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The Personal as Political:
Conservative Women and their Deep Stories

Kelsey Park

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Advisor: Dr. Melina Bell

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I. Introduction

Perhaps one of the zeitgeists of our current era is the gathering clamor surrounding modern womanhood. As a new narrative emerges of *who* women are and *what* they should be able to do in today's America, terms such as intersectionality, privilege, rape culture, and gender nonconformity have begun to tell the mainstream story of today's woman. For many women, these words are exciting—they seem to speak truth to concepts that seemed impossible to describe before this new vocabulary emerged. Shared vocabulary creates a sense of unity amongst women, allowing them to speak up together with a more cohesive and powerful voice than ever before. This strength has given many women newfound bravery, and this bravery has led to social change through new movements such as the #MeToo and #TimesUp. Yet, women make up slightly over half of our population; they are not a homogeneous group and to treat them as such is a mistake. Plenty of women feel that this new vocabulary of womanhood and social justice is strange and confusing. To them, the narrative just does not fit their own experiences. The strange words that are being applied to their lives do not seem to describe their lives. They are suspicious of words and claims that seem to be putting words in their mouths. Worse still, they seem to be telling them what they are *supposed* to think and feel as a woman. Perplexed, they may think, “Wait a minute? Isn't this feminist thing supposed to be about letting me speak for myself?”

Feminism has a decidedly left slant and with politics on either side come certain “feeling rules”—notions of what one *should* feel (Hochschild 15). Feeling rules are the emotional core of beliefs for both liberals and conservatives. For example, liberal feeling rules may be that one should feel “happy for the gay newlywed, sad at the plight of the Syrian refugee, unresentful about paying taxes” (Hochschild 15). If a woman has conservative feeling rules, then they often

feel that liberal feminism forces feeling rules onto them that are antithetical to “the emotional core of right-wing belief” (Hochschild 16). The now-famous Women’s March in Washington, D.C. which happened after President Trump’s inauguration specifically denounced the new president and officially embraced liberal feminist ideals, such as pro-choice activism. The Women’s March was meant to be inclusive and to lift up *all* women, but women who do not ascribe to liberal feeling rules (such as anger towards Donald Trump or sympathy towards sex workers) were pushed awkwardly to the margins and left feeling unrepresented. Perhaps they even felt as though they were not living up to what a woman was supposed to be according to the organizers of the march.

Women marching around in pink “pussy hats”¹ and yelling vulgar chants simply did not connect to the sensibilities of women who did not want to identify themselves as their genitals². Women who value modesty and saw flaunting their “pussies” as a poor way to gain respect. Feminists want me to wear a pussy around and if I don’t I’m not a real woman? I was taught that only my husband should see that part of me. I thought that the whole point of this march is that women are more than our genitals? One young woman from Virginia who I spoke to about the march said “I’m not against it per se, some of the demonstrators were not going about it in the right way. Some of the signs to me... it doesn’t help to be blatantly disrespectful to the people in power, which ties back to my religious beliefs.” As a conservative Christian, she felt that the disrespect aimed towards the Trump administration contradicted the respect for authority taught to her by her religion and valued by her community.

¹ See Appendix A. Fig. 1 for an example of the pussy hats.

² The pussy hats also received wide criticism as trans-exclusionary because they suggested that all women possess vaginas, however, this is outside the scope of my paper.

This woman's feeling rule was "authority should be respected" while the feeling rule of the march was "unjust authority should be vigorously protested". I borrow the term feeling rules from *Strangers in Their Own Land* by Arlie Hochschild, a work of political sociology that describes Hochschild's experiences getting to know conservative folks in rural Louisiana. The locus of her research is the concept of a "deep story" as an explanation for one's voting behaviors. According to Hochschild, a deep story is "a narrative as felt" and a "story that feels as if it were true... the story feelings tell, in the language of symbols" (Hochschild 16). She believes that we all have a deep story and that understanding the emotional narratives of others is key to understanding their politics. When I read about this concept, with the split between conservative and liberal women in mind, I began to wonder if one of the central problems that conservative women have with the liberal feminist vocabulary is that the new words simply fail to express their own deep story. Another question arose— *what words do conservative women use to tell their stories?*

So often women are spoken for before they have the chance to speak for themselves. This is one of the chief feminist complaints and one goal of the feminist movement has always been to restore the voices of women and to fight for their ability to speak for themselves. The voice that drowns out women has always been conceptualized as the booming male voice of the patriarchy, but conservative women now may feel that male voices in their community speak for them more accurately than the liberal feminist narrative. Conservative women often feel that their voices are drowned out by loud feminists who feel qualified to speak on their behalf, though their ideas are very different from their own. Furthermore, as opposed to being treated as intellectual equals with valid disagreements, conservative women often find that when they disagree with feminists the spirit of universal womanhood is all but lost as they are met with

hostility or condescension. Conservative women often feel as though they are portrayed as traitors to their own kind when they express non-liberal views. In the wake of white women voting for Donald Trump, the question on many liberal commentators' lips is "how *could* they?" Past this anger and disbelief towards supposedly traitorous women, is a subtler and pernicious generalization that women who vote conservatively are simply ignorant. Surely, feminists believe, if they understood their own interests as women there is no way that they would vote for a Republican. Surely, these poor women are being influenced by the coercive men in their lives. They are not allowed to vote for themselves, or alternately, they do not even realize they have been brainwashed by men.

Hillary Clinton herself has attracted a lot of criticism post-election because the public seems to interpret some of her comments to mean that women only voted for Trump because of pressure from men in their lives. That has been the narrative created, but I think I have a responsibility to rewind to the original quote, which was actually Hillary Clinton quoting her friend Sheryl Sandberg, another influential feminist celebrity. During an NPR interview with Rachel Martin on September 12, 2017, Clinton was asked about the various reasons she lost the election, including sexism. In her response, Clinton recounted a conversation with Sheryl Sandberg which concluded with Sheryl saying, "women will have no empathy for you, because they will be under tremendous pressure — and I'm talking principally about white women — they will be under tremendous pressure from fathers and husbands and boyfriends and male employers not to vote for 'the girl'" (Martin). The soundbite garnered from this, of course, was instant fodder for the idea that Hillary Clinton was anti-woman. The same day she did an interview with Vox wherein she also contributed this in her own words:

You know, all of a sudden the husband turns to the wife: 'I told you, she's going to be in jail, you don't want to waste your vote.' The boyfriend turns to the girlfriend and says,

‘She’s going to get locked up!’ All of a sudden it becomes a very fraught kind of conflictual experience. And so instead of saying I’m taking a chance, I’m going to vote, it didn’t work (Klien). There are other interviews that Clinton gave similar quotes in, but suffice it to say, this was a messaging gaffe through and through. Many of the women who I spoke with expressed deep discontent with these sorts of remarks.

