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Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

The Effect of Gender as Status Versus Gender as  
Identification on Abortion Attitudes

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Sociology

by

Miriam Frances Sharkey

December 2022

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Jan E. Stets, Chairperson  
Dr. Ellen Reese  
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2022

The Thesis of Miriam Frances Sharkey is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Effect of Gender as Status Versus Gender as Identification on Abortion Attitudes

by

Miriam Frances Sharkey

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Sociology  
University of California, Riverside, December 2022  
Dr. Jan E. Stets, Chairperson

This study uses a sociological social psychological perspective to examine abortion attitudes among self-identified men and women. The study of abortion attitudes is important because abortion has remained an ongoing, controversial political topic for decades. Identity theory suggests that people's attitudes are guided by their identities. I predict that the more that someone identifies with his/her gender, the more that s/he opposes abortion. Although exceptions exist, people's gender identification is often shaped by traditional, cultural meanings associated with gender that typically do not support abortion access. By analyzing the Identity Module in the 2014 General Social Survey through ordinary least squares regression among self-identified men and women, the findings indicate that the more that someone identifies with his/her gender, the more they are likely to oppose abortion. The strength of gender identification has a greater impact on abortion attitudes than gender identity, measured in terms of whether respondents identify as male or female. Future research must consider the self and how individuals view themselves, especially in relation to gender, in an analysis of abortion attitudes.

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## INTRODUCTION

Abortion remains one of the most unresolved ideological and political battles in the United States, despite becoming legal at the federal level in 1973 with the Supreme Court ruling of *Roe v. Wade*. In 2022, abortion as a policy stopped existing as a federally supported right and was instead returned to state-level jurisprudence with the Supreme Court ruling of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*. Many women nonetheless currently seek abortion services. For example, the Center for Disease Control reported that an estimated, 629,898 legally induced abortions were performed in the United States in 2019 alone (CDC, 2020). Studies have elucidated the various reasons women seek abortion care, such as a concern for the future economic and health consequences for themselves, their families, and the potential child (Kirkman, Rowe, Hardiman, Mallett, and Rosenthal 2009). Regardless, as shown by various closures of clinics in certain states, there had been persistent threats to abortion access and modifications to legalization at the state level that were increasingly successful even before the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (Diamant and Sandstrom 2020).

These restrictions on abortion access are due, in part, to voters electing politicians that enact laws that restrict abortion access. Abortion is a more politically salient issue in the United States compared to other countries, in part, because the issue has been framed in the realm of constitutional rights as opposed to a medical health issue (Halfmann 2019). The rise of the pro-life movement after the famous Supreme Court ruling has played a major influence in continuing this prominent schism in public opinion in the United States by successfully mobilizing conservative voters around this issue (Jelen and Wilcox 2003). This political movement made way for numerous politicians with anti-abortion stances to become elected; they have proceeded to enact restrictive abortion laws, though voters have mixed opinions and knowledge about the laws being passed (Diamant and Sandstrom, 2020; Smith, 2016; White, Potter, Stevenson, Fuentes, Hopkins, and Grossman 2016; White, Grossman, Stevenson, Hopkins, and Potter 2017).

One crucial detail to note is that not all abortion attitudes are hardline on one side of the debate or the other. The General Social Survey (GSS) has polled American residents since 1972 about the morality of an abortion depending on the reason a woman holds for seeking one. Of the seven frequently asked



abortion scenarios found in this survey, some portion of respondents express approval for all or none of the scenarios, while others express ambivalent attitudes by approving some scenarios while disapproving of others. People who lean towards a pro-choice stance express mixed views towards scenarios that have culturally been classified as “elective” (“for any reason,” “is single,” “is married but doesn’t want children,” “can’t afford more children”) because, as some literature suggests, many people often consider it appropriate to ascribe personal responsibility to the woman for not preventing the pregnancy in the first place (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox. 1992; Craig, Kane, and Martinez. 2002). People who lean toward a pro-life stance, on the other hand, express mixed views towards scenarios that are categorized as “traumatic” (“pregnant as a result of rape,” “birth defect,” “life of the mother is threatened”) because many people often consider the women in these scenarios as victims of misfortune or a crime (Cook et al. 1992; Craig et al. 2002).

The persistence of this political debate and divide is why it is important to study abortion attitudes and the factors that may influence them. Women, despite being direct stakeholders in the issue of abortion access, vary widely in their permissive and restrictive attitudes on abortion such that gender is considered an unreliable predictor of abortion attitudes compared to more reliable factors such as religiosity (Adamczyk, Kim, and Dillon 2020; Hertel and Russel, 1999).

