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Effects of gender and religiosity among Christians and Muslims on “gendered” role attitudes towards ability and equality: the case of Lebanon

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Abstract

This study examined the possible impact of religiosity on Lebanese Christian and Muslim college students' attitudes towards gender roles. The sample consisted of 1081 males and 1338 females who constituted 1098 Christians and 1182 Muslim students randomly selected from 11 universities in Lebanon. Respondents were asked to rate 11 most heatedly debated issues regarding gender roles in Lebanon. Factor analysis revealed two preconceptualized dimensions, i.e., “equality” and “ability”. MANOVA results showed that highly religious Muslims had a lower tendency for equality between men and women, while less religious Christian females showed the highest ratings on the equality dimension. Interaction effects showed that Christian females with low religiosity levels registered the highest score on the ability dimension. By contrast, Muslim males with a high religiosity level gave the lowest rating on the ability dimension for women, i.e., they degraded women's ability to perform jobs equally like men. This study is significant to the extent of differentiating between confessional groups on gender role attitudes in Lebanon.

Background of the study

Gender studies have recently attracted the attention of scholars interested in promoting gender equality in Arab states (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2000; Fernea, 1985; El Saadawi, 1980). The extant literature, however, has been limited to Muslim samples and countries, with inconsistent findings. A number of studies have portrayed Arab women as powerful members in society (Nader, 1990), as increasingly educated, and as entering the labor market in growing numbers (Haddad, 1985), while other studies have portrayed Arab women as lacking

freedom and citizenship rights, and as subjugated by a patriarchal social structure (e.g., Sharabi, 1975; Sharabi, 1988) which denies their citizenship rights in a myriad of ways. It is suggested that religious women conform closely to the standard of culture and religious commitment and reinforce strong kinship and stereotyping attitudes in a patriarchal society (Thompson, 1991).

From another perspective, religiosity as a behavioral concept has been rarely studied among Christian and Muslim groups in the Arab world. It is acknowledged that groups with different religious backgrounds exhibit different behaviors (Barakat, 1977; Khashan, 1992). Furthermore, differential socialization among groups suggests that females in the Arab world are acculturated into a system of patriarchy that renders them submissive, passive, and obedient to male supremacy (Abouchedid & Nasser, 2000). It is also suggested that men who exhibit patriarchal attributes are more likely to produce high levels of religious behavior than women, and are more disposed to conservative behaviors than men (Sharabi, 1988). Moreover, the existence of a significant relation between religiosity and patriarchal images presents a demonizing picture in the West, of women in Arab society (Rizzo, Meyer, & Ali, 2002).

Analysis of Arab Muslim behavior ingrained in Islamic values of communal and coreligionist bonds gives less freedom and autonomous behavior to individuals. Islam also allows for greater symbiotic adherence transcending a language-cognitive conflation to behavior. Within a religious discourse, Islam binds the community from minute civil matters to greater national or legal issues. However, Christian Arabs have been projected by different value priorities (Abouchedid, 1997). In their recent histories, they have established Western bonds, often finding immigration to the West to solicit better standards of living, or in some cases to forgo persecution. It is not without reason to find differences in social attitudes between Christians and Muslims in the Arab world in general, and in Lebanon in particular.

Gender studies in Arab states can be classified into two types: situational and dispositional. Situational studies have attributed women's discrimination to situational or structural forces such as the patriarchalized— cultural, legal, social, and political structures which deny women's citizenship rights as seen from the spectrum of equality of gender roles in society (Sharabi, 1988; Barakat, 1984). This neopatriarchal belief-system (Sharabi, 1975; 1988) which permeates the entirety of the social, economic, and political institutions in many Arab states has further legitimated the subjugation of women to an existing male-supremacist socio-political structure as with Palestinian (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2000; 1998) or Algerian women (Bennoune, 1995), often noting the role of religious ideology, fundamentalism, and gendered socialization as barriers to development and social progress (Mernissi, 1982; 1987).