Conceptualizing conservative women in such simplistic and negative terms is a dangerous trap to fall into. A movement which calls itself a Women’s Movement should represent all women, or call itself something else. There are millions of conservative women in the United States. To brush them off as fringe exceptions is an ineffective strategy for supporting female progress. It fundamentally mischaracterizes conservative women, their intelligence, and their autonomy. Effective theories are based on facts and effective movements need effective theories. In my personal experience growing up across the South, conservative women are far from the meek simpleminded creature that they are often dismissed as. Conservative women, like all women, are incredibly diverse. They are strong, faithful, kind, wild, passionate, frank, witty, and warm. They are fierce cowgirls and dedicated community organizers and super-moms who fight for local education.

If it seems as though I am waxing poetic on these women, I must confess that I am. Though I am a liberal feminist through and through, I was raised by a whole village of conservative women across the South. From my soft-spoken mother, who taught me that taking care of others is how we show love, to my female pastors who taught me that women are capable of being impactful leaders, these women made me who I am today. This project is a love letter to them and I hope that I can give women like them a voice in academic literature in my own small way. These women were the exact reason I was originally inspired to go into Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality studies. Growing up, I wanted so badly to be like them and it seemed like

Women's studies might help me get closer to that goal. But as I have undergone the study of my minor over the past few years, I found myself growing further away from what the women I admired looked like. I did not usually see the wise women who had nurtured and inspired me reflected in the pages of my feminist readings. I want to change that.

Thus, although this project is foremost a feminist work of political sociology, it is one that I care deeply about. Striving to research and write as rigorously as possible, I will also be exploring my own experiences and using personal language throughout this work. I am uniquely positioned at the intersection of scholarly feminism and Southern femininity. Therefore, I believe that my personal reflections are not only relevant to this work, but they are impossible to untangle from it. Rather than feign an impossible position of tepid academic neutrality, I will attempt to highlight moments where my personal experiences shape my analysis in the spirit of exacting honesty.

II. It's a Man's World

I think we, as a society, tend to see women as heroes only when they do a man's job, or provide support efforts to male undertakings. They are "rebels" or "bad girls". Take for instance, the beautifully illustrated and wildly popular book *Bad Girls Throughout History* by Ann Shen. There is a whole sub-genre of books of this ilk, and one of the most beloved pullout quotes from Shen's genre standard is "Everything we've gained has been hard-won by a woman who was willing to be bad in the best sense of the word"³ (Shen 5). Furthermore, I think that it is worthwhile to consider the aesthetic forces at work here.⁴ On one hand, the intent to represent

³ The popularity of such sentiments, particularly as an aesthetic device, is so ubiquitous that I have the following anecdote: I have worked under three different women who have a version of the unattributed quote "well-behaved women seldom make history" tastefully framed and hung above their desk. The image of the rule-breaking woman as the ultimate role model seems to have been universally adopted by a rising generation of female professionals.

⁴ See Appendix A. Fig. 2 for the cover art of the *Bad Girls Throughout History*

women whose ambitions were traditionally unfeminine in an art style that roughly echoes that of a Disney princess is clear. The implicit message is that these “bad girls” who did great things should be the role models of young women, akin to the princesses of yesteryear. It seems strange to me that these women were painted in such a hyper-feminine style (all pastel, an airy lightness to the shape of their watercolor bodies). When I discussed feminism with women throughout this study they felt it lost a some of its significance when it became a fashionable cultural movement. The infamous pussy hats were mentioned over and over again, and not in a favorable light. One woman wondered why people speaking about something as important as women’s rights would make themselves look stupid “running around wearing their little pink caps out there.” This older woman, Patty, thought that it must be a new fashion trend, something for girls to “get dressed up in” and “post on the Facebook so other people know they are hip.”

Books about female role models in history talk about scientists or WWII nurses. When women do great things that might be considered feminine, we make them martyrs instead, like Mother Theresa. Well, the conservative women I love are heroes, not martyrs. My mother may have never invented anything, but she worked her fingers to the bone when she was only a teenager to keep a roof over her head when she was abandoned by her abusive parents. She even worked extra shifts to help pay for baby supplies when her sister became a teenage mother. She loves children with all her heart and has always done everything in her power to help them. She volunteered endlessly at our local public schools and at church. She encouraged me to invite lower-income girls to my slumber parties (remembering her own childhood) and she would chat with them to make sure they had everything they needed, sending them home discreetly with things like fresh food. She woke my sister and me up every day for two decades, got us ready, drove us to and from school and all our extracurricular activities, and home-cooked most meals

we ate. She encouraged our creativity and imagination, and instilled within us the idea that there was nothing we could not achieve. I was taught my worth because she treated me like I meant everything to her. She is a good woman. She is not a nasty woman, but she is my hero.

A. Good Girls: Mothers, Homemakers, and Nuns

I think that women like my mother are ultimately seen as martyrs because they give so much of themselves in a way that does not result in public recognition or financial gain, the traditional measures of male success. I can only imagine that to give such dedication to one's life work and then to feel that it has been invalidated by a movement that says women should be focused on amassing social and financial capital must be deeply frustrating. Violence against women is ultimately predicated on taking away their autonomy. When, as feminists, we discredit the autonomy of women whose viewpoints we do not understand or agree with, we do them a disservice which makes them vulnerable. On another angle, feminists have traditionally fought the idea that there is one hegemonic version of appropriate womanhood. The fight to ensure women a place outside of the home and within the public spheres of the workplace and politics involved a fundamental reimagining not just what a woman was capable of doing, but also to some extent of what a woman *ought* to do. Many feminists may adamantly argue that this is precisely *not* the case, but if many women express feeling as though feminists are imposing their own ideas about what women should and should not do, then there is at the very least a disconnect between feminist theory and perceptions of feminist action.

Feminism generally posits that women should not be told what to do with their lives, and often charges that conservative women regularly submit to what they are told to do in their traditional gender roles. Ironically, conservative women chafe at precisely the idea of being told what to do—by liberals, liberal feeling rules, and by the government. A common rallying cry of

conservative women could be summed up roughly as “leave me and my family alone! I know what is best for them and for myself.” The idea that feminists know better about their lives is, frankly, insulting to them. They perceive a double standard: if a man were to say that women do not make up their own minds and cannot vote without a man guiding them, these sentiments would be immediately derided as sexist and infantilizing. To suggest that women inhabit a false consciousness, wherein they do not even consciously *realize* the extent to which their decisions are not their own is patronizing at best and reminiscent of a tinfoil conspiracy theory at worst. Conservative women care a lot about being feminine and womanly so to be told that they are not a “real woman” by feminists is hurtful and alienating. Who made them the arbiters of womanhood, conservative women wonder?

