

**GENDER AS A TOOL OF THE RIGHT:
WOMEN AND THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT**

by

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Abstract

With the rise of the Tea Party movement, conservative women are yet again in the spotlight in America. Prominent, influential, and strong-willed women have become the public face of the Tea Party nationwide, and a substantial portion of the movement's grassroots support is among women. This thesis argues that female Tea Party elites have constructed a gendered narrative in order to mobilize their socially conservative women into supporting their primarily economic movement by infusing the otherwise autonomous and atomized individual at the center of their economic conservatism with the gendered identities of "family," "mother," and "woman," effectively narrowing the gap between social and economic conservatism. The results of logit regression analyses using survey data offer limited support for the effectiveness of this strategy in increasing grassroots support. Differences in men's and women's support for the Tea Party based on family concerns and gender awareness do not emerge; but among those who have children, women – and especially socially conservative women – are more likely to support the Tea Party than their male counterparts. Ultimately, I suggest that the higher level of involvement of socially conservative women in an economically conservative movement raises the possibility of a broader and more inclusive women's agenda in the U.S.

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1. Introduction

With the rise of the Tea Party movement, conservative women are yet again in the spotlight in America. Despite a long history of conservative women's political involvement, there remains a serious lack of feminist literature directly addressing conservative women and their claims. Instead, feminists have often ignored them, marginalized them, or treated them as aberrations or victims of false consciousness. Despite these dismissals, however, conservative women continue to be active and influential in American politics, most recently as leaders and activists within the Tea Party. Prominent, influential, and strong-willed women like Minnesota congresswoman and presidential candidate Michele Bachmann and former Alaska governor and vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin have become the public face of the Tea Party nationwide. And a substantial portion of the movement's grassroots support is among women. How has these women's gender identities influenced the Tea Party's rhetoric and support?

Of course, conservative women are hardly a new phenomenon, although each generation of liberal scholars and writers seems think their presence indicates some new and nefarious turn in American politics. Women, not men, were at the forefront of the anti-suffrage movement in the early twentieth century, confounding suffragists, who characterized them as traitors and dupes of men.¹ Andrea Dworkin as well as Pamela Johnston Conover and Virginia Gray, for example, each tried to make sense of the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment back when the New Right was still new, with Dworkin arguing that conservative women are "self-hating"² and Conover and Gray coming to the conclusion that the ERA failed because of conflicts between conservatives and feminists about whether women should be defined as individuals or in relation

¹ Thurner, "Better Citizens Without the Ballot," 33-34.

² Dworkin, *Right-Wing Women*, 17.

to the family.³ During the 1990s, feminist and journalist Elinor Burkett presented the stories of conservative women throughout America and was amazed to find how varied – and genuine – the movement is, and how blind she and other liberal feminists had been to it.⁴ In 2006, feminist Courtney Bailey similarly looked the “right-wing feminism” groups that emerged from the Anita Hill scandal in the early 1990s, arguing that their “feminism” is not feminism at all but instead “fails to acknowledge how dominant institutions disadvantage the very feminine qualities that right-wing feminists celebrate as ‘natural.’”⁵ Most recently, the women of the Tea Party have prompted similar hand-wringing among liberals: Katha Pollitt, for example, observes that the movement has left feminists “surprised,” given what she sees as the Tea Party’s obvious anti-feminism.⁶ To use the words of historian Kim Nielsen, these observers and scholars need to move “beyond the ‘oh, look, there’s a woman!’ stage of historical inquiry” and recognize that women have long been active in conservative politics, acting through their own agency and not merely as pawns of patriarchal interests.⁷

Still, even if their existence is not really new, the rhetoric of female Tea Party leaders is interacting with ideology in a novel way. Historically, research on conservative women activists in the American right has grouped them into two distinct and partially antagonistic categories: social conservatives, who are motivated primarily by religion and traditional gender roles, and economic or “laissez-faire” conservatives, who are motivated by a neoliberal economic philosophy and neo-conservative foreign policy preferences. Generally, there is agreement that these two broad camps, while allied in their opposition to feminism, have different reasons for

³ Conover and Gray, *Feminism and the New Right*, 3.

⁴ Burkett, *The Right Women*, 16-17.

⁵ Bailey, *Taking Back the Campus*.

⁶ Pollitt, “Grisly Mamas.”

⁷ Nielsen, “Doing the ‘Right’ Right,” 171.

their positions that limit the potential for full cooperation between them, especially their beliefs regarding the role of the state and women's roles vis-à-vis men. I argue that the Tea Party women have managed to unite these two branches of conservative women's activism. The women of the Tea Party have infused the otherwise autonomous and atomized individual at the center of their economic conservatism with the gendered identities of "family," "mother," and "woman," effectively narrowing the gap between these conflicting philosophies.

I begin, first, by providing an overview of the literature on conservative women from both feminist and conservative perspectives, which illustrates the cultural context from which the women of the Tea Party have emerged, paying particular attention to the tension between the social and economic strains of conservatism. Next, I identify a specific gender-based narrative that has emerged from the rhetoric used by female Tea Party elites to build support for their movement and agenda. I argue that this narrative is designed to narrow the ideological gap between social and economic conservatives in a novel and strategic way. I then turn from the elite level to the mass level, relying on regression analysis to determine to what extent the elite-level narrative strategy has been effective. Specifically, I examine the extent to which the motivations behind women's support for the Tea Party are more gender-based than men's, which would indicate that the gendered narrative has drawn women to the movement. I also analyze the extent to which socially conservative women's attitudes have warmed toward the Tea Party over time, which would suggest that the gendered strategy has indeed been effective in bridging the gap between social and economic conservatism among women. Finally, I discuss the implications of an effective gender-based narrative within mainstream conservative politics. If gender is gaining saliency among the right, then perhaps a common space is emerging between the conservative and feminist women's discourses, with the possibility for more constructive and

positive engagement among women, as well as a more central role for women's voices in the public sphere.

2. The Tea Party Women's Narrative

2.1. Feminists and Conservative Women

One gets the sense that feminists, especially second-wave feminists, have never been quite sure what to make of conservative women. In large part, their response has been to ignore conservative women or dismiss them as victims of false consciousness or as pawns of patriarchal interests. Of course, feminism has much to say to the right wing more broadly, but despite the central role played by women in articulating and promoting the right wing's message, conservative women as gendered actors is a notion not commonly addressed. For example, feminist scholars Cynthia Burack and Jyl J. Josephson present their agenda for feminist engagement with the right wing; however, despite their brief acknowledgement that "[w]omen are agents and shapers of right-wing beliefs and policies," their vision of the appropriate feminist response to the right wing lacks any treatment of who conservative women are, what their motivations may be, or what feminists should make of them.⁸ Instead, conservative women are lumped in with the broader conservative movement, and the possibility that their politics could be informed by their identity as women is overlooked. Another way that conservative women are overlooked, Ronnee Schreiber argues, is in the media's tendency to characterize conservative women's activists as conservatives, not as women, which reduces attention to the challenge that conservative women's existence poses for feminists.⁹ By refusing to label conservative women as women, those in the media have contributed to the perception that gender has no place in conservative politics. Overall, the gendered claims of conservative women appear overlooked within the political discourse, both at academic and mainstream levels.

⁸ Burack and Josephson, "Women and the American New Right," 72.

⁹ Schreiber, "Who Speaks for Women?"

Other feminists accept that these conservative women are motivated by their identity as women but dismiss them as pawns of men and unsuspecting victims of a pervasive patriarchal hegemony. A forceful example of this is Andrea Dworkin's characterization of the right-wing woman as being motivated by "[t]he singularly self-hating loyalty to those committed to her own destruction [which] is the very essence of womanhood as men of all ideological persuasions define it."¹⁰ In Dworkin's view, conservative women are just as acutely aware of their status as women within the hetero-normative patriarchy oppressing them as feminists are, but instead of fighting they respond by clinging to the existing order – playing by “the rules of the game on which their lives depend”¹¹ – having consciously allied themselves with patriarchy against the feminist forces that would dismantle the tradition and stability that they had learned to navigate and survive. Whereas feminists strive to liberate women by breaking the patriarchal order, according to this view, conservative women insist that resistance is suicidal and that women must accept and embrace patriarchy to survive.