A second body of theoretical literature covers the situational elements in the analyses of gender inequality in the Arab world. Western scholars have shown their interest in the perceived low social and economic status of women as well as in their secluded existence in social and political arenas. In addition, Arab women have been viewed in the West as passive, obedient, exotic, and seductive belly-dancers (Shaheen, 1984; Al-Obeidi, 2000; Schwartz, 1996). In short, scholars working in this area approach the topic of gender in the Arab world by alluding to the dysfunctions of the system such as the reproduction of archaic social and political structures (Abouchedid & Nasser, 2000), patriarchal beliefs (Sharabi, 1988), or by sympathizing with the victims themselves who live under abrasive social and economic conditions.

In general, most gender research in the Arab world has been “uni-religious” exclusively limited to Islamic countries and Muslim populations; hence, there is no a priori ground to suggest that findings from Islamic Arab countries are generalizable to other Arab countries which accommodate Christians. In addition, the fact that gender research ignores to compare Christian and Muslim attitudes on gender equality, very little is known as to how Arab Christians and Muslims may converge or diverge in their attitudes towards ‘traditionally demarcated’ and ‘ideologically constructed’ gender roles in society. Therefore, the uniqueness of each gender and the distinct perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of Arab Christians or Muslims regarding gender equality in society have not been previously documented.

This paper seeks to contribute to the study of religious behavior between males and females from different religious backgrounds. First, it examines Lebanese college student attitudes towards gender equality in Lebanon— a country that accommodates Christian and Muslim populations. Historically, Lebanese Christians have been receptive to Western cultural traditions (Khashan, 1992) and their schools have played a significant role in spreading Western thoughts and modernity, en route towards equality between men and women (e.g., Cassidy & Warren, 1996). Lebanese Muslims, on the other hand, share some of their religious beliefs and traditions with those of their brethren in neighboring Arab states; such beliefs have been either supportive or unsupportive of gender equality depending on the behavioral structure of that society. Therefore, comparing the attitudes of Lebanese Muslim and Christian college students towards gender roles helps to assess the social and cultural reasons for these attitudes, and thereby to determine the likelihood of greater support for women’s representation, legitimacy and wider participation in the social, economic and political arenas in pluralist contexts. Furthermore, this inter-group comparison yields important data on attitudinal differences regarding gender roles in society since Muslim and Christian college students are organized in social and political clubs at university campuses that debate social, political, gender, citizenship and religious issues. In a broader sense, college students in Lebanon are considered as one of the most informed segments of the Lebanese society whose cultural characteristics and political orientations mirror Lebanon’s wider socio-political culture because such characteristics are displayed on university campuses (Barakat, 1977; Khashan, 1992).

The present analyses will focus on college students’ attitudes towards 11 most heatedly debated clichés about gender roles in Lebanon as obtained from newspapers and archive material. Clearly attitudinal differences on gender roles stem from different agencies of socialization; one such important agent of socialization in the Arab world is the religious institution (Khashan, 1992). Hudson (1968) argued that religion and kinship share an important role in the Arab sense of identity. More specifically, religion constitutes the main base of the political, social, and legal structure in the Arab world; it is the main map to individuals’ identity in the specific national system (Khalaf, 2001).

Our basic premise about the social make-up and its consequential gender role attitudes can be explained by the classical patriarchal formulations. Although at present, female youth in Lebanon express egalitarian views, they seek equality with males in occupational and educational spheres (Nasser & Abouchidid, 2006). This is not surprising as the literature reports that women cross-nationally are more liberal in their attitudes than men (O’Keefe & Hyde, 1983; Kulik, 1999). However, it is rare that one finds females in a key economic, ideological, military, or political position in the Arab world. In addition, looking at the basic orientations of members of a confessional group, and their perceptions of gender role

attitudes in order to say about other Arabs is somewhat an overgeneralization. For instance, Tunis, which is a predominantly Muslim country, has instituted state rules that have enticed a behavioral structure similar to that of any Western society; whereas, women in Saudi Arabia are mostly confined to tasks that are perceived in Western standards as being dominated by males (Pharaon, 2004). The Arab world is extensive, spanning from the Atlantic edge of Africa through the Northern part to the “Persian Gulf,” and any sort of generalization must be approached with caution. Lebanon is not only an Arab country but also a Mediterranean one with a multi-confessional, and plural society (Abouchedid, 1997; Sidani & Gardner, 2000). Being aware of these limitations, generalizations made in this paper do not simplify the differences in Arab society but rather shed light on the underlying structure of these societies and what may be perpetuated by it. Several hypotheses were formulated in this study that explore issues related to religiosity, gender, and confessionalism.