Much of the animosity between traditional, conservative-leaning women and liberal feminism comes from this chasm between the ideal feminism which supports *all* women, including homemakers, and the frequent shortcoming of the movement to articulate that support without inherent bias against homemaking activities. Betty Friedan’s groundbreaking book *The Feminine Mystique* was one of the crucial sparks that ushered in the era of second wave feminism in the 1960s. Friedan’s work may be hailed by many women as instrumental to the gains women have made within public life, but it also set a tone of “the hostility early feminists planted in the heart of the movement toward women who refused to follow their lead” (Burkett 41). *The Feminine Mystique* attempted to name the nebulous depressive experience of many housewives who, on the outside, appeared to have it all, but on the inside found themselves feeling empty and shiftless. Many housewives of the time identified strongly with the sensation that Friedan wrote about. Her book challenged society to recognize the deep unhappiness of these women and gave them the language that they needed to demand more for themselves. Yet,

it is crucial to remember that Friedan also used harsh language “to describe the life of educated housewives in *The Feminine Mystique*: ‘waste of a human self’ and ‘parasite’” (Burkett 41). Sentiments such as these abounded during the heyday of second wave feminism, and “even as late as 1970 Gloria Steinem was calling homemakers ‘dependent creatures who are still children’ in *Time*” (Burkett 41).

Conservative women do not appreciate being infantilized and having their important position within their families degraded by comments such as these. Modern feminists often adamantly insist that they support all women, even fulltime homemakers and mothers. They point to longstanding feminist support for social policies such as “public funding of childcare centers and family leave acts” (Burkett 41). Elinor Burkett, the feminist author of *The Right Women: A Journey Through the Heart of Conservative America* refutes that “such protestations are disingenuous” because “most of those programs were designed to help women ‘liberate’ themselves from household responsibilities, not to help them handle them more easily” (Burkett 41). If a woman truly values her household responsibilities and derives a positive sense of self-worth based on her care work, the suggestion that she requires liberation from her life’s work undermines her entire self-concept. Feminists may perceive their message as “women should be free to pursue any life that they so choose,” but historical feminist rhetoric and current policy positions may instead send a different message to homemakers: women should be free to pursue any life they so choose, but being a homemaker is the worst of the possible options so we must especially help those women who decide to give up their better alternatives. As a result, conservative women may end up feeling “degraded not by their husbands or sons, but by feminist leaders unable to conceive that any woman would choose to be a housewife” (Burkett 41).

Traditional women are often conceptualized as meek, but conservative women are likely to rankle at such a suggestion. One woman named Brittany, who identified as somewhat of a libertarian with a “proud, Southern Texas thing going on” gave the following quote:

Well, I know there are stereotypes with everything, the thought that a woman should be a mother only, in the kitchen cooking, but it’s really the exact opposite; conservative women are *extremely* independent in a lot of ways. All of my friends are conservative women, and every woman that I know- they have a job, they are very successful. We are all very much contributors to the family financially, spiritually, physically—in everything, we are all 50/50 partners with our husbands... Conservatism to me means freedom to pursue my dreams. I feel like that’s kind of an American value—to be able to set off and do whatever your heart desire, to know that if I work hard I can reach personal goals...I want the freedom to do what I want to do and I don’t want the government to tell me what I can and cannot do.

Many of the other women I spoke with had responses similar to Brittany’s. For example, one said that she saw feminism as “worshipping women” by treating them like fragile objects, continuing with, “I think that the worship of women is bad for them because it makes them seem like they aren’t strong enough to handle reality. It feels like women are being treated like babies—it feels like we have to be coddled by society and, frankly, I find it exhausting.” The above quotes relate to a central principle of conservatism, self-reliance. Conservatives believe that normally functioning adults have a responsibility to take care of their own challenges, without help from the government or special social treatment.

Elizabeth-Fox Genovese had questions very similar to my own when she began writing her book *Feminism is Not the Story of my Life*. She wondered how so many women reject the term feminist “though they have benefitted from the feminist gains of the past thirty years.” She embarked on a research project speaking with such women about their views and “each had an implicit refrain: Feminism is not talking about my life” (Fox-Genovese 2). Worse yet, there seemed to be a pervasive suspicion that feminists did not even think that the lives of conservative

were *important*. Defenders of the feminist movement may rush to claim such suspicions simply are not fair, but consider the words of feminist Linda R. Hirshman when assessing the life of a stay-at home mother and Harvard grad who fills her time providing a stimulating, nurturing home for her children and engaging in social activism such as writing her congressional representatives. Hirshman does not hold back her vitriol for this woman's lifestyle: "is not all this biking and tree climbing a bit too much of the inner child for any normal adult? ... she has no power in the world. Why would the congressman she writes to listen to someone whose life so resembles that of a toddler's, Harvard degree or no?" (Hirshman 34).

B. The Feminine Mystique

Virtually all of the reading that I conducted in preparation for this research mentioned one specific text as sparking the feminist revolution: *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. I must admit that despite the extensive reading of feminist texts that I had engaged in throughout my WGSS minor, I had never even picked up the book. Even amongst my relatively liberal, *very* feminist social circle, Friedan is often mocked as a caricature of a problematic, white feminist—a bra burning ninny whose work claimed that women were incapable of thinking for themselves and only acknowledged the problems of a very select group of privileged women. I have a specific memory of attending a panel on Feminism (several of my friends were speaking as panelists) and as each panelist explained their 'feminist journey,' one traced hers from secretly ordering her first copy of *The Feminist Mystique*, to devouring the large tome in one day, to her book becoming lovingly worn—the journey ended with her throwing it away. The message for the audience seemed to be that trashing Friedan's seminal work was the final symbolic step in becoming a fully-evolved feminist. What's more, saying this proudly on stage was not perceived

as a subversive move by an audience comprised of self-avowed feminists, of both the old guard and new.

The punchline of the story, throwing away Feminism's holy book, was met with uproarious laughter and knowing smiles shared between audience members. It was a crowd pleaser of the highest magnitude. I had not ever read the book, but I instinctively scoffed. I had been smart enough to avoid the book that we all laugh at as zany second wave prater. It was a loving laughter, like the polite agreement you would offer if your slightly drunken great aunt delivered a tirade about her 'progressive' social beliefs with terms that have become considered gauche in modern times; you know that she means well, her enthusiasm is inspiring, she might have even done significant social work in a bygone era, but you know better than *to ever repeat the things she says today*.

This research project was the first time that I felt I could no longer avoid reading feminism's off-color great aunt. I was not fully aware of how many expectations I entered into my reading of the *Feminine Mystique* with until I began noticing that I evaluated each page based on whether it fit my preconceived notions or not. As it turns out, the book was everything I thought it would be—and more.

III. Research Methodology

Researching a population that seemed to receive little academic interest (historically) yet one which seemed to be on the brink of an exploding renaissance of academic focus (post-Trump) was a task that was equal parts daunting and exciting. The country is so divided along political lines right now—will anyone even be willing to talk to me? What will they make of me, a college woman researching for 'Women's, Gender, and Sexuality' studies? Surely, that phrase alone will let them smell my liberal stench from ten miles away. As I prepared to begin my

research, I was wholly uncertain that I could even pull it off. My biggest fear was that any of my subjects would feel attacked. I was genuinely attempting to hear them in their own words and assure them that their voices had value to contribute to our collective body of knowledge.