Researchers are unclear as to why self-reported women vary in their opinions on abortion when they share the same social status (female) within our society, hence implying that most if not all people sharing the same social status would agree with each other regarding issues pertaining to them. In this study, I focus more on people’s reported self-views related to their gender rather than their self-reported gender as a status or position in society.

No studies have considered the extent to which people choose to identify with their gender, and how that relates to abortion attitudes. Identity theory (Stets 1997; Stets and Burke 1996) provides a formulation as to how and why attitudes ought to be measured by not simply looking at gender as status but also gender as an identity, or in this study, gender as identification. While status pertains to one’s position in the social structure, an identity stems from an individual’s self-meanings of themselves (Stets 1997; Stets

and Burke 1996). Gender identification is how strongly individuals see themselves as a member of their gender.

This study aims to further assess associations between people's gender identification and their abortion attitudes. The individual act of identifying strongly with one's gender may predict people's abortion attitudes better than their status as gender or simply knowing whether they are male or female. Using a sample drawn from the 2014 General Social Survey (GSS) Identity Module, which is the most recent data available that includes information on respondent's gender identification, abortion attitudes, and relevant controls (age, party affiliation, religiosity, race, gender, marital status, socio-economic status, and their number of children), I investigate the influence that gender identification has on abortion attitudes.

I first review work on abortion attitudes, discussing what they are, how they are measured, how they are acquired, how they have changed over time, and characteristics that influence attitudes. Then I will review identity theory, looking at the types of identities, what constitutes an identity, how identities are maintained, and the multitude of identities within the self before reviewing traditional gender meanings and their relevance to gender identification. This current study aims to draw connections between the meanings of one's gender identification and their abortion attitudes. This will help scholars to better understand how people form and maintain their abortion attitudes.

## ABORTION ATTITUDES

Various factors are associated with abortion attitudes. The more religious a person and the lower their socio-economic status, the more likely they will be to oppose abortion access (Adameczyk et al. 2020). An increasing number of Democrats ascribe to the "pro-choice" stance of supporting abortion access and an increasing number of Republicans ascribe to the "pro-life" stance of opposing abortion access (Jozkowski, Crawford, and Willis 2021; Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Mouw and Sobel 2001; Noy and O'Brian 2016). Large families tend to be anti-abortion because these families are inclined to hold pro-natalist ideologies that strongly encourage procreation (Vogl and Freese 2020). Further, married women are less likely to support abortion access (Ruppanner, Mikołajczak, Kretschmer, and Stout 2019). Younger Americans are more likely to approve of abortion in "all or most cases" (PEW Research Center 2022). Also, while most

individuals across racial categories say abortion should be legal in “all or most cases,” Asians are most likely to endorse this followed by Blacks and Hispanics, and Whites are least likely to endorse it (PEW Research Center 2022).

Hertel and Russell (1999) found that while men are slightly more likely to be pro-choice than women, women consider the issue of abortion more important to them. Furthermore, compared to other social groups, pro-choice attitudes are more common among single men, who also tend to report more inconsistent abortion beliefs (Hertel and Russell 1999). In Hertel and Russell’s (1999) study, the male respondents, as opposed to the female respondents, were more inclined to answer survey questions about abortion more callously; hence, these men’s supportive attitudes towards abortion were relatively quite disingenuous. More recent studies have found that women are slightly more inclined to support abortion access compared to men in the United States (PEW Research Center 2022) and abroad (Loll and Hall 2019).

One more factor to consider that has been found in past studies to be a comparatively more reliable predictor of abortion attitudes than ascribed gender is people’s endorsement of traditional gender roles. Opponents of abortion are more likely to agree with certain definitions of femininity that emphasize the virtuosity of self-sacrifice, remaining home, and motherhood (Huang, Osborne, Sibley, and Davies 2014; Huang, Davies, Sibley, and Osborne 2016; Osborne and Davies 2012; Osborne, Huang, Overall, Sutton, Petterson, Douglas, Davies, and Sibley 2022) and definitions of masculinity that emphasize having control over women’s decisions (Cassino 2018; Swank and Fahs 2016).

No studies have considered the role of gender *identification* in shaping attitudes toward abortion. The next section discusses the theoretical perspective, identity theory, that helps us understand the relationship between gender identification and attitudes.

## IDENTITY THEORY

Identity theory might provide some insight into people’s abortion attitudes. Studying identity and identification has been carried out in research on gender, attitudes, and behavior regarding environmentalism (Stets and Biga 2003), race (Hunt and Reichelman 2019), race and trust (Stets and Fares

2019), and women's working status outside of the home (Ritt 2021). Identity theory (Stets 2018) discusses how people apply meanings to themselves as unique individuals, role-holders, and members of groups and categories. It is the internalized set of meanings that individuals apply to themselves. These meanings are stored in their identity standard. People refer to their identity standard when they activate one of their identities.