Hypotheses

H1. Given that attitudinal differences on gender roles stem from different agencies of socialization, mainly religion (Khashan, 1992), and in light of Arab Muslim behavior that that bestows less freedom for females as opposed to Christians, it is hypothesized that highly religious Muslims will be less supportive of egalitarian attitudes than their Christian counterparts.

H2. Since religiosity is associated with conservative cultural traditions that espouse patriarchal behavior (Hunsberger, 1998), it is hypothesized that Lebanese females with low religiosity levels will adhere to egalitarian attitudes more than those with high religiosity levels.

H3. Muslim males with high religiosity levels would rate low egalitarian attitudes compared to Muslim females, and Christians, both males and females.

Method

Sample

The sample in this study was part of a large study on attitudes of college students in Lebanon conducted by the Lebanese Association of Educational Studies (LAES). A representative sample of senior-level undergraduate college students ($n = 2436$) constituting 20% of the total number of senior students in Lebanon was randomly selected from 11 private and public universities. The sample consisted of 1081 (44.7%) males and 1338 (54.9%) females. In terms of religious affiliation, 1182 (49.5%) identified themselves as Muslims and 1098 (46%) as Christians, while 108 (4.5%) of the sample refused to disclose their religious identities. Among Muslim students, there were 484 (41.1%) males and 693 (58.9%) females, while the Christian sample comprised of 525 (48.1%) males and 567 (51.9%) females.

Questionnaire

A group of Lebanese journalists and academics were asked by the Lebanese Association of Educational Studies (LAES) to construct a questionnaire dealing with Lebanese college students' socio-political values and orientations. The religiosity and gender role items were

obtained from two sources; namely, excerpts from newspapers, and from interviews conducted with religious clerics and politicians. The first part of the questionnaire requested respondents to identify their gender, religion, type of university attended (private or public), and their scholastic majors. The second part consisted of a four-item religiosity scale, which included: (1) fasting; (2) frequency of attending church or mosque; (3) praying; and (4) the extent to which they obey religious commandments. Responses on the religiosity scale ranged from a high disagreement of “1” to a high agreement of “5.” The third part of the questionnaire had items that represent 11 most heatedly debated issues regarding the status of women in Lebanon such as their equality with men, ability, inheritance as well as their roles in the Lebanese political, social arenas, and honor. The items were limited to a three-point response of “agree”, “don’t know”, to “disagree” to obtain a definite yes/no type of response.

In order to ensure the face validity of the questionnaire, a panel of academics in Lebanon discussed the various questionnaire items during a two-day seminar at the Alumni club of the American University of Beirut. Panelists rated the questionnaire items as highly pertinent to public debates concerning gender issues in Lebanon. In addition, the authors observed that items on gender equality tap different constructs. Therefore, as a measure for ensuring the construct validity of the questionnaire, a principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation and eigen cut-off value of 1 was run on all the items on the devised scale. Factor analysis was useful since it provided a mechanism for item selection such that valid items contributed to measurement of construct validity. Item loading above 0.40 was considered part of a factor. Analyses yielded three factors, which were explained by 45.9% of the variance in the data (See Table 1). The first factor explained 26.2% of the variance. The items that loaded on this factor were preconceptualized as the “equality” dimension which included items on gender participation in political posts in the government, gender differences that stem from traditions, and women right to participate in politics like men. Since items on equality loaded highly on the first factor it was labeled as the “equality” dimension. This dimension had Chronbach $\alpha = 0.67$. The second factor was explained by 10.5% of the variance and it drew on agreements or disagreements with women’s mental capacity. This factor, therefore, was perceived as the “ability” dimension which yielded Chronbach $\alpha = .68$. The third factor had items loading high on dispositional characteristics of women such as being expressive and emotional. This factor was explained by 9.1% of the variance. In addition, this dimension had low communalities and a Cronbach $\alpha = 0.12$; hence, it was excluded from the analysis, but not from the descriptive statistical part of the study.