However, if someone you perceive to be politically opposed to you sidles up with a notepad and requests to ask invasive questions about your politics, an apprehensive response seems warranted.

A. Sample Selection

Always the macro-level thinker, my fantasy was that I could conduct a nation-wide study with random sampling. I envisioned myself with quality, comprehensive data from which I would triumphantly derive elusive conclusions, finally explaining not only the ‘Trump question’, but also the gender voting gap, widening regionalism, the ‘red state paradox’⁵, and other assorted political anomalies of the like. As beautiful as my dream was, I like to think the humble research that I did eventually complete uncovered genuinely meaningful, nuanced qualitative findings. Doused in selection bias and covering an admittedly small sample of interviewees, this project was scaled to my capacity as a student researcher working within a single semester, but it was still worthwhile. I can only imagine what I will discover, if I ever achieve my dream of expanding upon this project.

Now that I have expressed my requisite sentimentality, I will outline the technical process of selecting my sample pool. My limited timeline and the knowledge that I would be responsible for locating my research subjects immediately ruled out the large-scale sampling of my dreams. As such, I abandoned pursuing the most pristine data possible. Instead, I focused on how I might

⁵ ‘The Red State Paradox’ is a term which refers to Republican voting preferences within states which are often poorer, rural, and rely more heavily on federal aid. This has been deemed a ‘paradox’ because Republican candidates widely oppose the sort of federal spending and social programs that primarily benefit these so-called ‘red states.’

find subjects that I a) found interesting b) shared cultural understandings with and, most importantly, c) had reasonable social access to. My sampling method was one of the realms in which my role as the researcher was fundamental to the structure of this study.

I took inspiration from the research methodology that Arlie Hochschild used to write *Strangers on Their Own Land*, and used a scaled-down version of her approach, which she describes as “exploratory and hypothesis generating” (247). The goal of Hochschild’s research was “not to see how common or rare something is, or where one does and doesn’t find it,” but rather, “to discover what that something actually is” (247). The “something” that she tries to uncover in *Strangers on Their Own Land* is “the emotional draw of right-wing politics,” and the answer that she concludes with is the “deep story” mentioned earlier (247).

The central “something” that I wanted to discover was what sort of self-concepts conservative women hold. This is my attempt to uncover why the feminist movement, with its clarion call of “the personal is political,” often fails to attract women to its politics. What about the *personal* lives of women whose *politics* are conservative? To answer that question, I utilized one of Hochschild’s techniques called “snowball sampling,” which begins by reaching out to a few members of the community you are researching and then asking to be introduced to others who might be willing to participate. By mining the social network of your initial participants, you can increase your interview pool, branching out with each new participant. While snowball sampling is a convenient and effective way to get into contact with people who meet your research parameters, it is highly subject to selection bias; I must readily confess that most of my interviewees were connected to me socially by no more than three degrees of separation.

As a Texas native, and a student who attends a university in Virginia, my social networks are most deeply entrenched within those two states. Additionally, I was interested in

strategically narrowing my geographic case study because I obviously lacked access to a nationally representative participant sample. Therefore, I chose to interview women from Texas and Virginia. These states would likely be my case study area as a matter of convenience regardless of their unique characteristics, but fortuitously I think that they make an excellent combination to represent the American South with reasonable accuracy. Texas delivers Western, oil-baron libertarianism and Virginia provides Old South gentility and bible belt values. Political and cultural environments vary regionally throughout the country and I am most interested in studying the politics of the South. This is perhaps because of my own background: I am continually attempting to reconcile my love of the South with its politics, which often seem strikingly less compassionate than its extravagant courtesy. My interest in Southern politics is also likely tied to the academic study of the ‘red state paradox.’

While this project certainly does not provide full clarity on that notorious quandary, my conclusions do speak to how real-life voting motivations are often more discreet and personal than simple calculations may assume. Often liberal discussions of conservative women and rural ‘red states’ simply contend that those demographics fail to recognize their own political interests. Instead, my research suggests that a more poignant consideration may be examining *how* voters construct their interests. Voter analysis often makes certain assumptions about voters which simple do not hold true; voters are people with complex lives and opinions, not the perfectly rational economic actors with preferences toward ‘reproductive freedom’ that theory supposes them to be.

B. Developing the Research Question

My research questions were developed with a psychology professor (to minimize bias and other concerns) and a sociology professor (who helped me use best practices for sociological research).

My target research subjects were self-identified conservative women from Texas or Virginia, representatives of conservative women's organizations, and female religious leaders from Virginia or Texas. The complete list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

To officially conduct my capstone research, I was required to have my study approved by the Washington and Lee Institutional Review Board. One of the most crucial aspects of that application was sending in a set list of interview questions for approval, so much of the bulk of my study design was centered around crafting questions which would provide me the most useful data possible. As I conducted an extensive literature review about conservative women and their relationship to the feminist movement, I tried to track which sorts of questions popped into my mind. A lot of the questions I eventually settled on were attempts to see if the scholarly information I read would reflect conversations with actual conservative women in 2018; much of the resources I found had been written at least a decade prior and, like many people, I suspected there had been significant shifts after the 2016 presidential election.

C. Conducting the Interviews

My data set is obviously skewed towards my own background (white, middle class, relatively well educated) but I made genuine efforts to reach out as broadly as possible through my own social network for introductions to people who were perfect strangers to me. Nonetheless, even the fact that most of my interviewees knew that they had some tangible social connection to me likely influenced my research process; it is considered somewhat rude to rebuke the request of a 'friend-of-a-friend' and social pressures to accommodate my interview requests probably boosted my ability to obtain interviewees. That said, one of the challenges of conducting interviews with people within my own social circle was attempting to remain as neutral as possible and avoid making participants feel as though I would report back to our mutual

connections. I tried to emphasize that the confidentiality forms each participant signed before their interview meant that any information they shared with me remained under their control, that I would not attach their real names to any content, and that anything said during interviews would remain confidential.

I scheduled interviews with participants whenever was most convenient for them and conducted them over phone. I generally described the process to take 20-40 minutes overall when asking people to participate. Most interviews did fit that timeframe, but many went well over an hour. I tried my best to allow plenty of time for calls, in case an interviewee had a lot that they wanted to say. Often, these were the women who were most passionate about their beliefs, but each interview was valuable because in the real world many women do *not* view politics as a top priority; if anything, I was worried that because I tend to run in politically active circles, I was skewing my sample away from representing the average proportion of political involvement.