There are four identity types: social, group, role, and person (Stets 2018). Social identities refer to people's membership in social categories, such as race and gender. Group identities refer to people's membership as they interact with a specific set of others, coordinate roles and duties, and cooperate with each other. The family identity is an example of group identity. Role identities refer to the meaning tied to roles that people play out in the social structure such as student, worker, spouse, and parent. Person identities are the meanings that make individuals unique and distinctive (Stets 2018).

For each of these bases of identity exists five key aspects of any identity: salience, prominence, verification, private regard, and public regard (Stets 2018). The salience of identity is the likelihood that a person will enact an identity in a situation. The prominence of identity refers to how important an identity is to an individual. Salience and prominence are not synonymous, for a woman could, for example, invoke her gender identity in a situation and behave according to societal expectations, but privately consider the identity not important (Stets 2018).

Verification refers to individuals' perception that others see them in the same way they see themselves (Stets 2018). The verification of each of the different identity bases (social and group, role, and person identities) lead to different forms of self-esteem. The verification of social and group identities results in worth-based esteem, the verification of role identities results in efficacy-based esteem, and the verification of personal identities results in authenticity-based esteem (Stets 2018).

Private regard is feeling pride in one's identity (Stets 2018). Public regard is a person's perception that the wider society shows respect toward their identity (Stets 2018). For example, some might believe that society does not respect women.

Four of these identity aspects (salience, prominence, verification, and private regard) constitute a person's *identification* and thus determine the degree to which a person decides (though decisions are heavily constrained by social structures the person resides in) to either closely or loosely identify with a particular social, group, role, or person identity. The stronger these aspects of identity, the more likely individuals will identify with the identity. Public regard does not constitute identification because it stems not from the perspective of the individual, but rather from the perspective of the wider society evaluating the individual (Stets and Fares 2019).

#### GENDER IDENTIFICATION

Gender meanings make up one's gender identity standard, including what it means to be masculine and feminine (Burke and Cast 1997; Stets 1997). Prevalent cultural gender meanings include such beliefs as the duty toward motherhood for women (Osborne, Huang, Overall, Sutton, Petterson, Douglas, Davies, and Sibley 2022), the expectation for men to be the chief authority figure and primary household provider (Cassino 2018; Swank and Fahs 2016), and the expectation for both men and women to procreate and form families to pass down conservative ideas (Vogl and Freese 2020).

Gender expectations for women are inextricably tied to motherhood. People believe that women fulfill the ultimate level of femininity once they become mothers (Stets and Lee 2021). Furthermore, the philosophy of 'intensive mothering' pervades American society, which insists that for a woman to be considered a successful mother, she must place the needs of her children before herself (Stets and Lee 2021). Women who adhere to intensive mothering behavior are more likely to forgo healthcare services for themselves (Damaske 2022). Regarding abortion attitudes and traditional gender role expectations for men, male pro-life advocates tend to align with authoritarian ideas (Swank and Fahs 2016). Not inconsistent with this, evidence reveals that conservative men who lose income relative to their wives become more conservative towards abortion, while liberal men who lose income relative to their wives become more liberal towards abortion (Cassino 2018). Additionally, social conservatives believe women should stay home to raise young children instead of seeking careers; these beliefs correlate to their hesitancy to vote for female candidates even when these candidates identify as conservative (Schreiber 2016).

Women's self-sacrificial behaviors and men's insistence upon maintaining their authority as it relates to traditional gender roles may provide insight into how gender identification is associated with abortion attitudes. In this paper, I explore whether those who identify strongly with their gender tend to hold more traditional meanings about gender that, in turn, would be associated with attitudes that oppose abortion.

## HYPOTHESIS

In general, we should expect that gender identification and supportive abortion attitudes have an inverse relationship. People who strongly identify with their gender are inclined to believe in, and adhere to, longstanding and ongoing traditional meanings of gender. Attitudes towards abortion are inextricably linked to traditional gender meanings because the abortion debate has implications for women's and men's cultural roles and expectations regarding womanhood and manhood, respectively. Therefore, my hypothesis is as follows: **There will be a negative association between gender identification and support for abortion.**

## METHODS

### **Sample**

This study draws its sample from the General Social Survey (GSS) 2014 identity module. There were 1,303 U.S. adults 18 and above, who were interviewed for approximately ninety minutes, with a response rate of 69.2%. The 2014 GSS is appropriate for this study because it includes the gender identification variables, abortion attitude variables, and relevant control variables (traditional gender beliefs, age, marital status, gender, number of children, political party affiliation, religiosity, race, and socio-economic status). Because the GSS splits their samples into three randomly assigned ballots, two of which listed abortion attitudes and two of which listed traditional gender beliefs for respondents to answer, the final sample for my model is 397 individuals.