To Dworkin, conservative women are both aware of and motivated by their essential identity as women; as a result, her argument assumes that the conservative ideology and activism of these women must therefore be driven by fear and be duplicitous in nature. The problem with the belief that conservative women are aware of injustice but collectively respond to it with passivity and submission is that it is contradicted so forcefully by the long tradition of conservative women's activism against societal – and male – norms. When socially conservative women in the mid-eighteenth century became activists and militants for temperance, they were fighting against an industry dominated by men in both production and consumption in order to

¹⁰ Dworkin, *Right-wing Women*, 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

protect their families.¹² When conservative women today fight the sexual abuse and trafficking of underage girls around the world, they are opposing patriarchy and capitalism at its most exploitative.¹³ And even when conservative women fight abortion, they believe they are protecting vulnerable women and unborn children against violent and brutal (read: male) destruction.¹⁴ To see submission and complicity with a patriarchal, hetero-normative culture in the actions of the conservative women who actively oppose entrenched, male-dominant institutions like these must involve some degree of willful blindness to reality. Disagreement with conservative women's beliefs should not entail the misrepresentation and denigration of those women's characters.

In contrast, Ronnee Schreiber and Rebecca Klatch insist that feminists must take conservative women's claims at face value, as genuine and sincere manifestations of their gendered identities as women, in order to understand what motivates them. According to Klatch, feminists who dismiss the "antifeminist," conservative woman deny that that woman is "well aware of her status *as a woman* and [that the conservative woman] acts to defend that status" (emphasis in original).¹⁵ Schreiber goes even further, characterizing the accusation that conservative women are mere pawns of men as itself antifeminist because "[c]hastising conservative women for their relationship to powerful conservatives undermines women's political power and agency. Unless we believe that they are expressing their political concerns

¹² Dannenbaum, "The Origins of Temperance Activism and Militancy Among American Women," 236.

¹³ For example, Shared Hope International (<http://www.sharedhope.org>) is a conservative Christian organization that works to free underage girls from the sex trade. It was founded by former Republican congresswoman Linda Smith, who is often held up in the popular press as an example of the "new" conservative woman of the 1990s (see, for example: Burkett's *The Right Women* or Rosin's "Is the Tea Party a Feminist Movement?").

¹⁴ For example, see Mathewes-Green, "Abortion: Women's Rights...and Wrongs."

¹⁵ Klatch, *Women of the New Right*, 12.

and opinions under duress, it is critical to consider them on their own terms.”¹⁶ Although some feminists seem to believe that conservative women *are* in fact acting under duress, Schreiber and Klatch are willing to accept conservative women’s claims as authentic, assuming nothing about hidden motives, and recognizing the centrality of women within the conservative movement.

Writing in the midst of the emerging New Right movement of the 1980s, Klatch challenges the assumption that right-wing women are “monolithic” and identifies two distinct and even contradictory strains of conservative women’s activism: she calls them the “social conservative” and “laissez-faire conservative” perspectives.¹⁷ Socially conservative women tend to be preoccupied with social issues and motivated by religion, whereas laissez-faire conservative women have little use for social issues and instead care about economics and strong national defense. Although social conservatives and laissez-faire conservatives may have a common interest in opposing “big government” and communism, they do so for different reasons: social conservatives see the state as a threatening secular force capable of destroying the traditional family and communism as a godless threat to American Christians, while laissez-faire conservatives see a large state as inimical to neoliberal principles of economic freedom and communism as an international threat to this freedom as guarded by capitalist America.¹⁸ In fact, Klatch argues that laissez-faire conservative women’s worldviews are closer to the views of feminists than to those of social conservatives; the primary difference between laissez-faire conservative women and feminists is in their beliefs regarding how the state and society should respond to the systematic patriarchy and discrimination that both recognize exist.¹⁹ Schreiber, drawing a similar distinction to Klatch’s, presents case studies of the “social conservative” group

¹⁶ Schreiber, *Righting Feminism*, 28.

¹⁷ Klatch, *Women of the New Right*, 4.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4-6.

¹⁹ Ibid., 51-53.

Concerned Women for America (CWA) and the “economic conservative” Independent Women’s Forum (IWF) in the 2000s, which likewise illustrate how these factions interact with each other, the broader conservative movement, and feminist forces on the left.²⁰

As Klatch points out, these laissez-faire and social conservative elements of the conservative women’s movement correspond to the economic and social-issue strains of conservatism within the American right wing historically. One study she draws on is Lipset and Raab’s 1970 examination of American conservatism from 1790-1970, which identifies a lower-class, less educated constituency primarily motivated by social issues and a higher-class, more educated constituency primarily motivated by economic issues. Klatch sees the women of the New Right as a natural extension of these historically based divisions.²¹ Schreiber’s more recent analysis indicates that this basic division has persisted into the twenty-first century, although her book pre-dates the emergence of the Tea Party as a nationally recognizable and viable movement. Nevertheless, it seems logical that the women of the Tea Party are somehow another extension of these competing yet complimentary conservative constituencies – but are they? And what do their presence and success mean for the women’s movement?

To understand what motivates the Tea Party women in this context, it is necessary to understand how their conservative predecessors historically have thought. First and foremost, socially conservative women view the family as the most fundamental unit of society, and as a

²⁰ Schreiber, *Righting Feminism*. I quibble slightly with Schreiber’s characterization of the IWF as a prototypical “economic conservative” women’s organization, and instead tend to agree with Barbara Spindel’s conclusion that the IWF espouses both libertarian and traditionalist rhetoric (Spindel, “Conservatism as the ‘Sensible Middle.’”). Schreiber paints the IWF as the libertarian counterpart to the CWA, despite the fact that it’s not entirely libertarian. The IWF, for example, adheres to a biologicistic view of the sexes, which is somewhat at odds with the autonomous individual of neoliberalism. Nevertheless, the general contrast between conservative women who focus on social issues and conservative women who focus on everything else still stands, and still parallels this division within conservatism as a whole.

²¹ Klatch, *Women of the New Right*, 6-7.

result their identity as women is heavily informed by their relationships to family – in particular, by their roles as mothers and wives in the traditional heterosexual relationship. For example, in a 2005 article entitled “Women and Conservatism After the Sexual Revolution,” Claudia Winkler takes a distinctly socially conservative position, claiming that women – by nature of their gender – have an interest in preserving traditional sexual mores according to a “pre-political...enduring moral order, a natural law” that sees families and children as foundational to women’s identity and stability.²² Because of the irreducible biological differences between men and women, women “are the more vulnerable” to liberal norms that separate sexuality from heterosexual motherhood since they are susceptible to unintended pregnancies, and “so [their] chastity needs more guarding” than men’s.²³ Women, whose identity is defined by their roles within families as mothers and wives, have a responsibility protect the traditional family against the liberal and feminist onslaught that they perceive as denying them their traditional and natural identity in society. Conover and Gray recognize this conservative identification of women within the family, instead of as autonomous individuals, as the central conflict in the ERA debate.²⁴ While their argument overlooks other bases for objection to the ERA, their analysis clearly presents the crux of the *socially* conservative case against the amendment, although they do not make that distinction themselves. In short, the importance of family to the identity of socially conservative women cannot be overstated.

In contrast, laissez-faire or economically conservative women see the individual, not the family, as the primary unit of society. While admitting that conservative women’s “ability to make [themselves] heard stems in part from the successful disruption of many traditional

²² Winkler, “Women and Conservatism After the Sexual Revolution,” 18.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Conover and Gray, *Feminism and the New Right*.

institutions” by feminists, Christine Rosen maintains that the conservative women’s commitment to essentially non-gendered individualism as the preferred mechanism for women’s advances precludes any acceptance of the “collectivism” of feminists.²⁵ This strain of conservative thought denies any substantive differences between women and men and instead defines women as autonomous individuals *already equal* to men.²⁶ As a result of their ideological commitment to individualism, economically conservative women are unwilling to find a common cause with feminists who perceive patriarchy and discrimination as systematic injustices that can only be addressed through collective action and identity politics. Although socially conservative women construct their identity in relationship to their families while economically conservative women identify themselves as individuals for whom gender is a nonissue, both groups decry feminists’ use of collective action to achieve a version of gender equality that they each reject.