Interviews took the general form of the question set, and I asked follow-up questions when information unaccounted for in the structure of these questions came to light. My goal was for these interviews to feel relatively informal and conversational so that I could capture participants' views in their own words. I wanted to avoid making them feel they needed to speak in an overly formal or academic tone. When I asked follow-up questions I tried to maintain consistency by asking them questions in broad-based formats such as: What do they mean by particular terms used? Why are they using those terms? Why did they identify specific things as important to them? Generally, I found this approach to be successful, though sometimes I felt my questions became inadvertently vague in my attempts to remain neutral.

Obscuring my own political beliefs in an attempt to remain a neutral interviewer was a task that required some creativity. I would never lie to an interviewee, but I strived to emphasize the ways I might sympathize with the interviewee, and downplay any tensions between our personal beliefs. My opinions on the politics of my participants are entirely irrelevant to this study. When asked directly, as I sometimes was by curious participants, I would mention how I am not an official member of any political party and that, as a Christian, I try to vote how I feel the bible calls me to—both of which are completely true. I tried to pre-empt the desire to ask about my personal beliefs by providing an emotionally vulnerable account of how I decided to conduct this study. Southern women love their mommas, and if nothing else, that is always a good place to start with people. I sometimes listed other biographical information that belies my sympathies with conservative viewpoints, such as the fact that my family owns a small business. Perhaps more than anything else, I think my success in interviews was predicated on the fact that I genuinely did want to hear what my interviewees had to say and I believed their thoughts deserved to be heard by academia. I tried to communicate that as fully as possible. In return, I found that people cherished the opportunity to be listened to and to be treated with respect. To sum up my approach, I tried to keep my participants in what I once termed a “nebulous zone of comfortability.”

IV. Research Findings

I will divide my research findings into three sections to address the responses that I gathered from conservative women, representatives of conservative women’s organizations, and female pastors separately. Afterwards, I will analyze commonalities and potential takeaways from the qualitative data that these interviews provided me.

A. Conservative Women

Over the course of my research, I spoke with nine ‘unaffiliated’ conservative women from across Texas and Virginia. That research represents over eleven hours of conversation in total; though I billed my interviews as taking twenty to forty minutes to complete, many interviews went well-over that estimate as women began pouring out their frustrations. The first question that I asked each participant, “thinking back to the last election, what were your top 3 concerns that motivated your choice of candidate?” set the groundwork for the rest of the interview, and I often used these concerns as a reference point during follow-up questions. As a student of policy, I expected to hear mostly policy concerns when I wrote this question. My own bias towards concrete policy details became apparent when I found that many participants answered this question somewhat abstractly—usually with personal traits they wanted to find in a candidate.

I wonder if I should have worded my question more clearly to ask about policy positions specifically, as opposed to general concerns. I probably would have gotten more tight data on my participant’s policy priorities, but ultimately their responses undoubtedly gave me more valuable insight into voting logic than asking about policy would have. One, it was a valuable reminder that though policy is my own filter for politics (as someone deep in the weeds of technical legislation), most people do not spend their time engaged in thorough policy analysis. Secondly, and related, policy is often not the primary factor that drives one’s voting behavior. The average person does not care about supporting specific policies because maintaining a policy position on everything is unrealistic. Instead, it may seem more important to find a representative who they can *trust* to vote for the policies that they would support, if given the time to develop a policy stance.

I have tried to categorize each sort of response that I received to question one into the three broad categories of policy concerns, conceptual motivators, and character traits. Examples of conceptual motivators include: fear of socialism, concern about extreme political change, and distaste for any candidate who used their gender as a way to garner votes. Examples of character traits listed as top concerns include: strong Christian faith, honesty, and outsider status. To see a detailed reference chart with more information about answer to question one, see appendix D. The most popular three responses overall were: ‘pro-life values,’ the economy, and trust. Abortion was named four times throughout the interviews, and the economy (including terms such as economic issues or national debt) was listed six times. The concerns cited as most important tended to be something that participants had a personal connection with and, when asked to explain why they picked their answers, most gave a personal story. I will highlight some of those stories as I proceed to explore these top concerns.

1. Abortion

One striking trend that emerged was that among those who listed pro-life values, each participant listed that as their number one concern; in other words, the question of abortion was either not a top priority for them politically, or it was *the* top priority. One such interviewee, Helen, voiced this quite simply when she said, “I guess it makes sense that anyone who believes abortion is murder would be pro-life.” For religious women who conceptualize abortion as *murder*, it does seem intuitive that ending abortion would be their top concern. As Helen put it, “the biggest issue, obviously, in America is abortion because so many children are murdered every single day.” Passionate opponents of abortion tended to invoke their religious beliefs most heavily. Helen expressed doubt as to whether she would even care about abortion if she was not

a Christian and emphasized that she was driven by her conviction that “human life held the highest value” and that “abortion was an injustice against God.”

The most personal story that I received about abortion—by far—came from an extremely devout Christian woman who is middle aged and lives in North Texas. Ruth has two children who she clearly adores, and she took me quite by surprise when she led into the following story:

It’s really ironic. I am very, very passionate about abortion, and you won’t ever believe why. You won’t *ever* believe it! I’m so passionate about it, and it’s not because my nose is in the air and I think I’m better than anybody. It’s because when I was seventeen, I had a college education paid for on the line, and my boyfriend got me pregnant. Yes! And I want you to know that I went, and for three hundred dollars, I lied about my age, used somebody else’s social security number, and me and my boyfriend went and I had an abortion. And it didn’t hit me until I had my first child, what I had done. I put *myself* above that child. I was raised in a Christian home. I was raised to know right and wrong. I felt like I had a strong moral code, but I was young and I felt like that child was gonna ruin everything for me... I know the pain. I’ve been on both sides of the issue. We think it’s nothing, but it is a human life, and when I held my daughter in my arms, that whole facade crumbled. It was like I was blind, and when I looked at my baby that came out of *my body*, I realized *oh my God*, what did I do? I was scared the whole time: God’s gonna curse me, she’s not gonna have fingers or eyes, you know. But I’m forgiven, I’ve figured that out. God has forgiven me and I’m at peace now about it. I really believe my unborn child is in heaven and God makes everything new... but that’s why I’m pretty passionate.

Hearing Ruth share this incredibly emotional story was startling, because when she says she’s passionate, it is clear that she means that deeply. Yet, for all of the emotion she spoke with, it was all incredibly upbeat. It was clear that she was speaking with conviction that she had been forgiven and that now her role was to share her story if it could help other women from experiencing the same pain. Her story was filled with deep regret, but also with an infectious, cheerful humility. I was personally in awe of the way she was able to strike such an oratory balance. Her story has many potential lessons, and I hope that including it in her own words did it justice, but perhaps the biggest insight it can provide is that unwanted pregnancies affect women from all walks of life. Many pro-life advocates are accused of callousness and disregard

towards women seeking abortions, but abortion is an experience that has touched many of them personally. Some advocates, such as Ruth, are filled with compassion for women facing unplanned pregnancy. Ruth desperately wants to protect other women from the pain that came from her own abortion. Women like Ruth view themselves as having nothing but love and understanding for women considering abortion; pro-choice attacks on their character make them feel hurt and misjudged.