Table 1: Factor loading scores on the gender role attitudes questionnaire

	1	2	3	h ²
1. High jobs in the government should be equally divided between men and women.	.63			.48
2. When women work outside the house, their husbands should share in house work such as washing dishes and clothes.		-.45		.26
3. Women cannot perform tasks which are usually done by men.		.56		.41
4. Males are more capable of pursuing scientific studies than females.		.74		.55
5. Women are distinguished by sensitivity and emotionality.			.65	.44
6. No differences between women's and men's attributes; differences are made by traditions.	.57			.33
7. Females should equally inherit like males.	.66			.54
8. Like men, women have the right to practice politics.	.60			.45
9. It's normal that females go out and travel and have friends like males.	.67			.51
10. Premarital sex is a shame on both the female and her family.			.63	.53
11. Men are more capable in undertaking wise decisions concerning the family than females.		.62		.49
Total Variance Explained	26.2%	10.5%	9.1%	45.8

Analyses and Findings

The first analysis provided the frequencies and percentages of responses to the gender role attitude scale (See Table 2). The majority of respondents documented favorable views on equality in gender social roles in the Lebanese society. The two preconceptualized factors of equality and ability were quantified by adding ratings of each item that made up the factor and divided by the number of items. A mean score was obtained by adding item ratings 1, 6, 7, 8, and 9 (see Table 1) and dividing by 5 to obtain the dependent mean score for equality dimension. Items 2, 3, 4 and 11 were added and divided by 4 as the mean scores for the ability dimension. Negatively worded items were recoded to fit into the direction of the items in each dimension obtained. The new obtained mean scores allowed for further analyses of the data to test the hypotheses of the study. A series of correlations between self-declared religiosity with equality and ability was performed separately between males and females as well as between Christian and Muslim respondents.

First, respondents were asked to self-rate the religiosity scale along a five-point Likert scale. Summing up the scores on the four items and dividing by 4, (the number of items), a mean score was obtained for the religiosity behavior; the higher the mean rating the higher the religiosity behavior among respondents. The high middle, and low classification for the religiosity scale was based on the median as a cut-off mark.

Table 2: Frequency and percentages of responses on the gender role attitude questionnaire

	Agree n (%)	Don't know n (%)	Disagree n (%)
High jobs in the government should be equally divided between men and women.	1880 (79.9)	94 (4)	379 (16.1)
When women work outside the house, their husbands should do house work such as washing dishes and clothes.	1784 (75.9)	69 (2.9)	497 (21.1)
Women cannot perform tasks which are done by men.	1581 (67.5)	49 (2.1)	712 (30.4)
Males are more capable of pursuing scientific studies than females.	366 (15.6)	106 (4.5)	1880 (79.9)
Women are distinguished by sensitivity and emotionality.	2258 (95.6)	17 (.7)	79 (3.4)
No differences between women's and men's attributes; differences are made by traditions.	1534 (65.8)	115 (4.9)	681 (29.2)
Females should equally inherit like males.	1596 (68.1)	89 (3.8)	657 (28.1)
Like men, women have the right to practice politics.	2149 (91.5)	22 (.9)	177 (7.5)
It's normal that females go out and travel and have friends like males.	1925 (82)	45 (1.9)	378 (16.1)
Premarital sex is a shame on the female and her family.	1490 (63.5)	144 (6.1)	711 (30.3)
Men are more capable in undertaking wise decisions concerning the family than females are.	1118 (47.5)	77 (3.3)	1161 (49.3)

Table 3: Correlations coefficients of religiosity by ability and equality measures

	Male		Female		Christian	Muslim
	Christian	Muslim	Christian	Muslim		
Ability	-.03	.32**	-.13*	.21**	-.15*	.27**
Equality	.03	-.41**	-.016	-.37**	.08*	-.39**