Still, Klatch regards the tension between the family-based, gendered identity of social conservatives and the individualistic, non-gendered identity of economic conservatives as the nexus of irreconcilable differences between these two strands of conservatism. While the two factions’ goals regarding government are broadly compatible, social conservatives are comfortable with gender-based identity politics and a larger, more interventionist state capable of protecting (or enforcing, depending on one’s perspective) traditional gender roles, but economic conservatives are not.²⁷ Klatch especially regards the schism surrounding the role of the state as a “potentially explosive” issue between laissez-faire and socially conservative women.²⁸ Sylvia Bashevkin observes that prior to the New Right’s ascendance, although “[t]raditional laissez-faire, anticommunist conservatives tended to question the costs and origins of some feminist

²⁵ Rosen, “The Future of Women and Conservatism,” 32-33.

²⁶ For example: Lukas, “What You Get From Having an ERA.”

²⁷ Klatch, *Women of the New Right*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 200-205.

ideas...relatively few questioned the underlying rhetoric of equality so central to rights discourse in the U.S.”²⁹ But as social conservatives came to dominate the conservative agenda, social and laissez-faire conservatism have reached a tenable if occasionally uncomfortable alliance in opposition to what Angela Dillard calls the “looming specter of liberals and leftists.”³⁰

2.2. So, Who Are the Tea Partiers?

When looking at both the leadership and the grassroots supporters of the Tea Party, two characteristics stand out. First, women play a central role in the movement. Keli Carender, a 30-year-old Seattle woman, is credited with initiating the Tea Party movement, even before CNBC host Rick Santelli famously used the phrase “tea party” on the air.³¹ Former Alaska governor and 2008 vice-presidential nominee Sarah Palin and Minnesota congresswoman Michele Bachmann are commonly regarded as leaders of the movement;³² grassroots organizations like Smart Girl Politics (SGP), which “operate[s] like a feminist cooperative,” are prominent Tea Party movers and shakers; and six out of eight organizers of one of the main Tea Party groups, the Tea Party Patriots, are women.³³ At the mass level, various pollsters have found that anywhere from 40 to 55 percent of grassroots Tea Party supporters are women.³⁴

Second, both female and male Tea Party sympathizers are overwhelmingly conservative on social issues. A recent survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that when compared with all registered voters, self-identified Tea Party supporters are significantly more likely to oppose same-sex marriage (64 percent of Tea Partiers compared to 49 percent of the

²⁹ Bashevkin, “Facing a Renewed Right,” 679.

³⁰ Dillard, “Adventures in Conservative Feminism,” 26.

³¹ Graham, “Moms to the Barricades.”

³² Davey, “A GOP Agitator Not Named Palin.”

³³ Rosin, “Is the Tea Party a Feminist Movement?”

³⁴ Fund, “Women for Tea.”

general electorate) and abortion rights (59 percent to 42 percent). The survey also found that 69 percent of those who agree with the conservative Christian movement support the Tea Party, while only 4 percent of them disagree with it. Similarly, 42 percent of those who agree with the Tea Party support the conservative Christian movement, while only 11 percent of them disagree with it.³⁵ Clearly, despite the Tea Party leaders' insistence that their movement is a secular, economically driven one, its message also is resonating disproportionately with those who hold preexisting socially conservative beliefs.

So where does the Tea Party fit into the context of social and economic conservatism? On its face, the new movement purports to be economic in nature, concerned primarily with issues such as with the astronomically high U.S. debt, the perpetual inability of Congress and the president to pass anything even remotely resembling a balanced budget, Bush's \$700 billion bank bailout, Obama's nearly \$800 billion economic recovery package, U.S. tax policy, and what they see as socialism more generally.³⁶ However, as the Pew study indicates, this economically conservative movement is full of social conservatives, presumably also committed to a traditional understanding of gender relations. Occasionally, the tension inherent in a movement comprised of staunch social conservatives who claim to be committed to pursuing economically (and, somewhat paradoxically, militarily) conservative policies results in sharp disagreements about the purpose and direction of the movement.³⁷ Nevertheless, the Tea Party leadership –

³⁵ Clement and Green, "The Tea Party, Religion and Social Issues."

³⁶ See, for example, the Orlando Tea Party's "Declaration of Grievances" (blog post by culturewarrior, <http://www.thoughts.com/culturewarrior/the-orlando-tea-party-list-of-grievances>).

³⁷ One recent example involves the leader of one Tea Party organization, the Tea Party Founding Fathers, demanding that the Republican congressional leadership force the Democrats to reinstate Don't Ask, Don't Tell in exchange for raising the debt limit (McMorris-Santoro, "Tea Party Leader: We'll Take The Debt Ceiling Hike If You Put Gay Troops Back In The Closet.").

including its female leadership – has consistently attempted to present the movement as an economically conservative one.

As a result, although social and economic conservatism have been at odds historically,³⁸ both the social and economic strands of the conservative women's movement are identifiable and in fact working in tandem in the Tea Party movement. Palin is typical of this tendency. For example, during the 2008 campaign, she emphasized her social conservative credentials, particularly how she chose not to abort her Down-syndrome son Trig; her daughter Bristol has since hit the speaker's circuit telling teenagers to be sexually abstinent. In addition, Palin's ties to the very conservative Pentecostal Assemblies of God church have been documented, although Palin has attempted to distance herself somewhat from the rather extreme Pentecostal doctrine.³⁹ Nevertheless, female Tea Party leaders, Palin included, promote the movement as an economic, not Christian, one. One leader, Tammy Bruce, has characterized the Tea Party as a "dream" whose supporters are "[p]ro-choice and pro-life, Christian and not, poor and rich, black, white, gay and straight."⁴⁰ The president of the Boston Tea Party, Christen Varley, has also noticed a reluctance by the Tea Party leaders she works with to explicitly promote socially conservative positions, commenting, "We would be stupid to bring up abortion at a meeting."⁴¹ Palin has refused to take a hardline stance against homosexuality, even voicing support for civil unions in the vice-presidential debate – the same position advocated by Democratic nominee Joe Biden.⁴² While social conservatives may in practice comprise a significant chunk of the Tea Party

³⁸ For example, Schreiber documents the reluctance of the CWA and IWF to work together. Schreiber, *Righting Feminism*, 118.

³⁹ Coyne and Miller, "A Visit to Palin's Church."

⁴⁰ Bruce, "Why Tea Party women lead the charge."

⁴¹ Rosin, "Is the Tea Party a Feminist Movement?"

⁴² Sullivan, "Palin, Biden agree on gay rights at debate."

movement, the movement's most prominent female leaders generally steer clear of defining it in those terms.

In spite of this, it does not appear that social conservatism has totally taken the backseat to economic conservatism. While economically conservative women have successfully established their rhetoric of liberty, individualism, and patriotism as the dominant narrative in the Tea Party, it has not been at the expense of traditional, gendered social conservatism. Instead, the two narratives have been merged in a way that imbues the autonomous actor of neoliberalism with a distinctly gendered identity. In particular, the Tea Party women have used gendered notions of family, motherhood, and womanhood to justify their economically conservative policy preferences, national security positions, and political activism.

2.3. *The Narrative*

In order to attract socially conservative women who tend to be skeptical of neoliberalism, female Tea Party leaders have crafted a narrative that gives women a stake in the persistence of the laissez-faire conservative status quo. First, the Tea Party narrative as shaped by conservative women has inserted the language of family into economic individualism. Just as socially conservative Protestant women feel that women naturally belong at home with the family⁴³ and fear that feminism undermines family relationships,⁴⁴ Tea Party women see the family as their primary responsibility and foundational to their identity as women. Unlike more traditional social conservatives, however, Tea Party women find that their responsibility to their families has complemented rather than been at odds with their political involvement. Palin has claimed that conservative women want to ensure a “better future for their kids” and has railed against the

⁴³ Scott, “Choices, Constraints, and Calling.”

⁴⁴ Gallagher, “Where Are the Antifeminist Evangelicals?”

“generational theft” driven by excessive government spending that threatens families’ security in the future.⁴⁵ Teri Christoph, the executive director of SGP, echoes Palin: “The [Tea Party] women are just very frustrated, because they feel like all this over-reach of government is effecting [sic] their families, their kids futures [sic], and they’re really, really passionate about it.”⁴⁶ Outside observers are noticing this too, admitting that family is indeed central to the Tea Party women. Psychologist Peggy Drexler characterizes the Tea Party women as “women rising up to confront a world they feel threatens their families”;⁴⁷ and Katha Pollitt notes that “the Tea Party adds a note of faux kitchen-table ‘common sense’: why shouldn’t the government have to balance its budget the way a family does?”⁴⁸

In short, the political identity, activism, and rhetoric of women Tea Party leaders is driven on a fundamental level by their location within their families and their values of and responsibilities to those family units. Michelle Moore, an SGP activist, has argued that the nation’s woes can be traced to conservative women’s *inaction* in politics, saying, “As those on the left spent the last 50 years taking over every aspect of our lives – politics, arts, education – you and I were raising our families, we built our businesses, our communities, our lives — you know – we were taking care of the business of the day. All the while we trusted those we sent to Washington were looking out for us.”⁴⁹ Although this quote came from a speech delivered to a Tea Party gathering of both genders, Moore’s appeal to families, broken trust, and individuals taking matters into their own hands clearly was designed to resonate with women who feel their families have been threatened by the government. If the female Tea Party leadership can

⁴⁵ Palin, “Don’t Mess with Mama Grizzlies,” 25, 27.