### **Dependent Variable**

*Abortion attitudes* were measured using a scale that was created from seven items in the 2014 GSS dataset. Each question asks a respondent if he/she believes abortion should be legally permitted for a

pregnant woman in seven hypothetical scenarios. The question is: “Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if. . . A. If there is a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby? B. If she is married and does not want any more children? C. If the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy? D. If the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children? E. If she became pregnant as a result of rape? F. If she is not married and does not want to marry the man? G. If the woman wants it for any reason?” Potential responses range from “Yes” or “No” for each scenario. As shown in Table 1, a principal components factor analysis indicates a single underlying dimension for this measure with high internal reliability ( $\alpha = .90$ ). The items are averaged with higher values indicating greater support for abortion.

Table 1. Principal Components Factor Analysis, Abortion Attitudes

Items	Factor Loading
Baby has defect	0.72
Married but wants no more children	0.88
Mother’s health is at risk	0.58
Can’t afford more children	0.88
Result of rape	0.69
Woman is single	0.88
For any reason	0.87
$\alpha$	0.90

### **Independent Variable**

*Gender identification* was measured through a scale created from four items in the GSS that assess the prominence, salience, verification, and feelings of pride (private regard) in one’s gender identity. Public regard did not factor well with the other variables when constructing the gender identification scale (factor loading = .37) because, as mentioned before, it stems from the wider society's evaluations of the individual instead of the individual’s perspective (Stets and Fares 2019). Each aspect of gender identification is measured with a single item, and responses range from “not at all” to “completely” (coded 0 to 10). Prominence is assessed by asking, “How much is being your gender an important part of how you see

yourself?” Saliency is assessed with the question, “In general, how much do you find that being your gender influences or guides how you behave?” Verification is measured from the question, “Think about how you see yourself as your gender. How much do you think friends see you this way?” Private regard is operationalized from the question, “How proud are you to be your gender?” As shown in Table 2, the four items factored into one underlying dimension with good reliability ( $\alpha = .83$ ). The items were averaged to create a scale following previous work (Hunt 2020; Stets and Fares 2019), with high values indicating greater identification with one’s gender.

Table 2. Principal Components Factor Analysis, Gender Identification

Items	Factor Loading
Prominence	0.83
Private regard	0.81
Saliency	0.78
Verification	0.80
$\alpha$	0.83

### Background Variables

I control for background factors that prior research indicates are associated with abortion attitudes, including respondents’ religiosity, traditional gender beliefs, gender, age, marital status, number of children, race, socioeconomic status, and political party affiliation (Adamczyk et al. 2020; Bartkowski, Ramos-Wada, Ellison, and Acevedo 2012; Damaske 2022; Gay and Lynxwiler 1999; Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Jozkowski et al. 2021; Loll and Hall 2019; Osborne, Huang, Overall, Sutton, Petterson, Douglas, Davies, and Sibley 2022; PEW Research Center 2022; Ruppanner et al. 2019; Stets and Lee 2021; Vogl and Freese 2020). Previous research finds that support for abortion should be associated with greater socioeconomic status, being female, being younger, being non-white, and Democratic party affiliation (Adamczyk et al. 2020; Jozkowski et al. 2021; Loll and Hall. 2019). Alternatively, opposition to abortion is associated with higher religiosity, being older, being white, married status, having a number of children, and having a Republican party affiliation (Adamczyk et al. 2020; Jozkowski et al. 2021).



*Traditional Gender Beliefs* were measured using a scale that was created from two items in the 2014 GSS dataset. The first question asks respondents to what extent they agree with this statement: “A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.” The second question asks respondents to what extent they agree with this statement: “It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.” Responses range from strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. Both of these variables are reverse coded with higher values indicating more agreement with each statement. The two variables are averaged with higher values demonstrating greater endorsement of traditional gender beliefs.

*Gender* is coded as a binary dummy with men as the reference group (coded 0) and women coded 1, for the 2014 GSS only allowed for these two gender options as it had not asked respondents questions about their non-binary gender identities. *Age* is measured in years. *The number of children* is assessed by asking participants, “How many children have you ever had?” *Marital status* is assessed by asking participants, “Are you currently ‘married,’ ‘widowed,’ ‘divorced,’ ‘separated,’ or ‘never married’” (coded 1 to 5). This variable is recoded as a dummy variable with “married” (coded 1) and “non-married” (coded 0). For *race*, Black, Hispanic, and Other Ethnicity are coded as dummy variables. Each group is coded 1, with Whites as the reference group coded as 0.