* Significant at the 0.05 level

** Significant at the 0.001 level

Table 3 reports the correlation coefficients for self-declared religiosity among Lebanese college students. An inverse correlation was found between religiosity and equality dimension ($r = -0.23$, $n = 2118$, $p < 0.01$) and correlated positively with ability ($r = 0.15$, $n = 2144$, $p < 0.01$) (correlation not reported on Table 3). By selecting Muslims religiosity ratings, it was associated with equality ($r = -0.39$, $n = 1018$, $p < 0.01$) and positively correlated with ability ($r = 0.27$, $n = 1026$, $p < 0.01$). By contrast, self-declared religiosity among Christian males correlated weakly though with equality ($r = 0.08$, $n = 971$, $p < 0.05$) and ability respectively. Moreover, equality ratings among Christian students were inversely correlated with ability ($r = -0.15$, $n = 1027$, $p < 0.01$). Correlation data also revealed noteworthy differences in the self-declared religiosity between Muslim and Christian males and females. Taken separately, self-declared religiosity among Muslim males was positively correlated with ability ($r = 0.32$, $n = 434$, $p < 0.01$) and was inversely correlated with equality ($r = -0.41$, $n = 427$, $p < 0.01$), i.e., Muslim males whom self-declared themselves as highly religious rejected notions of equality between men and women. Self-declared religiosity among Christian females was neither associated with ability nor with equality; while equality was inversely correlated with ability ($r = -0.10$, $n = 490$, $p < 0.05$). In addition, Muslim females' religiosity was inversely associated with equality ($r = -0.37$, $n = 587$, $p < 0.01$) and was positively correlated with ability ($r = 0.21$, $n = 588$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 4: Overall mean for gender by confessional affiliation by religious behavior

				Mean	SD	
Dependent Variable	Gender	Confessional Affiliation	Religious Behavior			
Equality	Male	Christian	Low	2.72	.026	
			Middle	2.73	.035	
			High	2.74	.040	
			Muslim	Low	2.49	.034
				Middle	2.11	.04
				High	1.88	.03
	Female	Christian	Low	2.89	.03	
			Middle	2.889	.03	
			High	2.89	.03	
		Muslim	Low	2.72	.03	
			Middle	2.43	.02	
			High	2.24	.04	
Ability	Male	Christian	Low	1.99	.04	
			Middle	2.01	.05	
			High	1.94	.06	
			Muslim	Low	2.08	.05
				Middle	1.68	.06
				High	1.57	.04

	Female	Christian	Low	2.51	.05
			Middle	2.34	.04
			High	2.33	.04
		Muslim	Low	2.33	.04
			Middle	2.11	.03
			High	2.03	.051

A 3 x 2 x 2 MANOVA of religiosity behavior (low, middle, and high) by confession (Christian and Muslim) and gender (male and female) was run on the two dimensions of equality and ability. Table 4 presents the overall means and standard deviations. Table 5 presents the F-ratios. Significant differences were reported between males (M = 2.45) and females (M = 2.68) on the equality dimension and between males (M = 1.879) and females (M = 2.27) on the ability dimension. A main significant effect was found between Christians (M = 2.81) and Muslims (M = 2.31) on the equality dimension, Christians (M=2.18) rated the ability of women higher than Muslims (M = 1.96). Last, main significant effect was found for religiosity on the equality between the three-religiosity classifications. The low religiosity provided higher levels on the rating of equality and ability compared to the middle and high religiosity. A post-hoc analysis showed differences between all combinatorial levels of religiosity at $p < 0.001$ levels.

The interaction showed significance for gender by confessional affiliation on the equality dimension. Christian females rated higher than Muslim males and Muslim females in the equality dimension. In addition, significant interaction level was found between confessional affiliation (Christian/Muslim) and religiosity on the equality and ability dimensions. Christians with high religiosity gave the highest rating on the equality and ability dimensions, while Muslims with high religiosity levels gave the lowest estimate for equality. Overall, Christian and Muslim males with the low religiosity gave the highest rating on the equality dimension more than those with high religious behavior. In addition, Christian females with low religious behavior gave the highest rating for the ability dimension. Muslim with a high religious behavior gave the lowest rating on the ability dimension, i.e., women are less able to compete with men.