⁴⁶ Cohn, “Conservative Spotlight: Smart Girl Politics.”

⁴⁷ Fund, “Women for Tea.”

⁴⁸ Pollitt, “Grisly Mamas.”

⁴⁹ Michelle Moore, posting to A Traditional Life Lived blog, September 13, 2010, <http://www.atraditionallifelived.com/2010/09/text-of-912-tea-party-speech.html>.

successfully convince socially conservative women, whose identity is defined in relation to their families, that government policies are threatening those families and that economic conservatism can save them, then social conservatism and economic conservatism for those women become mutually reinforcing and even indistinguishable.

Second, Tea Party women narrow the wider “family” narrative to focus on their role as mothers, which they similarly borrow from socially conservative beliefs about gender differences and women’s responsibilities to their children. In this case, motherhood is invoked in a protective sense and applied to both domestic and foreign policy positions. Again, Palin leads the charge. In her speech at the 2008 Republican National Convention, which propelled her to the front of the not-yet-formed Tea Party movement, Palin appealed to motherhood in her defense of John McCain and his hawkish foreign policy, saying that “as the mother of one of those troops [in Iraq], that is exactly the kind of man I want as commander-in-chief.”⁵⁰ On the domestic front, Palin has argued:

The policies coming out of D.C. are allowing us to feel empowered, really, allowing us to rise up together because moms kind of just know when something’s wrong. It’s that mother’s intuition thing, I think. We can tell when things are off-base, off-course, or not right. And we’re not afraid to roll up our sleeves and get to work and get the job done and set things straight. Moms can be counted on to fight for their children’s future.⁵¹

Notably, Palin delivered this speech to the pro-life group Susan B. Anthony List, whose *raison d’être* is centered on a socially conservative understanding of motherhood, so it was natural that Palin tied the socially conservative anti-abortion discourse to the new Tea Party protective-

⁵⁰ Palin, “Palin’s Speech at the Republican National Convention.”

⁵¹ Palin, “Don’t Mess with Mama Grizzlies,” 26.

motherhood discourse. Such connections can help traditional socially conservative women feel more comfortable with the Tea Party's more broadly economic agenda.

Palin is not the only Tea Party leader who emphasizes motherhood in this way, however. Varley also sees motherhood as central to Tea Party women's activism, noting that "[w]omen take it personally. These are my *kids* they're coming after" (emphasis in original).⁵² The Tea Party Patriots' Rebecca Wales calls these women "mama bears worried about their families."⁵³ Observing this motherhood rhetoric, feminist Sarah Jaffe writes in *Bitch Magazine* that "conservative female pols...are now united under the media handle 'Mama Grizzlies,' joining the idea of mother-as-protector to patriot-group undercurrents of by-any-means-necessary violence." She concludes, "The women of the Tea Party represent security moms taking the guns for themselves."⁵⁴ Framed in this way, women as mothers *should* demand the laissez-faire conservative policies of neoconservatism abroad and neoliberalism at home. The Tea Party women's gendered identity as "mother," which is drawn from gendered social conservatism, is consequently applied to the non-gendered individual of economic conservatism. Like the "family" narrative, these appeals to motherhood are designed to construct women's social and economic conservatism as interdependent and necessary.

Finally, in addition to their identity as mothers within families, the women leading the Tea Party movement frequently reference their identity as women within the broader society – in this case echoing the laissez-faire conservative faction identified by Klatch that recognized gender-based discrimination. On one hand, the women of the Tea Party are aware that their relationship with men is unequal; Wales points out that "[f]or a long time people have seen the

⁵² Rosin, "Is the Tea Party a Feminist Movement?"

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jaffe, "Tea Stained," 18.

parties as good-ole-boy, male-run institutions. In the Tea Party, women have finally found their voice.”⁵⁵ On the other hand, Tea Party women feel that the feminist movement has deliberately overlooked conservatives. Christoph says that SGP, for example, was founded to give conservative women a voice and “hopes to change” the fact that they “don’t have that ‘sisterhood’ that kicks into gear when one of our own is attacked.”⁵⁶ These Tea Party women therefore would likely agree with Schreiber’s assessment that “conservative women are located outside the group ‘women’ that most feminists reference.”⁵⁷ According to Christoph, one of SGP’s “big goals” is electing more women to office because “we feel like we’re being under represented [sic] in government.”⁵⁸ While traditional conservatives would eschew such collectivist measures, these empowered conservative women activists are being forced to confront the reality that Klatch’s laissez-faire conservative women noticed nearly 30 years ago – that women are disadvantaged vis-à-vis men, and that conservative women are ignored by feminists. As a result, many of these Tea Party leaders see their new movement as a vehicle to correct both these imbalances.

The women leading the Tea Party, then, draw first on the socially conservative, gendered narratives about family and motherhood that lead them to adopt conservative economic beliefs and hawkish foreign policy convictions, and draw second on the economically conservative, non-gendered narrative that a woman’s place in society should be no different from a man’s, but is, that leads them to adopt certain strategies of group identity politics. Palin neatly tied all three strands together when she told the women at the Susan B. Anthony List breakfast that she is

⁵⁵ Fund, “Women for Tea.”

⁵⁶ Cohn, “Conservative Spotlight: Smart Girl Politics.”

⁵⁷ Schreiber, *Righting Feminism*, 54.

⁵⁸ Cohn, “Conservative Spotlight: Smart Girl Politics.”

“grateful to have a place like this, full of sisters who are not put off by a gun-toting, pro-life mom of a fun, full family.”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Palin, “Don’t Mess with Mama Grizzlies,” 33.

3. Gender Differences at the Mass Level: How Effective is the Narrative?

Of course, whether women, especially conservative women, are responding favorably to the narratives being spun for them by the Tea Party's leaders is unknown. If, in fact, this rhetoric has been effective in muting the tensions between social conservatism and economic conservatism among conservative Americans, then it is conceivable that the ideological underpinnings of the conservative coalition may be shifting yet again. Just as social conservatism came to dominate the Republican Party in the 1980s due to the Christian Right's influence, economic conservatism appears to be directing conservatives in the 2010s. The merging of the socially conservative and economically conservative ideologies may allow today's conservatives to avoid some of the more divisive ideological schisms that have plagued the Republicans throughout the past thirty years,⁶⁰ resulting in a more coherent conservative message and, possibly, an even more stable and formidable base of public support.

If women respond to the Tea Party for different reasons than men, then this would suggest that gender is a relevant factor in Tea Party mobilization. Similarly, if socially conservative women come to support the Tea Party over time to a greater degree than non-socially conservative women, then it would appear that the Tea Party leadership is effectively dispelling social conservatives' skepticism about neoliberalism. Although to some extent the Republican Party itself has managed to bring social conservatives and economic conservatives together, the Tea Party represents a voluntary movement (claiming to be) distinct from the Republican Party; publicly supporting the Tea Party necessarily involves a public embrace of its

⁶⁰ An example of a non-gendered strategy economic conservatives use to bring social conservative into their fold, I would argue, is the states' rights movement. This movement, while officially not taking positions one way or the other on controversial social issues, nevertheless creates space for states with large or influential socially conservative populations to pursue their agenda legislatively and through the courts.

version of economic conservatism that support for the Republicans alone has never required. The social conservatives who actively choose to participate in the Tea Party must also be comfortable with its economic agenda. For this reason, the expression of support for the Tea Party should be an accurate indicator of whether individuals agree with its economic agenda and help to illustrate the relationship between social conservatism and economic conservatism.