On the other hand, fiscally conservative women who did not link religion to their politics were the only participants to explicitly state a ‘pro-choice’ preference. One middle-aged woman from the Houston metropolitan area, Agnes, expressed that though she did not personally believe in abortion as a Mexican Catholic woman, she believed that women should have the right to choose from a legal standpoint. When I asked if her religious background influenced her political preferences she gave a bit of a laugh and said that while she felt her political preferences probably *should* be influenced by her Catholic faith, they were not. From my perspective, Agnes’ stance on abortion seemed well-aligned with her other concerns because she phrased one of her top three concerns as “the socialist environment we were going into.” When articulating her choice to list that concern, a key point that she made was “I really believe that people have the right to decide what they want to do. It’s your constitutional right to decide what you do with your life!”

The other participant who most strongly held a similar view described herself primarily as a libertarian, for whom her Roman Catholic upbringing was “always this boring obligation I had on Sundays, it was always more of a joke rather than any sort of spiritual or religious thing in my life.” This young woman, Caroline, was actually the only participant to list *protecting* abortion rights as a top-three priority; interestingly, she still fit the pattern of naming abortion as

her first concern. Caroline, the only currently non-religious woman who I interviewed, now considers herself to be “an agnostic atheist.” Caroline outlined her quest to arrive at her own political beliefs after being raised in a conservative, Catholic household. Ultimately, she says that she could find “no better thing to fight for than liberty,” and that revelation made her very fiscally conservative, yet socially liberal.

2. *The Economy*

Many of the women who I spoke with expressed dismay at the declining purchasing power that they felt their family had experienced over the past decade. Economic concerns were one of the policy issues I intuitively expected to mainly fall along class lines, but surprisingly women from across the income spectrum voiced their concern about the economy. From working-class women worried about losing America’s manufacturing jobs to China, to women with advanced degrees in subjects such as business and economics. America’s national debt was often discussed as a looming threat for American families. Ruth attributed her family’s falling prosperity to America’s debt. She felt that even though she and her husband were educated and had a “nice life,” even their relatively well-off family could feel that the economy had tightened around them. From Ruth’s perspective, “our insurance rates have doubled, and now it’s like the companies can’t contribute like they have before. I feel the pressure of the debt of America and it keeps getting worse and worse. I just felt like, man, we better do something or social security might not be there.” Those who listed the economy as a concern usually mentioned the future of social security. Some women were afraid not only for themselves, but also for their parent’s survival if social security collapsed.

3. *Trust*

Though the term “trust” was the third most cited concern, it was actually only explicitly listed by two different participants in question one; every other answer given besides abortion, the economy, and trust was only listed once. The two women (Patty and Regina) who gave this response were among the older participants in the sample and they both felt as though President Obama had been untrustworthy. They described the Democratic establishment as corrupt. Both also listed a similar desire for a candidate who would truly care for the American people. Patty used the phrase “someone that has the interest of America at the heart,” which seemed to be in reference to foreign policy, whereas Regina said she wanted “someone that would look out for the American people,” which seemed to be more aimed at domestic issues.

The issue of trust came up in many of the interviews with women who did not list it explicitly as a top concern. Six of the ten women I interviewed held overall opinions of the government and politics that could be characterized as “jaded” or “cynical” (to use some of their words). The question I expected to yield the greatest variety in answers was “are there any stories from your own life that you feel have shaped your political opinions? If yes, are you comfortable sharing how those formative experiences have influenced your voting preferences?” Instead, an astonishing *six* included a story about how watching their parents or grandparents be party loyalists impressed upon them the importance of getting to know the candidates and making an informed decision. All but one of the six had stories about how the older generation of their families were life-long Democratic voters. Some conjectured that because their relatives had lived through the Great Depression, they felt they owed the Democrats their vote for life. Fond, mild teasing was common as they laughed about their deceased relative’s political steadfastness: “I think he would have voted for Mickey Mouse if he was a Democrat.” One

woman chuckled about hiding the fact that she voted Republican in her first election from her Grandmother. At that time, she explained, it was common for a young person's secret rebellion to be voting for George Bush.

All of these women who spoke about the party loyalty of their parents listed it as one of the *most politically influential* stories in their life. Here, I will circle back to the point I am trying to make about trust. Watching the generation that raised them vote with blind party trust permanently made these women wary of party politics. Many mentioned how the Democratic party had gone into a shameful decline and that it could no longer be trusted. As these women turned instead toward the Republican party, they carried in their memory the fact that their parents had been so betrayed by a party they pledged absolute allegiance to. Most are determined to avoid making the same mistake and claim that while they are conservative, they stay open-minded about each candidate and give them a chance to earn their vote. Most women insisted that they would vote for a candidate of either party as long as they trusted them most. They long for the days of stability when one could trust their political party, but those days seem long gone. If a candidate can make them feel that lost hope, it is a powerful motivation to vote.

4. *Other Policy Concerns*

Many policy issues cropped up throughout the interviews, even if they had not originally been listed as a top concern. Two that I would like to touch on in this section are immigration and defense. In terms of immigration concerns, many had personal stories which had spurred their focus on the issue. One participant, an older woman from North Texas named Nancy explained "I know personally a young woman who was brutally attacked by illegal immigrants and left for dead... I know of people who have been hurt, and that's a big concern of mine." One caveat that might have influenced the frequency of immigration being raised as a top concern in

my pool of participants is the fact that many were from Texas. As Nancy noted, “We have such a huge border with Mexico” and that means Texans have more interactions with Hispanic immigrants generally. Nancy worried that immigrants were having a negative effect on her area because they “take jobs away from the people who live here” but employers “pay them under the table” so they do not pay back into the tax base. As a taxpayer in Texas, illegal immigration seemed like a threat to her wellbeing. Nancy’s household tends to be tight on money and her husband works in the construction industry (known for using inexpensive immigrant labor) so this issue hits especially close to home.

Immigration from Islamic countries has also become a hot-button concern in the wake of the 2016 election and President Trump’s infamous ‘travel ban’ on certain Muslim countries. While some liberals are baffled by any woman’s willingness to support Trump in light of his overtly sexist persona, many conservatives appear equally baffled by liberal stances which combine preachy feminism with blanket acceptance of Muslim immigrants. If the liberals see “independent womanhood as a bedrock of modern Western civilization,” conservatives wonder why liberals seem so unconcerned about “female emancipation coming under threat from cultural forces that have infiltrated Europe and America with the arrival of Muslim immigrants” (Young). Most participants who mentioned immigration spoke about Mexican immigration specifically, but both demographics were addressed as posing a threat to the safety of American women. In previous political eras, “fear of terrorism and crime had been amped up as a campaign strategy to push women into the political embrace of a strong—and often right-wing—male protector” and today “the anxieties about Islamic extremism that helped propel Trump to victory have given rise to a peculiar marriage of feminism and nativism in Europe” (Young). One

participant in particular, an older woman from West Texas, heavily lauded President Trump for calling President Obama out for his supposed support of the “Muslim agenda.”

