sex, and pay more attention to family values.

6. \*There is nothing wrong with premarital sexual intercourse (R).

7. Traditional values, customs, and morality have a lot wrong with them (R).

8. Everyone should have their own lifestyle, religious beliefs, and sexual preferences, even if it makes them different from everyone else (R). Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism

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9. The radical and sinful new ways of living and behaving of many young people may one day destroy our society.

10. Trashy magazines and radical literature in our communities are poisoning the minds of our young people.

11. It is important that we preserve our traditional values and moral standards.

12. People should pay less attention to the bible and the other old-fashioned forms of religious guidance, and instead develop their own personal standards of what is moral and immoral (R).