3.1. Hypotheses

If the gendered rhetoric of Tea Party leaders has been effective, we should expect that women are responding positively to the Tea Party out of family-based and gender-based concerns to a greater extent than men, and that socially conservative women are responding more positively to the Tea Party over time. Because the narratives of family and motherhood tap into socially conservative women's identities and the narrative of gender awareness taps into "laissez-faire" conservative women's beliefs about gender, women should be more receptive than men to rhetoric that emphasizes these values. Therefore, I first expect that women are more likely to support the Tea Party out of concern for their families than men. Second, I expect that women are more likely to support the Tea Party out of concern for their children than men. Third, I expect that women are more likely to support the Tea Party out of gender concerns than men. If gender differences emerge in the likelihood of support for the Tea Party based on variables that measure concern for family, children, and gender, then it would appear that the female leadership's rhetoric has been effective. In addition, the successful incorporation of social conservatism into economic conservatism through gendered rhetoric aimed at women should result in socially conservative women becoming more accepting of the Tea Party's agenda. Therefore, my fourth hypothesis is that socially conservative women's support for the Tea Party

will increase between the earlier and later surveys to a greater degree than socially conservative men's support. If these hypotheses are substantiated by the data, the effectiveness of the Tea Party women's strategy will be supported.

3.2. Data and Measures

I use two CBS News/The New York Times polls, the Government and Tea Party Movement poll in early April 2010 and the 2010 Elections/Government poll from late October 2010, both of which were obtained through the Roper Center database. Both surveys reached respondents through a combination of landline and cell phone calls. These particular surveys were selected for several reasons. First, each includes an item measuring respondents' support for the Tea Party movement. Second, in order to probe individuals' motivations for supporting the Tea Party, the surveys include detailed questions about respondents' families' finances, home life, and ideological beliefs. Third, because part of this theory includes the softening of socially conservative women to the Tea Party over time, the surveys include identical or at least substantively comparable questions and were conducted using similar methodology. Finally, six months lapse between the two surveys, during which opinions toward the Tea Party may have changed. Although six months is still a short interval, it is the longest period of time between comparable surveys that are available.

The Government and Tea Party Movement poll is particularly useful because, as its name suggests, the survey's designers are particularly concerned with understanding public opinion and behavior with regard to the Tea Party. As a result, this survey includes a battery of questions probing respondents' attitudes toward the Tea Party, involvement with the Tea Party, and knowledge of the Tea Party. In addition, it features an oversampling of Tea Party supporters,

which allows for more in-depth analysis of this subpopulation with smaller standard errors. However, despite the depth of this poll, it still does not include items that explicitly measure Tea Party supporters' reasons for their beliefs. As a result, I rely heavily on proxy variables to measure these attitudes. Nevertheless, because of its focus on the Tea Party, the Government and Tea Party Movement poll is particularly helpful in testing gender differences in Tea Party support.

The second survey, the 2010 Elections/Government poll, is similar but unfortunately not identical to the Government and Tea Party Movement one. In this case, the focus of the survey is the upcoming 2010 congressional election, and as a result it is less focused on the Tea Party specifically. In this case, the oversampled subpopulation is African Americans, and some of the questions that do not appear in this survey prevent a time-series analysis on the first three hypotheses because no suitable proxy items are included. As a result, this analysis cannot address whether any gender differences in the motivation for Tea Party support have changed as the Tea Party has become more prominent politically.

This analysis focuses on three sets of logistic regressions, one measuring gender differences in the motivation for Tea Party support and the other two measuring the change, if any, in social conservatives' attitudes toward the Tea Party over time. The dependent variable in each analysis is a dummy variable indicating whether respondents consider themselves to be Tea Party supporters, with 1 indicating Tea Party support and 0 indicating a lack of support. Although this measure probably groups both passive and active Tea Party supporters together, it is the best indicator of Tea Party support available in both surveys. The only other potentially relevant question available in both surveys asks whether respondents have a "favorable" or "not favorable" opinion of the Tea Party, a question that would likely attract even more people who

only passively support the Tea Party. In fact, the “support” question in both surveys records fewer positive responses than the “favorable opinion” one, suggesting that it is slightly more costly for individuals to “support” the Tea Party than to merely be favorably disposed to it. The April survey also includes a question about whether respondents have donated money to a Tea Party cause or attended a Tea Party rally, but too few respondents replied positively to enable any meaningful statistical analysis. As a result, I have relied on the “support” measure as the best available compromise for the dependent variable.

In the first set of regressions, which address the first three hypotheses, the first three independent variables address the issue of concern for the well-being of the family. The first item, “lowering class/social status fears,” is a dummy variable indicating that the respondent fears a reduction in their families’ “social or financial class” standing. Therefore, this variable captures respondents’ pessimism about their families’ social status, a fear that may drive some to support the Tea Party’s economic agenda. The second item, “recession affect family,” is a dummy variable that indicates whether respondents have reported being negatively affected by the economic recession. This dummy variable is constructed from a question that asks whether respondents’ families have been faced with “hardship” or “difficulty” as a result of the recession, or whether it has had “not much effect” or even a “positive effect.” If respondents reported hardship or difficulty, their responses were coded 1; otherwise, they were coded 0. This variable indicates whether the economic climate actually has had a negative impact on families, regardless of any fears or trepidation about the future, which may propel some to support the Tea Party. The final “family” item, “family finances,” is a dummy variable indicating the state of the respondents’ family financial situation, regardless of the recession or future fears. If respondents reported that their family finances were “fairly bad” or “very bad,” they were coded 1; if they

were “fairly good” or “very good,” they were coded 0. This variable specifically addresses respondents’ financial situation, which may be poor, or excellent, regardless of the recession and regardless of any future fears, and which may drive Tea Party support among some individuals.

The next two independent variables measure motherhood and gender as motivating factors for Tea Party support. Motherhood is measured by a dummy variable, “has kids,” indicating whether respondents report having children either under or over eighteen years of age, in which case they are coded 1; if not, they are coded 0. This approach assumes that having young children at home and having adult children living elsewhere are essentially equivalent. If the Tea Party rhetoric emphasizes the problems left for future generations of Americans, it makes little sense to divide between younger children and older children. Having children, therefore, should influence how receptive individuals are to the Tea Party’s message about creating a better future for American children.

Finally, the “gender” variable is somewhat problematic. Because the survey did not include any item that addressed gender awareness or policy, I have had to rely on an imprecise proxy measure. One of the questions asks respondents which political figure they most admire, and proceeds to name some two dozen prominent American politicians. I have constructed a dummy variable indicating whether respondents have named a woman from either party as their most admired political figure (“admires female politician”), with the (admittedly large) assumption that those who name a woman do so consciously. Of course, this may not be true; further complications arise from the possibility that conservative or Tea Party women like Sarah Palin may be more prominent than liberal women like Hillary Clinton, therefore biasing the results toward an increased probability of supporting the Tea Party. However, since this analysis is most concerned with gender differences within those who name a woman, this bias should still

be distributed evenly across genders. Therefore, it should function adequately as the best available indication of gender consciousness present in the survey.

In addition, the model includes controls for respondents' income and age. The age variable is treated as a continuous variable, with each unit increase representing an increase of one year of age. The income variable is an ordered categorical variable that groups respondents by income levels: under \$15,000; \$15-30,000; \$30-50,000; \$50-75,000; \$75-100,000; and over \$100,000. Both of these control variables were included because observers have argued that the Tea Party appeals disproportionately to older, middle-class voters.⁶¹

Identifying variables to test the fourth hypothesis – that socially conservative women are increasingly comfortable with the Tea Party's economic agenda – is more straightforward. Since social conservatives tend to adhere to traditionally and religiously defined values, evangelicalism should be an appropriate proxy for social conservatism in the U.S. Because the survey item asks whether respondents "think of themselves as evangelical or born again Christians," it can to some extent transcend denominations, since Christians from Pentecostals to Roman Catholics can think of themselves as, in the words of Christ, "born-again." While this measure will regrettably misclassify socially conservative Christians who nevertheless do not identify as evangelical, social conservatives of other faiths, and liberal evangelicals, the strong relationship between evangelicalism and social conservatism in the U.S. is well established.⁶²

The variable used to measure economic conservatism is simpler still. This survey item asks respondents, "If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services, or a bigger government providing more services?" If respondents reply with

⁶¹ Przybyla, "Tea Party Advocates Who Scorn Socialism Want a Government Job."