Table 5: 2x2x3 MANOVA F-ratios for gender by confessional affiliation by religious behavior on the equality and ability dimensions

Source	Dependent Variable	df	Mean Square	F
Gender (A)	Equality	1	23.06	143.59**
	Ability	1	68.38	218.15**
Confessional Affiliation (B)	Equality	1	108.31	674.42**
	Ability	1	21.70	69.23**
Religious Behavior (C)	Equality	2	11.09	69.07**
	Ability	2	11.20	35.71**
A*B	Equality	1	2.120	13.20**
	Ability	1	.12	.39
A*C	Equality	2	0.09	.61
	Ability	2	.12	.39
B*C	Equality	2	12.01	74.81*
	Ability	2	3.50	11.15**
A*B*C	Equality	2	.20	1.25
	Ability	2	1.55	4.94*
Error	Equality	1945	0.16	
	Ability	1945	0.31	

* Significant at the 0.05 level

** Significant at the 0.001 level

Overall, results showed that Christians registered significantly more agreements with equality between men and women ($p < 0.001$) than their Muslim counterparts, and documented more disagreements with ability notions that discriminate against women on mental grounds such as “Males are more capable of pursuing scientific studies than

females.” Furthermore, significant mean differences were found between males and females in their ratings of the 11-item-questionnaire (See Table 4), with exception to item 10 on premarital sex. Analyses showed that females were opposed to discrimination against women, espousing an egalitarian stance and possibly rejecting the patriarchal belief-system more than males, unlike their male counterparts who exhibited a patriarchal-tinged behavior.

Discussion

In general, factor analysis results confirmed a two-factor structure preconceptualized equality and ability dimensions among Lebanese college students which were partially explained by their self-declared religiosity. While previous studies have shown that gender identities may strengthen collective patriarchal ideologies (Moore, 1998), particularly in gender roles, correlation results showed that patriarchal beliefs and attitudes of gender equality are either strengthened or weakened according to respondents’ self-declared religiosity so that it cuts across gender identity and religious affiliation. To elaborate, correlation coefficient results showed that self-declared religiosity among Muslim respondents was inversely correlated with equality and positively associated with ability. The MANOVA results confirmed the first hypothesis that religious Muslims do rate females low on ability and equality, whereas Christian males do so with a lesser degree than Muslims. On the other hand, religiosity among Christians was weakly correlated with the ability and equality dimensions. It may be that conservative religious ideology provokes Muslim beliefs to bestow upon men higher status and privileges in society than women (Hunsberger, 1995).

Further, females were significantly more likely than males to reject societal directed sex roles. In concert with previous literature on patriarchal behavior in the Arab world (Sharabi, 1988), it was quite anticipated that Muslim males would endorse patriarchal views that defeat notions of equality and ability between men and women unlike their Muslim female counterparts who gave balanced gender role attitudes. Self-declared religiosity among Muslim females was inversely correlated with equality i.e., the high religious respondents gave lower estimates of equality while the lower religiosity females gave higher equality and ability ratings. However, the MANOVA interaction effect did not show that high religious males had significantly higher ratings than high religious females, and conversely for low religious males and females. These results do not fully support the second hypothesis. This finding would suggest that Muslim and Christian females endorsed patriarchal beliefs as a possible route to buffer their self-esteem from social belittlement. Thus, gender whether males or females considered with high or low religiosity were similar in their ratings and hence confirmed the second hypothesis. These findings fit in well with the broader Arab social context; it seems that Lebanese college students are more acculturated into egalitarian gender roles where education can still play a fundamental role in promoting gender roles in society and the work place. Still at the legal level, the Lebanese law assuages punishment and reduces the duration of imprisonment for these individuals who perpetrate what the law coins as ‘honor crimes’ (Jara’em Sharaf), which include femicide of promiscuous unmarried females by male family members. Even in legal terms, the Lebanese judiciary protocols do not allow women to stand for any official legal transactions.