For *political affiliation*, two dummy variables were created. The original variable measures participants’ political party, asking, “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?” The eight potential responses to this original question are “strong Democrat,” “not strong Democrat,” “Independent near Democrat,” “Independent,” “Independent near Republican,” “not strong Republican,” “strong Republican,” and “other party” (coded 0 to 7). The three responses of “strong Democrat,” “not strong Democrat,” and “Independent near Democrat” (recoded as 1) and the remaining four responses (recoded as 0) were combined to create the Democratic Party Affiliation dummy in order to make political affiliations nowhere near the Democratic party as the reference group. The three responses of “strong Republican,” “not strong Republican,” and “Independent near Republican” (recoded as 1) and the remaining four responses (recoded as 0) were combined to create the Republican

Party Affiliation dummy in order to make political affiliations nowhere near the Republican party as the reference group.

*Religiosity* is assessed by combining five variables pertaining to people's religious beliefs: the strength of participants' religious affiliation, their daily amount of prayer, their belief in God, feelings about their religiousness, and feelings about their spirituality. The strength of religious affiliation is assessed with the question, "Would you call yourself a strong (religious preference) or not a very strong (religious preference)?" Responses ranged from "strong" to "no religion" (coded 1 to 4). This is reverse-coded with higher values indicating greater religious affiliation. Daily prayer is measured with the question, "About how often do you pray?" Responses range from "several times a day" to "never" (coded 1 to 6). This is reverse coded with higher values indicating more frequent daily prayer. Belief in God is measured by responses to the statement, "Please tell me which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about God." Responses range from "I don't believe in God" to "I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it" (coded 1 to 6). Feelings about religiousness are assessed with the question, "To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?" Responses range from "very religious" to "not religious" (coded 1 to 4). This is reverse coded with higher values indicating feeling more religious. Finally, feelings about spirituality are measured with the question, "To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?" Responses range from "very spiritual" to "not spiritual" (coded 1 to 4). This is reverse coded with higher values indicating participants feel more spiritual. The five variables are averaged with higher values demonstrating greater religiosity.

*Socioeconomic status* (SES) combines the income, education, and occupational prestige of participants. Income is ascertained by asking participants, "In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year before taxes?" Responses ranged from "under \$1,000" to "\$150,000 or over" (coded 1 to 25). Education is the highest year of schooling completed. Responses range from "no formal schooling" to "8 years of college" (coded 0 to 20). Occupational prestige scores are assigned to respondents based on their reported occupation. This standard prestige score is a simple mean value of ratings for each occupation category ranging from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating more prestigious

occupations (for more information, see the GSS Methodological Report No. 124 and No. 70). Income, education, and occupational prestige are moderately correlated; ( $r = .49$  (prestige and education),  $r = .41$  (income and education),  $r = .33$  (income and prestige). The variables are standardized and averaged ( $\alpha = .69$ ). Higher scores indicate higher socioeconomic status.

## ANALYSIS

Ordinary least squares regression is used to assess the relationships between the independent variable of gender identification, the dependent variable of abortion attitudes, and the relevant control variables. The full model used for this analysis includes gender identification, abortion attitudes, self-reported gender, political affiliation, religiosity, age, marital status, children, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

## RESULTS

Table 3 reports descriptive statistics for the independent variable (gender identification), the dependent variable (abortion attitudes), and the control variables. Regarding the independent variable, the average rating is approximately 8 out of a scale from 0 to 10, demonstrating that respondents in this sample generally identify highly with their gender. Men account for 41% of the sample, while women account for 59% of the sample. Participants' age ranges from 18 to 89 years old with an average age of 51. About 49% of the respondents are married. Respondents, on average, have at least one child. The sample is 72% White, 15% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 4% Other.

Table 4 presents the correlations of the variables used in the analysis. Respondents who highly identify with their gender tend to be female ( $r = .13$ ), have more children ( $r = .17$ ), tend to be *religious* ( $r = .20$ ), have low socioeconomic status ( $r = -.10$ ), are black ( $r = .19$ ) and not white ( $r = -.15$ ). People who oppose abortion access identify closely with their gender ( $r = -.17$ ), endorse traditional gender beliefs ( $r = -.20$ ), tend to be male ( $r = -.11$ ), have a number of children ( $r = -.12$ ), are Republican ( $r = -.30$ ), are religious ( $r = -.41$ ), and Hispanic ( $r = -.15$ ). Alternatively, support for abortion access involves having a Democratic party affiliation ( $r = .27$ ), and higher socioeconomic status ( $r = .17$ ).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics (N=397)