⁶² Brint and Abrutyn, "Who's Right About the Right?"; Dowland, "'Family Values' and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda."

smaller government and fewer services, they are coded as economic conservatives. This measure is especially useful in measuring Tea Party support because it encapsulates the Tea Party's central message of promoting limited government and decreased spending. As a result, this measure of economic conservatism is closely related to the economic conservatism of the Tea Party and is appropriate for measuring support for the Tea Party among those who share its ideology.

Finally, in addition to the age and income variables described above, a third control variable for political interest is included in these sets of regressions. Because women overall tend to be less politically interested than men,⁶³ failing to account for this may understate any gender differences in why men and women support the Tea Party. (In the end, the variable for political interest had little effect on the first model's results and was removed to minimize overspecification. However, it does exert an effect in the second and third sets of regressions, and as a result it is included here.) Again, because the surveys do not include consistent measures of political interest, I have had to rely on imperfect proxy measures. In the April survey, the question that comes closest to measuring political interest asks respondents whether they "have heard or read" "a lot," "some," "not much," or "nothing" about the Federal Reserve. If respondents reported having heard or read "a lot" or "some" information about the Federal Reserve, I coded their responses as 1, with the assumption that those who knowingly encounter information about the Federal Reserve also are politically interested. In the October survey, this question is not repeated, and the best proxy for political interest asks respondents about how closely they are following the 2010 election. If respondents reply that they have been paying "a lot" or "some" attention to the 2010 election campaign, as opposed to "not much" or "no

⁶³ Verba, Burns, and Schlozman, "Knowing and Caring About Politics: Gender and Political Engagement," 1056.

attention,” their responses are coded 1. As with the April proxy, the use of this variable assumes that those who report paying attention to the election are also the most politically interested. In addition, both the April and October proxies are subject to overrepresentation due to social desirability bias, which may further obscure the results. Nevertheless, despite these drawbacks, the political interest variables are included, since they help to measure gender differences more accurately.

3.3. Results

If the female Tea Party elites have been successful in cultivating support for their movement among women through this three-pronged gendered narrative, we should expect to see a gender discrepancy emerge between the characteristics of the women and the men who support the Tea Party. Specifically, women should be more likely than men to support the Tea Party out of a concern for their families, their children, and their gender. To test this, I have developed two logit regression models. Model 1 includes a dummy variable indicating female respondents but does not include any interaction terms. Model 2 includes interactions between the female dummy variable and the indicators for each of the gender items.

Model 1: $\text{Pr}(\text{Tea Party Support}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Female}) + \beta_2(\text{Fears Class/Status Reduction}) + \beta_3(\text{Recession Affected Family}) + \beta_4(\text{Family Finances}) + \beta_5(\text{Kids}) + \beta_6(\text{Admires Female Politician}) + \beta_7(\text{Ideology}) + \beta_8(\text{Income}) + \beta_9(\text{Age})$

Model 2: $\text{Pr}(\text{Tea Party Support}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Female}) + \beta_2(\text{Fears Class/Status Reduction}) + \beta_3(\text{Female*Fears Class/Status Reduction}) + \beta_4(\text{Recession Affected Family}) + \beta_5(\text{Female*Recession Affected Family}) + \beta_6(\text{Family Finances}) + \beta_7(\text{Female*Family Finances}) + \beta_8(\text{Kids}) + \beta_9(\text{Female*Kids}) + \beta_{10}(\text{Admires Female Politician}) + \beta_{11}(\text{Female*Admires Female Politician}) + \beta_{12}(\text{Ideology}) + \beta_{13}(\text{Income}) + \beta_{14}(\text{Age})$

Table 1 – Tea Party Support (Narrative)⁶⁴

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 2 (evangelicals)	Model 2 (non-evangelicals)
Female	-.131 (.280)	-.092 (1.369)	-1.335 (2.161)	-.452 (1.585)
Fears Class Status Reduction	.601** (.294) [.067*]	.775** (.395) [.085*]	1.128* (.651) [.128*]	.788* (.475)
<i>Female*Fears Class Status Reduction</i>		-.542 (.571)	.116 (1.103)	-1.106* (.640) [-.109]
Recession Affected Family	-.279 (.233)	-.156 (.291)	-.290 (.437)	-.134 (.323)
<i>Female*Recession Affected Family</i>		-.344 (.452)	-.422 (.729)	-.204 (.521)
Family Finances	.635*** (.239) [.071***]	.569** (.269) [.062**]	1.030** (.450) [.117**]	.492 (.349)
<i>Female*Family Finances</i>		.492 (.640)	.445 (1.462)	.263 (.689)
Has Kids	-.320 (.337)	-.808* (.479)	-3.470*** (.926) [-.395***]	-.338 (.475)
<i>Female*Has Kids</i>		1.307* (.677) [.143*]	3.482*** (1.186) [.397***]	1.194 (.789)
Admires Female Politician	.869* (.456) [.097*]	.576 (.667)	2.096** (.937) [.239**]	.167 (.718)
<i>Female*Admires Female Politician</i>		.834 (.854)	-.552 (1.921)	1.264 (.900)
Ideology	1.449*** (.164) [.161***]	1.483*** (.161) [.162***]	1.681*** (.314) [.191***]	1.464*** (.220) [.144***]
Income	.401*** (.113) [.045***]	.428*** (.117) [.047***]	.570*** (.201) [.065***]	.432*** (.132) [.042***]
Age	.043*** (.010) [.005***]	.044*** (.010) [.005***]	.056*** (.018) [.006***]	.040*** (.013) [.004***]
Constant	-10.550*** (1.313)	-10.734*** (1.376)	-11.486*** (2.446)	-10.611*** (1.668)
N	644	644	206	430

⁶⁴ * = p < .10; ** = p < .05; *** p < .01; () = standard errors; [] = significant marginal effects

The results of the regressions are presented in Table 1. In neither model is the female indicator significant, suggesting that, overall, the Tea Party appeals to both genders equally. When the female interactions are added, however, certain distinctions between the bases of men's and women's support for the movement become apparent. Of these interactions, neither the family nor gender variables are significant, suggesting that these variables have a similar effect, significant or not, on the probability of both women and men supporting the Tea Party. Only the interaction effect for Female*Has Kids is significant, with a coefficient of 1.31 (std. error = .68), and a p-value of .054, barely missing the .05 threshold. While men with children are slightly less likely to support the Tea Party than men without children, with a coefficient of -.808, there is no similar effect for women, who have a coefficient of .499. In fact, if anything, women who have children may be slightly more likely to support the Tea Party than women without children, although the effect is not statistically significant. This difference offers some support for the hypothesis that women support the Tea Party out of concern for their children to a greater degree than men do. As a result, the first hypothesis – that women will support the Tea Party out of concern for their families more than men – is not substantiated. However, the presence of an identifiable difference in Tea Party support between men and women who have children suggests that women may be responding favorably to the Tea Party elites' motherhood rhetoric, even if the family and gender narratives are falling flat.

When Model 2 is limited to only evangelicals, which is the proxy for social conservatives, these gender differences in the effect of parenthood on Tea Party support become even more pronounced. Among evangelical men, having children has a strongly negative and significant relationship to Tea Party support, with a coefficient of -3.470 and a standard error of .926: an evangelical man who has children is about 39.5 percent less likely to support the Tea Party than

an evangelical man who does not have children. The coefficient for women, however, completely negates this effect: with a coefficient of 3.482 and standard error of 1.186 for women, this difference entirely disappears. Essentially, the Tea Party is somehow attracting socially conservative women to its cause to a much greater extent than socially conservative men. Among non-evangelicals, however, the presence of children is not a significant predictor of Tea Party support for either gender. Ultimately, something is afoot with evangelical women and their relationship to the Tea Party that is consistent with the expectation that socially conservative women are more receptive than men to the Tea Party's rhetoric that emphasizes the role and responsibilities of motherhood.

To test the next hypothesis – that the Tea Party's gendered integration of social conservatism and economic conservatism has increased support for the Tea Party among socially conservative women – I have developed two more sets of logit regression models, Models 3-4 and Models 5-8. The first set is designed to isolate interaction effects, and the second allows for separate analyses by gender.