I grouped the topic of defense together with the topic of immigration because women seemed to approach both with fears about safety. In the 2016 election, the threat of Islamic terrorism led many voters to see immigration policy and national security as two sides of the same coin. Currently, America contains “nothing like Europe’s demographic concentrations of Muslims, where entire, dense quarters of cities and suburbs are inhabited by people whose culture is often seen as being at belligerent odds with the ‘hosts’” (Young). Nonetheless, commentators have noted that “a few significant terrorist attacks by homegrown Islamists in the United States have inflamed and exaggerated fears that would otherwise have been muted or slow-burning” (Young). The women who I interviewed largely eschewed explicit mentions of Islam, but many of their statements about national security implied they much preferred the Trump administration’s approach to Islamic immigration over the previous administration’s approach.

Mostly, women spoke about worrying for their child’s safety. They did not want to send their children into a dangerous world full of people who might do them harm. One woman, Brittany, shared that she had family members who were in the armed forces, so she took a particular interest in promoting the military. Another, Caroline, was studying politics and most strongly feared the possibility of nuclear war. Because of this, Caroline said “I felt like we needed a president who would be able to be professional and handle complex issues diplomatically. Trump was insane, but I also didn’t trust Hillary because she completely failed as secretary of state and I didn’t think she would be respected on the world stage.” Defense is

commonly viewed as a masculine concern, but my study suggests that women have their own significant anxieties surrounding national security, which deserve analytic recognition.

5. Candidate Choice

Though seven of the ten women I interviewed did cast their vote for Trump, most did so only begrudgingly. Multiple women explained that they could hardly bring themselves to vote once they entered the booth, and only did so out of an intense moral conviction that voting is “a human right that we should all be proud of.” One young woman, Megan, chose to abstain from voting because she felt she could not morally cast a vote for either. In her words, the choice between Hillary and Trump was “like we either light the fire or pour gas on it, either way it would all blow up.” Megan became detached from the election, watching it unfold almost as though it was a reality TV show. As a devout Jehovah’s Witness, she also turned toward her faith as a source of comfort. Megan said that her religious background let her see that “no human in this system is going to fix things,” which led her to “think the only way to fix things is to have hope that there will be a new world where everything is better. It's gonna take something bigger than us to fix our problems, and God is here to do that.”

As in Megan’s colorful fire analogy, many women stated that they chose Trump only because he seemed like the “lesser of two evils.” Such explanations usually included a justification for why they concluded they could not vote for Hillary Clinton. Generally, women contended that they did give Hillary fair consideration. A remarkable *three* different women said that Hillary “lost them” when she said she supported full term abortion, or “abortion on the due date.” All three were convinced that Hillary had said she supported full-term abortion in one of the presidential debates. As someone who knew the Clinton platform well, I was extremely confused the first time that I heard this claim. After some research, I realized that while Clinton

certainly did *not* support abortion up to the due-date, my interviewees were right that she had sort of said she supported full-term abortion during a debate—in a roundabout way. Actually, this misconception arose after Clinton failed to effectively respond to Trump’s accusations that she believed in partial-birth abortion. The precise Trump quote from the debate is “based on what she is saying, and based on where she's going and where she's been, you can take a baby and rip the baby out of the womb. In the ninth month, on the final day and that's not acceptable” (Tinker). Clinton, presumably in an attempt to stick to her talking points, ignored his character attack and responded by reaffirming a woman’s right to choose and adding, “the kinds of cases that fall at the end of pregnancy are often the most heartbreaking, painful decisions for families to make” (Tinker). Clinton supports limits on late-term abortion (except in extraordinary cases of medical need); because she did not clearly state that she was against aborting fully-developed children, it seemed as though she was implicitly agreeing with Trump.

Though Clinton does not support aborting late-term fetuses on demand, the above example is indeed a good example of how Clinton “lost” a lot of women. Beholden to a large base of pro-choice backers and trained to maintain messaging consistency even when such rhetorical inflexibility harms her, Clinton’s mistake was not a mistake at all. She did not misspeak, she just miscalculated. She often has—especially on issues that women care most about. Clinton has always struggled to make herself likable in the public eye. She felt that her failure to take Bill’s last name and look the part of a politician’s wife had contributed to him losing the governor’s race in 1980. After that she worked hard to maintain the right image for politics, but her basic personality still caused problems. She describes one such debacle in the following way:

One of Bill’s opponents in the primary attacked my job at a Little Rock law firm as a way of going after Bill. This really got under my skin. ‘I suppose I could have stayed home

and baked cookies and had teas,' I told the press in exasperation, 'but what I decided to do was pursue my profession.' That did it. Suddenly I was in the middle of a full-blown political firestorm, with self-righteous moralists saying I had insulted American mothers. As someone who believes in supporting mothers, fathers, and families of all kinds, this hurt.

(Clinton 226). For someone who "believes in supporting mothers," Clinton has an undeniably hard time convincing the rest of the world that. As I will demonstrate in section ten, dedicated to motherhood, this is a crippling deficiency. Mothers may sense that Clinton, like many feminists, looks down on them for taking care of their families. Clinton's post-election media presence may have only confirmed those suspicion. Multiple women brought up their anger towards the fact that Hillary had suggested they only voted Trump based on the opinions of their husbands or boyfriends; this resentment certainly did not convince them that their Trump vote had been a mistake.

6. *Contemporary Feminism*

When I conducted the literature review in preparation for this project, I found a curious generational divide that I had never noticed before: older women identified more strongly with the term *women's movement*, whereas younger women identified more with the term *feminism*. There appears to be a strong temporal dimension to differential perceptions of the women's movement and feminism. Young women, generally the under thirty crowd, mainly reacted with confusion when I asked about the women's movement. When I asked Hellen (in her early twenties) what she thought of the women's movement she took an awkward pause and then asked, "um what specifically...?" As she trailed off I saw the division predicted by the literature unfold before my eyes. I tried to remain neutral and insist that she give her gut reaction to the term and eventually Hellen laughingly said, "when somebody just says that, my first reaction is to roll my eyes a little bit." On the other hand, Nancy, who is in her early sixties responded

exuberantly to the women's movement, with great thanks for "all of the women who did that."

She expanded:

I think that our foremothers have done us well, because they've gotten us out of the house. There's a lot of women who didn't want to be in the house. They felt like it was a trap. Women need to have their own money, they need to be independent so they don't feel trapped. I'm really glad that we have that choice now, whereas fifty years ago it was a hard thing for women to have a fulltime job.