	mean	sd	min	max
Abortion Attitude Scale	0.60	0.38	0.00	1.00
Gender Identity Scale	8.33	1.86	0.00	10.00
Traditional Gender Beliefs	2.09	0.67	1.00	4.00
Women	0.59	0.49	0.00	1.00
Age	51.50	15.45	23.00	89.00
Number of children	1.94	1.56	0.00	8.00
Marital Status	0.49	0.50	0.00	1.00
Republican Party Affiliation	0.34	0.47	0.00	1.00
Democratic Party Affiliation	0.48	0.50	0.00	1.00
Religiosity Scale	2.68	1.08	0.00	4.00
Socioeconomic Status	0.03	0.77	-3.24	2.51
Whites	0.72	0.45	0.00	1.00
Blacks	0.15	0.36	0.00	1.00
Hispanics	0.10	0.29	0.00	1.00
Other Race	0.04	0.18	0.00	1.00

Table 5 presents the regressions for gender identification with abortion attitudes. The effect of gender identification indicates that it is negatively related to abortion attitudes ( $\beta = -.04, p < .05$ ). The more one identifies with their gender, the less likely they support abortion access. Greater religiosity ( $\beta = -.14, p < .00$ ) and Republican party affiliation ( $\beta = -.06, p < .00$ ) also are significantly associated with decreased support for abortion. Support for abortion is associated with higher socioeconomic status ( $\beta = .05, p < .00$ ) and being black ( $\beta = .06, p < .01$ ). The variables that are not significantly associated with abortion attitudes are agreement with traditional gender beliefs ( $\beta = -.03, p > .05$ ), gender ( $\beta = -.02, p > .05$ ), number of children ( $\beta = -.01, p > .05$ ), marital status ( $\beta = -.02, p > .05$ ), Democratic party affiliation ( $\beta = .03, p > .05$ ), being Hispanic ( $\beta = -.03, p > .05$ ) or other race ( $\beta = .01, p > .05$ ).

Table 4. Correlation Matrix Of Variables (N=397)

	Abortion Attitude Scale	Gender Identity Scale	Traditional Gender Beliefs	Women	Age	Number of children	Marital Status	Republican Party Affiliation	Democratic Party Affiliation	Religiosity Scale	Socio-economic Status	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics	Other Race
Abortion Attitude Scale	1.00														
Gender Identity Scale	-0.17***	1.00													
Traditional Gender Beliefs	-0.20***	0.09	1.00												
Women	-0.11*	0.13*	-0.16**	1.00											
Age	0.06	0.08	0.12*	0.07	1.00										
Number of children	-0.12*	0.17***	0.15**	0.11*	0.28***	1.00									
Marital Status	-0.08	-0.07	-0.09	0.02	-0.05	0.11*	1.00								
Republican Party Affiliation	-0.30***	0.02	0.23***	-0.06	0.16**	0.10	0.13**	1.00							
Democratic Party Affiliation	0.27***	0.06	-0.18***	0.04	-0.09	-0.09	-0.11*	-0.69***	1.00						
Religiosity Scale	-0.41***	0.20***	0.19***	0.28***	0.18***	0.21***	0.02	0.20***	-0.12*	1.00					
Socio-economic Status	0.17***	-0.10*	-0.24***	-0.04	0.07	-0.11*	0.30***	0.11*	-0.02	-0.11*	1.00				
Whites	0.03	-0.15**	-0.09	-0.05	0.19***	-0.09	0.11*	0.27***	-0.25***	-0.21***	0.20***	1.00			
Blacks	0.06	0.19***	0.07	0.10*	-0.11**	0.12*	-0.13*	-0.23***	0.28***	0.26***	-0.15***	-0.67***	1.00		
Hispanics	-0.15**	0.03	0.08	-0.02	-0.10*	0.03	-0.01	-0.09	0.03	0.05	-0.18***	-0.52***	-0.14**	1.00	
Other Race	0.05	-0.06	-0.05	-0.03	-0.10*	-0.05	0.00	-0.08	-0.03	-0.05	0.09	-0.31***	-0.08	-0.06	1.00

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \* p<0.05 \*\* p<0.01 \*\*\* p<0.001

Table 5. Standardized OLS Estimates Of Favorability toward Abortion Among Respondents of the 2014 GSS (N=397)

	Abortion Attitudes
Gender Identification	-0.04* (0.02)
Traditional Gender Beliefs	-0.03 (0.02)
Women	-0.02 (0.01)
Age	0.08*** (0.02)
Number of children	-0.01 (0.02)
Marital Status	-0.02 (0.02)
Republican Party Affiliation	-0.06* (0.02)
Democratic Party Affiliation	0.03 (0.02)
Religiosity	-0.14*** (0.01)
Socioeconomic Status	0.05** (0.02)
Blacks	0.06** (0.02)
Hispanics	-0.03 (0.02)
Other Race	0.01 (0.02)
R-squared	0.33
Adjusted R-squared	0.30

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p<0.05 \*\* p<0.01 \*\*\* p<0.001

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between gender identification and abortion attitudes. I tested the hypothesis that people with a stronger gender identification are less likely to support abortion than those with weaker gender identification. This analysis demonstrates that one's gender identification is associated with one's abortion attitudes.