Models 3 (April) and 4 (October): $\text{Pr}(\text{Tea Party Support}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Female}) + \beta_2(\text{Evangelical}) + \beta_3(\text{Female*Evangelical}) + \beta_4(\text{Economic Conservative}) + \beta_5(\text{Female*Economic Conservative}) + \beta_6(\text{Political Interest}) + \beta_7(\text{Income}) + \beta_8(\text{Age})$

Models 5 (April) and 6 (October): $\text{Pr}(\text{Tea Party Support}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Evangelical}) + \beta_2(\text{Economic Conservative}) + \beta_3(\text{Political Interest}) + \beta_4(\text{Income}) + \beta_5(\text{Age})$ (sample limited to women)

Models 7 (April) and 8 (October): $\text{Pr}(\text{Tea Party Support}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Evangelical}) + \beta_2(\text{Economic Conservative}) + \beta_3(\text{Political Interest}) + \beta_4(\text{Income}) + \beta_5(\text{Age})$ (sample limited to men)

The results are presented in Table 2. In April's Model 3, evangelicalism, the proxy for social conservatism, is not a significant predictor of Tea Party support for either gender, although the coefficient for women is approximately double that for men, and its coefficient is positive for both genders. Economic conservatism, however, is a strong and significant predictor of Tea Party

support in April, and this effect is about the same for both genders. In October's Model 4, the results look similar. Again, evangelicalism is signed positively but is not significant for either gender, and the (non-significant) effect for women is higher than for men. Overall, little difference in socially conservative women's support for the Tea Party emerges in this model.

Table 2 – Tea Party Support (Social Conservatism)⁶⁵

	Model 3 (April)	Model 4 (Oct.)	Model 5 (April – Women)	Model 6 (Oct. – Women)	Model 7 (April – Men)	Model 8 (Oct. – Men)
Female	-.172 (.606)	.126 (.515)				
Evangelical	.323 (.304)	.355 (.397)	.722** (.313) [.086**]	.863*** (.312) [.135***]	.333 (.293)	.327 (.392)
<i>Female*Evangelical</i>	.380 (.432)	.490 (.509)				
Economic Conservative	2.680*** (.529) [.350***]	2.120*** (.422) [.353***]	2.579*** (.360) [.308***]	1.591*** (.347) [.249***]	2.661*** (.527) [.370***]	2.175*** (.422) [.378***]
<i>Female*Economic Conservative</i>	-.123 (.632)	-.478 (.542)				
Political Interest	.317 (.205)	.900*** (.249) [.150***]	.482* (.290) [.058*]	.927*** (.238) [.145***]	.241 (.278)	.874** (.373) [.152**]
Income	.240*** (.063) [.031***]	-.131 (.082)	.329*** (.085) [.039***]	-.050 (.113)	.180** (.089) [.025**]	-.201* (.115) [-.035*]
Age	.036*** (.007) [.005***]	-.002 (.007)	.032*** (.010) [.004***]	.008 (.010)	.039*** (.010) [.005***]	-.003 (.010)
Constant	- 6.136*** (.729)	- 2.554*** (.629)	- 6.536*** (.768)	- 3.005*** (.757)	- 6.002*** (.866)	- 2.072*** (.753)
N	1198	913	575	476	623	437

When analysis is limited only to female respondents, evangelicalism becomes a significant positive predictor of Tea Party support in both time periods, with Models 5 and 6 predicting coefficients of .722 (std. error = .313) and .863 (std. error = .312) respectively. A

⁶⁵ *= $p < .10$; **= $p < .05$; ***= $p < .01$; ()=standard errors; []=significant marginal effects

woman who calls herself an evangelical in April is about 8.6 percent more likely to support the Tea Party than a non-evangelical woman; in October, the effect of evangelicalism for women increases to 13.5 percent. Interestingly, the predictive power of economic conservatism for Tea Party support among women decreases somewhat between April and October, with the coefficient falling from 2.579 to 1.591. This means that in April, economically conservative women were 30.8 percent more likely to support the Tea Party than economically liberal women, while in October they were 24.9 percent more likely than liberal women. For men, however, the picture is different: evangelicalism is never a significant predictor of their Tea Party support, while the effect of economic conservatism remains constant at about 37 to 38 percent. Overall, it appears that the changes in the effect of evangelicalism on Tea Party support are located almost entirely among women, which is consistent with the hypothesis that women are more receptive than men to gendered attempts by Tea Party elites to integrate social conservatism with a neoliberal economic agenda.

It is puzzling, though, why the magnitude and significance of the control variables – political interest, income, and age – vary so much between the April and October surveys. While the differences in the effects of political interest may be explained by the different and imperfect proxy measures used, the insignificance of income and age in the October models is not as easily addressed, since these questions are identical in each survey. Even when political interest is removed from the equation, the differences in the other variables persist. Why do age and income have positive and highly significant effects on Tea Party support in April 2010 but have insignificant – or even negative – effects six months later? The overall proportions of Tea Party supporters to non-supporters do not vary widely between the surveys (see Tables 3 and 4), yet the demographic composition of Tea Party supporters and non-supporters appears to have altered

enough that the predictive power of the regression model decreases from about F=17 in April to about F=9 in October.

Table 3 – Tea Party Support in April

	Women	Men	Total
Yes	7.46%	10.66%	18.12%
No	30.36	32.12	62.48
DK/NA	13.5	5.9	19.39
Total	51.32	48.68	100.00

Table 4 – Tea Party Support in October

	Women	Men	Total
Yes	11.05%	12.46%	23.51%
No	31.17	31.62	62.8
DK/NA	9.82	3.88	13.7
Total	52.04	47.96	100.00

One possible explanation is the increased election coverage at the time of the October survey compared to the media coverage during the April survey. When the October poll was conducted, the 2010 midterm elections were only a couple of weeks away, and the Tea Party had fielded several high-profile candidates, male and female, for various congressional and state-level offices. In early April, however, the midterm elections were still distant, and the political news coverage at the time was heavily focused on the health care reform effort, which had just passed, as well as the state of the economy. According to the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, in late March the only Tea Party leader who was a “Lead Newsmaker” at the time was Sarah Palin, who received about 2 percent of the media’s coverage, compared to the Obama administration’s 9 percent.⁶⁶ In October, however, three of the six “Lead Newsmakers” were Tea Party politicians,⁶⁷ each receiving about 2 percent of the media’s

⁶⁶ Holcomb, Nikitin, Santhanam, and Sartor, “PEJ News Coverage Index: March 22-28, 2010.”

⁶⁷ Specifically, Carl Paladino, Sharron Angle, and Christine O’Donnell.

coverage, compared to the Obama administration's 6 percent.⁶⁸ It is conceivable that because of the increased attention to Tea Party candidates, whose newsworthiness came from the Tea Party's divergence from the rest of the Republican establishment, the Tea Party figured much more centrally in media coverage immediately prior to the election than it did six months earlier. If enough Americans were exposed to more media coverage of the Tea Party in October, this could have had a framing or learning effect for enough Americans to cause them to change their minds about the movement, effectively muddling the demographic profile of Tea Party supporters without necessarily altering its aggregate levels of support very radically.⁶⁹

In fact, the age and income effects do become less pronounced between April and October. As Table 5 reports, the average age in April of Tea Party supporters was about 55, while non-supporters' average age was about 44. By October, this age gap had narrowed: Tea Party supporters were on average only 49 years old, while non-supporters averaged 45 years old. Similarly, in April the median income level for Tea Party supporters was \$50,000 to \$75,000, while the median income level for non-supporters was \$30,000 to \$50,000. In October, however, the income disparity between supporters and non-supporters had evaporated, with non-supporters' median income increasing to the \$50,000-\$75,000 level. As information about the Tea Party became more widespread and non-supporters learned enough to take a position on the movement, the age and income distinctions between supporters and non-supporters all but disappeared, diminishing the predictive power of the regression model in October.

⁶⁸ Jurkowitz, "PEJ News Coverage Index: October 11-17, 2010."

⁶⁹ See, for example: Lenz, "Learning and Opinion Change, Not Priming."

Table 5 – Age/Income Profile

	Mean Age (April)	Mean Age (October)	Median Income (April)	Median Income (October)
Supporters	55.26	49.37	\$50K-\$75K	\$50K-\$75K
Non-Supporters	44.43	45.43	\$30K-\$50K	\$50K-\$75K
DK/NA	42.11	38.84	\$30K-\$50K	\$30K-\$50K

3.4. Discussion

Overall, the survey results only partially substantiate the hypothesis that the female elites' gendered appeals to family, motherhood, and gender awareness have been effective in cultivating women's support for the Tea Party. None of the three proxy variables for concern over family indicates any divergence between women's and men's levels of support for the Tea Party; neither did the admittedly imperfect proxy for gender awareness. The status of being a mother, however, does appear to exert a statistically significant, positive effect on Tea Party support among women that exceeds its statistically significant, negative effect on Tea Party support among men. Among only evangelicals, moreover, both the magnitude and significance of the effect of having children on supporting the Tea Party are enhanced: while men with children are 40 percent *less* likely to support the Tea Party than men without children, women with children are no more likely to support the Tea Party than women without children.⁷⁰ While evangelical men with children display a rather strong aversion to the Tea Party and, presumably, its message of economic conservatism, evangelical women who have children show no such hesitance at all.