From another perspective, if one extends the contact hypothesis and its role in education on the moderation of inter-group attitudes (Verma et. al, 1994), one might predict that

education provides opportunity to adopt more gender neutral attitudes towards men and women. By contrast, although Lebanese college students registered favorable attitudes towards gender equality, the MANOVA results yielded significant differences between males and females and their self-declared religiosity. While gender identity connotes recognition of differences between the sexes as well as awareness that these differences are socially directed (Gilligan, 1982; Moore, 1991) and constructed, females in the present study were significantly more likely than males to reject patriarchalized societal constructed gender roles.

Turning to the religious identification of respondents, independent MANOVA results showed that Christian students registered more agility to de-gendering participation and representation of men and women in political and social arenas than their Muslim counterparts, while disagreeing with ability that considers women as mentally inferior to men. In fact, this hypothesis is partially accepted in that Muslim males and highly religious individuals rated lowest equality between men and women. Religious identification as an important component of respondents' attitudes (Devine, 1992), appeared to be a salient variable in the definition of Muslim and Christian differential attitudes towards gender equality. However, this finding cannot corroborate the hypothesis that Christians are more inclined to endorse egalitarian gender roles than Muslims without considerations for the self-declared religiosity factor (Emerson, 1996 cited in Rizzo, Meyer & Ali 2002). Perhaps, Muslim attitudes towards gender roles mirror the conceptual distinction of Islam where there is the 'Pristine' Islam (the ideal) which states that both sexes are equal before God (Mernissi, 1996) and 'traditional' Islam (the practiced) which is influenced by religious authorities that enforce androcentric practices (Rizzo, Meyer & Ali 2002). Since Lebanese identify their religious affiliation according to their birth certificates, favorable attitudes to gender equality of men and women among Christians can be related to other factors not accounted for in the present study such as parents' level of education and occupational attainment. In addition, the absence of a high positive correlation between the self-declared religiosity and equality between men and women among Christians might indicate presence of an egalitarian ethos in Christianity and among Arab Christians in particular.

Limitations

Further research is needed to explore the contextual factors that play a role in the formation of Lebanese college student attitudes towards gender equality in society; the data demonstrated only a small part of attitudes to gender equality. For instance, it is well established that the work place exerts substantial influence on gender equality attitudes (Kane & Sanchez, 1994). Preschool enrollment and type of education plays a role in the formation of egalitarian versus repressive and undemocratic attitudes to gender equality in the formative adolescent years (O'Connor, 1988). Still, because of the long duration of their formal education, gender role attitudes among college students are expected to be more egalitarian than those of average citizens in remote areas. However, this assumption remains limited unless average Lebanese citizens are included in future national surveys that tend to yield broader generalizations. In this context, future research should examine the impact of family socialization and employment on the formation of gender role attitudes. Additionally, while previous research has shown variations in gender attitudinal differences as linked to work experiences and employment (e.g., Cassidy & Warren, 1996), the present study

overlooked these independent variables from the analyses since the Lebanese sample was mainly composed of 'traditional students,' i.e., individuals who are not employed and fall into a small age range. Thus, employment of respondents should be used in future studies on gender to examine its possible impact on the formation of gender role attitudes. Furthermore, family socialization, class, and income may also contribute to the explanation of gender equality roles in society. These variables can be included in future research on gender equality roles in Arab states, particularly among Christian and Muslim groups from different socioeconomic backgrounds, since people with different status variables such as family structure, socioeconomic status (Hunt, 1980) and political affiliation may be associated with different value systems (Converse, 1964); hence exhibit different views to gender equality.

Finally, given the rise of fundamentalism in parts of the Arab world as contrasted to globalization and the sweeping penetration of Western values and life styles into the region mainly through Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), gender role attitudes are expected to be differentiable between what could be classified as conservative and liberal groups. While the primary concern of the present study was to document the attitudes of Lebanese Muslim and Christian youth towards gender equality in Lebanon, Western attitudes towards Arab men and women will be of interest to cross-cultural researchers interested in establishing complementary-system variables in their analyses of the Arab image in the West from a gender perspective. Thus, the locus of cross-cultural variables may be identified such as the actual position of women in the Arab world versus the image of the Arab woman in the Western mind. These variables may invite further research that seeks to understand how Arab women are viewed from outside the Arab world, and within it.

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