The lack of a gender difference in abortion attitudes has been quite perplexing to many scholars given that abortion is a health issue that directly affects many women. This study has uncovered that gender identification potentially plays a role in shaping people's attitudes. The more strongly one identifies as either a man or a woman, the more likely that he or she will oppose abortion.

One potential explanation for why gender identification is associated with opposition to abortion is because the meanings of being male and female within people's identity standards include various traditional gender views that are related to opposition to abortion. Additionally, attitudes help verify and sustain the self-meanings within individuals' identities (Stets and Biga 2003). Thus, one of the ways that individuals may maintain the meanings tied to gender identification is by holding attitudes consistent with their gender meanings. Abortion attitudes are one set of attitudes that may facilitate stable gender identification meanings.

One discrepancy within this study's findings is that though the endorsement of traditional gender beliefs was found to correlate with opposition to abortion, the regression results showed no significance between these beliefs and abortion attitudes. One potential reason for this is that the measure of traditional gender beliefs is limited. There is only a two-item measure, reducing the full range of traditional gender beliefs that could be captured. While in this study I was able to use two questions that inquired respondents as to their beliefs about women's expectation for domesticity, more items are likely needed to operationalize individuals' traditional gender beliefs.

Another potential reason why the regression results showed no significance between the endorsement of traditional gender beliefs and abortion attitudes has to do with the role of traditional gender beliefs in the analysis. Without controlling for the endorsement of traditional gender beliefs, gender

identification is not associated with abortion attitudes ( $\beta = -.02, p > 0.05$ ). Without controlling for gender identification, the endorsement of traditional gender beliefs is negatively associated with abortion attitudes ( $\beta = -.04, p < .05$ ). Including both gender identification and the endorsement of traditional gender beliefs into the regression results, I find that gender identification, but not the endorsement of traditional gender beliefs, is negatively related to opposition to abortion. These findings suggest that traditional gender beliefs are associated with gender identification, and gender identification, in turn, is associated with abortion attitudes. Thus, the effect of traditional gender beliefs on abortion attitudes is through gender identification. Prior work discussed a reciprocal relationship between identities and attitudes (Stets and Biga 2003). As mentioned above, identities influence attitudes and attitudes help to confirm and sustain one's identities. In this research, a reciprocal relationship may exist between gender identification and gender beliefs. Gender identification may help shape gender beliefs, but gender beliefs also may maintain people's gender identification. Thus, gender identification can act as an intervening process between gender beliefs and attitudes about abortion, as was found in this research.

Traditional gender role meanings may persist for women even in situations where women don't want to support them. We might see this concerning abortion. For example, pro-life advocates might convince abortion seekers to give birth but put their child up for adoption as an alternative to abortion (Joyce 2013). Furthermore, pro-life advocates frame their stances as "pro-woman" and argue for the personhood of fetuses because they believe themselves to be rescuing virtuous yet vulnerable women from the supposed trauma and regret resulting from obtaining an abortion due to both taking the life of a person and for not fulfilling their "true" desire to become mothers (Donnally 2013; Duerksen and Lawson 2017; Ehrlich 2019; Holland 2013; Husain, 2014; Newell 2019; Roberti 2017). This is because of the widely prevalent gender belief that feminine behavior is to be 'motherly,' which is characterized by selflessness, nurturance, and servitude. Thus, while individuals may not hold traditional gender beliefs, they may only behave in ways consistent with them out of pressure from others rather than on their own accord.

Recent studies have identified how much traditional gender beliefs have persisted. Between the mid-twentieth century to the early twenty-first century, many people changed their minds about women's



competency. They view women as more competent today compared to the past, but they continue to expect men to act in a more independent, agentic manner, and for women to act in a much more communal and accommodating manner (Stets et al. 2023). These assumptions regarding women and their accommodating nature are consistent with the benevolent sexist belief that women who adhere to the traditional meanings of femininity such as self-sacrifice should be supported by their community, emulated by other women, and protected by their authoritative male relatives (Glick and Fiske 2001; Glick and Fiske 1996; Moya, Glick, Expósito, de Lemus, and Hart 2007). People who agree with benevolent sexist beliefs tend to oppose abortion, including in cases where the life of the mother is threatened (Huang, Osborne, Sibley, and Davies 2014; Huang, Davies, Sibley, and Osborne 2016; Osborne and Davies 2012). Thus, the prevalence of traditional gender role meanings may be tied to benevolent sexist beliefs, thereby further strengthening their association with abortion attitudes.