The higher support for the Tea Party among socially conservative women who have children may suggest that the Tea Party elites may be having some success in attracting socially

⁷⁰ Why evangelical men with children are so *unlikely* to support the Tea Party is also a fascinating question, but beyond this paper's scope. Sticking with the narrative-frame theme, perhaps men are more receptive to the Tea Party's emphasis on individualism and autonomy, which likely does not resonate as well with the socially conservative emphasis on family and community.

conservative women to their movement to a greater degree than socially conservative men. The results over time offer some support for this second hypothesis. Although the difference in the effect of the interactions of gender and evangelicalism do not indicate any greater propensity for evangelical women to be Tea Party supporters than men, the measurement of the effect is nonetheless positive. When the analysis is limited by gender, the positive effect of evangelicalism on the probability of supporting the Tea Party increases and reaches significance for women while remaining small and insignificant for men. In addition, the effect of evangelicalism for women increases by about 50 percent between April and October, while the effect of economic conservatism declines slightly. As the Tea Party's gendered narrative has reached a broader audience, socially conservative women – but not socially conservative men, or non-social conservatives of either gender – have increasingly responded to its message positively, increasing the effect of evangelicalism on Tea Party support while decreasing the effect of economic conservatism.

Motherhood, therefore, continues to act as the most politically potent component of socially conservative women's identity. Traditional social conservatives construct women's identity within their families, and a woman's responsibility to her family necessarily involves a responsibility to her children, assuming she has children. Still, although the female Tea Party elites have emphasized both the family more generally and motherhood more specifically, it appears that socially conservative women are responding more enthusiastically to appeals to their role as mother than to their role as wife.

On the other hand, this analysis provides no evidence that the more "laissez-faire" conservative commitment to gender equality and recognition of gender discrimination has had much effect on the level of Tea Party support among women. Given the economic focus of the

Tea Party's message, it seems that the most potential for substantial gains for the Tea Party should be among social conservatives, not economic conservatives, who presumably already support the movement. Social conservatives' historical skepticism of the secular underpinnings of market liberalism but demonstrated willingness to forge lasting alliances with economic conservatives suggests that there is strong potential for a similar alliance within the Tea Party movement. Nevertheless, because unlike the "big-tent" nature of the Republican Party the Tea Party faction is defined by its ideological commitment to limited government and radically reduced spending, achieving a mere alliance with social conservatives is more difficult. Instead, the Tea Party must convince social conservatives that their interests – the values that matter most to them – are best served by far-right economic policies. By tying a socially conservative conception of women's identity to its economic agenda, the Tea Party has attempted to draw social conservatives into their movement. And to a certain extent, it appears to have been effective.

4. Conclusion

“Imagine the coalition that could be formed – a real women’s coalition joining women across the broadest possible spectrum – to work on enforcement of child support payments, improved adoption services, measures to lower the teen pregnancy rate, research on contraception for both men and women, and social and economic programs that would lift some of the burden off parents. It’s a fantasy, of course, because neither side is willing to acknowledge that there is common ground.” – Elinor Burkett⁷¹

Although it is tempting to write off the influence of Tea Party women as just one more iteration of conservative women’s long history of activism, some of its features may prove constructive for the U.S. women’s movement. In particular, the willingness of some prominent female Tea Party leaders to embrace at least the term “feminism,” which they apply within their own conservative ideology, suggests that there is room in an increasingly mainstream conservative discourse for a recognition of specifically women’s interests. When Tea-Party-affiliated women campaigned in the 2010 elections, they were the targets of some rather sexist attacks from people of all ideological stripes,⁷² likely raising conservative women’s awareness of the discrimination women face in a male-dominated world. While they may disagree with their

⁷¹ Burkett, *The Right Women*, 243.

⁷² Liberal bloggers slandered Palin by claiming she had possible nude photos, (doctored) pictures of her dressed in skimpy clothing, rumors that she had faked her latest pregnancy to cover up the “fact” that Trig was actually her daughter Bristol’s child, and (in contradiction) her decision to fly to Alaska to give birth to Trig which was being characterized as a last-ditch attempt at inducing a miscarriage (blog post by pfeffermuse, http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/08/31/581399/-How-Low-Can-*We*-Go). Liberal pundit Chris Matthews has called Michele Bachmann a “balloon head” Bamberger, “Michele Bachmann is a ‘Balloon Head’ in Chris Matthews’ Book.”). Conservative pundit Tucker Carlson called Palin a candidate for “supreme commander of MILFistan” (Hagey, “Tucker Carlson’s deleted Sarah Palin tweet sparks war of the sexes.”). And these are only a few examples.

liberal counterparts about the extent to which this discrimination represents systemic injustice, as well as the proper response to it, central conservative figures that acknowledge women's unique interests potentially can transform the relationship between feminists on the left and these "frontier feminists," as Palin calls them, on the right.⁷³

Overall, it does appear that conservative women are finally comfortable with women's full participation in politics. Old contradictions between the socially conservative claim that women belong in the private sphere and the reality of conservative women's activism have been muted by the narrative frame that suggests women's responsibility to their families necessitates their political involvement. As a result, on the whole, Tea Party women have wholeheartedly embraced their public roles.⁷⁴ In addition, women's groups like SGP place a high priority on encouraging conservative women to run for office, thus increasing conservative women's descriptive representation in government. In fact, over the past decade or so, heightened party polarization in Congress has essentially eliminated moderate Republican women, resulting in a decrease in substantive representation (according to liberal norms) for women despite an increase in their descriptive representation.⁷⁵ The Tea Party women's push to place conservative women in government promises to continue this trend, and feminists on the left must face the reality that not all women agree with them about what policies and practices are in women's best interests.

Indeed, certain areas of agreement between conservative and liberal women can provide a starting point for more constructive dialogue, but only if both sides are willing to listen to the other's perspective. This heightened dialogue between conservative and feminist women has the

⁷³ Palin, "Don't Mess with Mama Grizzlies," 33.

⁷⁴ Michelle Bachmann may be somewhat of an exception. Unlike Palin, she does not accept the "feminist" label, and she is far more open about her socially conservative background. Still, her clear interest in pursuing the presidency in 2012 suggests that these reservations may not be all that strong (Copeland, "Hail to the Housewife.").

⁷⁵ Frederick, "Are Female House Members Still More Liberal in a Polarized Era?" 184.

potential to uncover what really is at the core of *all* women's shared experiences in a society that purports to value sexual equality at least nominally but frequently fails to achieve it substantively. Additionally, it creates space for constructive debate about which solutions to gender-based discrimination should be taken to effect positive change – and about what even constitutes positive change in the first place. Of course, there is ample opportunity for this dialogue to go sour; *constructive* dialogue is hardly assured. But the possibility of failure is a poor excuse to do nothing at all. Clearly, feminism has not yet articulated a compelling narrative and solution for women's equality, or such a significant subgroup of women would never have felt the need to challenge it on the basis of their gender.

Even more promising – from this perspective, at least – is the receptiveness of socially conservative women to the Tea Party's agenda, at least when it is framed by the motherhood narrative. On one hand, if socially conservative women, who generally are more comfortable with collective action centered around identity issues than are neoliberals, become convinced that their political activism is in fact tied to their own socially conservative identity, the liberal women's movement may even manage to gain new allies in its fights for some of the policies Burkett lists in the quote that opens this section; perhaps her "fantasy" is not quite so out of reach. On the other hand, if the Tea Party's economic conservatism instead liberalizes socially conservative women's identities, then notions of liberal equality and nondiscrimination become more central to the conservative discourse, and traditional social conservatism's traditional gender roles become less relevant politically. In this case, women's empowerment would be even more widely recognized, though on an individual rather than collective level, among the Right. The lasting presence of a women's perspective within mainstream conservatism has the potential to articulate women's interests across a much broader ideological space and help make

gender an issue central to the political discourse among both liberals *and* conservatives, if only the elites and the voting public continue to embrace it.

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