One limitation of this study is that respondents are asked about their approval of patients' reasons for seeking an abortion like many other traditional surveys on abortion attitudes have done. However, very few surveys ask respondents about their opinion on whether they believe *Roe v Wade* should be repealed. On the one hand, abortion is considered by many in the United States to be one of many policy issues that appeal to single-issue voters, or voters who are known to choose between policies and candidates based solely on their ideological stance on abortion (Longley 2022). On the other hand, further evidence finds that even among many Americans who hold ambivalent attitudes towards patients' scenarios to the point of being classified as only permitting abortion in "few cases" (this most often means "traumatic" abortions) (Osborne et al. 2022), there still lies opposition to the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* (Undem 2015). Questions that ask about people's attitudes towards abortion in certain scenarios are weakly correlated to people's attitudes toward the legalization of abortion. Thus, future research ought to collect primary survey data that inquires respondents as to their attitudes towards the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* to find how gender identification relates to these attitudes.

Researchers have certainly pondered women's abortion attitudes, in part, because studies into women's voting behavior find that abortion attitudes do not always cause, let alone correlate, with women's

voting preferences. For example, studies have found that women among certain denominations such as evangelicals and Protestants are more inclined to vote Republican than the somewhat-less affiliated and non-affiliated women (Wilde and Glassman 2016). And, we know that religiosity and being Republican are positively associated with a pro-life stance. Paradoxically, though research has found that women tend to be more religious than men, women are more likely to vote Democratic and support more progressive policies than men (Wilde and Glassman 2016). This demonstrates problems in using attitudes to predict behavior; in this case, using abortion attitudes to predict voting behavior. Researchers ought to collect information on people's reported voting behavior alongside their abortion attitudes and gender identity to better understand the relationship between these three processes.

Other research reveals that attitudes don't predict women's behavior regarding their decision of an unplanned pregnancy. Past research uncovered a percentage of patients who seek abortion services despite holding anti-abortion beliefs (Thomas, Norris, and Gallo 2017). Moreover, longitudinal studies have found that women who successfully receive an abortion are more likely to support abortion access afterward, while women who are denied abortion due to gestational limits are less likely to support abortion access after the incident (Woodruff, Biggs, Gould, and Foster 2018). Studies measuring people's identity using identity theory have found stronger relationships between identity and behavior than attitudes and behavior. For example, people who are more inclined to identify as having an environmental identity engage in more environmentally friendly behavior than those who simply report supportive attitudes towards environmentalism (Stets and Biga 2003). These studies demonstrate that your life experiences and self-meanings as to who you are influences your attitudes rather than the other way around. People's life experiences pertaining to how they learn about gender form their gender identities, which then correlate to their attitudes toward abortion. Further research should collect more information on people's life experiences, especially their identities, to study abortion attitudes and abortion-related behavior.

Yet another limitation of this study is that few types of identities are available in this data to test the association between them and abortion attitudes. This study has found evidence for an association between the social identification of gender with abortion attitudes. However, other identities not tested in

this study have the potential to be associated with abortion attitudes, such as feminist identities. For example, prior research has found that intricacies exist within women's identities in that they have been found to either highly identify with both being female and feminist, or neither, or one or the other (van Breen, Spears, Kuppens, and de Lemus 2017). Women who identify more highly as female, as shown in this study, may be more likely to oppose abortion access compared to women who identify more highly as feminists. This is because feminists have advocated for abortion access (Gilmore 2008; Kline 2010; Nelson 2003), though further research suggests that feminist identities don't entirely determine feminist attitudes (McCabe 2005). Future research ought to collect primary data that measures the prominence, salience, verification, private regard, and public regard of feminists to further explain the associations between identification and abortion attitudes.

One last limitation of this study is that the data are cross-sectional and not longitudinal. Longitudinal data would provide better measurement as to whether gender identification affects oppositional abortion attitudes, whether abortion attitudes affect a stronger gender identification, or whether both effects occur.

Much past research has considered gender not influential in understanding people's abortion attitudes. In this study, I find that gender is related to abortion attitudes in the sense that the strength of people's gender identification determines their attitudes much more than gender as a status. This finding suggests further possibilities for how to uncover ways in which identification better predicts attitudes than status alone. Because people have agency in what identities they claim and so work more towards maintaining them, it is the strength of their personal identifications that may better uncover what is associated with abortion attitudes.

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