This sort of recognition from the older set of participants seemed to be the norm, whereas younger women seemed to connect less personally to the accomplishments of the women's movement. There were generational divides in the vocabulary that women used. For example, I never heard a younger woman use "women's libber" to describe the movement's adherents, but many of the older women did.

The general consensus that I found was that feminism "got way too carried away... it seemed great and it was, but we got too carried away." Ruth fervently supported the original push for women's rights, saying, "First it started with let's get the women's right to vote. Of course! They're human beings! They have a voice! Yes! Then it was let's get equal pay. *Of course*, everyone deserves to be paid for the work they do, heck yeah!" According to Ruth, though, "When women decided to burn their bras, that began the decline of the family unit. It's a terrible tragedy. Feminism now just makes me *sad*. To me, it seems like women are exalting themselves over men. For a man or a woman to say they're better than the other one, that's selfish and arrogant." Casey, a much younger grad student, also criticized feminism "as a cultural moment," as she feels it "tends to be extreme. It doesn't totally represent what I believe because it ties in abortion. There are many ways to avoid pregnancy. My big issue with it is that I don't agree with 'my body my choice'... at the base of it, what makes the women have more rights to the child than the father?" These women worried that feminism had veered off the path

of equality and into encouraging women to be selfish. Each one, no matter their age, spent a lot of time assuring me that they believed in women's rights in the workplace, and that women should be free of things like sexual harassment and assault. Phrases like "women can do anything a man can do, and maybe even better" were common, but usually followed up by something to the tune of "except, of course, in the physical realm. Men are just stronger than women and that's a fact."

Many participants associated feminism with judgement. Hellen felt that many women who labeled themselves feminists do not represent women well because in her experience they "tended to be very judgmental." Most of them were able to give sound definitions of feminism such as, "a woman who believes that women are equal to men in every category, they should have the same rights, and that they should be able to do whatever they want." Even among those who could provide definitions like that, however, they mentioned that many people have a negative impression of feminists, so they did not generally identify as one, even though they all claimed to believe in equality. Caroline, the youngest and most socially liberal in the study gave a thoughtful response, which encapsulates the points made by other women:

I think that third wave feminism gets a little bit off the rails... I think the problem is that there isn't much of a centralized message to the modern-day women's movement, whereas in the past there were concrete goals that women were fighting for and could see established, like getting the right to vote. We were passing legislation, and now we are just in a place where we are trying to change people's minds. And that's a much, much harder thing to do. It's so all-encompassing because gender roles are such a foundational part of our society, our upbringings, and our psyche. To accomplish the goals that third wave feminism is going to take centuries... but a lot of people want to see immediate change happening, and that ends up with the movement splintering in unproductive ways. It ends up with people having a bad image of the movement because some really radical person will say something totally crazy and that'll become someone's only impression of feminism and they will dismiss all feminists after that—even those who want really realistic things. I think the women's movement now has horrible PR.

I self-identify as a feminist but I think it's one of those things that's almost meaningless at this point; calling yourself a feminist in this day and age doesn't give anyone an indication of what you actually believe. There are so many different versions

of feminism, and so many different people calling themselves feminists who do not exhibit feminist traits. So, when you tell someone you're a feminist, you're not so much communicating a message about yourself to them. They're just putting their own implications of that word on you. It's useless for communicating, because if you want to know if someone is a feminist it has to be a whole long conversation where you get into, like, Intersectionality, and the limits, and it gets so muddled. At the same time, I self-identify as a feminist because I think people who refuse to sort of get vilified by feminists. I think that if you don't say you're a feminist, people don't really want to talk to you further about your views and how you have many feminist beliefs but don't like the label. It's easier to just identify as a feminist.

To some of the women I interviewed, feminism seems like a movement full of radical beliefs and petty complaints. Many expressed that feminism had in some way trivialized the real progress of the original women's movement and devolved into angry women wearing absurd pink hats. Even a simple google images search reveals the stark difference in modern perceptions of the women's movement and feminism. See appendix C for screen shots of the two search terms. Images that represented the women's movement were mainly black and white photographs; they looked historic, as though the movement was thoroughly in the past. The similar searches that Google suggested were things like civil right, human right, and suffrage. Feminism, on the other hand turned up primarily pop-art style pictures with a lot of pink. Some of the images were bubbly feminist art, but darker images showed up as well, such as one that read "feminism is cancer." Google's suggested search terms? Art, pink, bad. As I discussed in relation to products such as *Bad Girls Throughout History*, feminism can sometimes look like a consumerist aesthetic endeavor, as opposed to the serious movement it is.

7. Religion

All but one of the women I interviewed identified as very religious Christians. Seven out of the nine Christian women claimed that their faith had direct effects on their political preferences. As with the topic of abortion, women who described themselves as *fiscally* conservative tended to emphasize their religion less. Conversely, those who described

themselves as most religious tended to identify as more conservative overall. The notable exception to that trend is that those who described themselves as most politically apathetic also tended to be relatively religious. While some women described themselves as specifically conservative in a fiscal sense, no one identified as socially conservative but more economically liberal.

8. *Motherhood*

When I was formulating the questions for this interview I ran many of my thoughts by my own mother, because she was the sort of woman I wanted to learn more about. The question “what does motherhood mean to you?” ended up on my final list of questions because she gave such an impassioned answer; the very first thing she said, without hesitation, was “motherhood is *everything*.” Remarkably, almost every mother who I subsequently interviewed said the exact same thing. My hunch about the value of this question turned out to be exactly right. Motherhood was one of the topics that clearly got to the heart of my participants. Amongst those who were mothers especially, their entire tone of voice changed and softened. The language that they used shifted. This is my own unscientific observation, but they sounded most as though they were recalling specific experiences from their own life when they answered this question. This would not be quite as interesting an observation, were it not for the fact that one of the other questions *specifically asked* them to recall formative experiences, but motherhood seemed to draw them into introspection much more naturally than an explicit request to hear about their memories. Each woman spoke with a lot of pauses, and I imagined their faced squinting up in concentration, thinking of their own mothers or of their children as they carefully added more details to their answer.

Hellen's view on motherhood, as a young woman who looked forward to having her own children one day was that it was "a great blessing that God has given to women." Though Hellen did not think motherhood was God's plan for every woman, she thought that "generally women are blessed with the potential for motherhood. God has placed in most women the desire to have children and to raise them. I think for a lot of women that's how He designed them, and they would never be really fulfilled in life unless they were a mother." Every woman noted that motherhood was not an obligation or expectation for all women at some point during their answer, which I was not expecting. The voluntary nature, or the idea of motherhood being a "calling" was consistent throughout each response. The importance of teaching your children self-reliance and independent thinking was also usually mentioned. Nancy summed up the most commonly expressed sentiments in this way:

You teach them to walk so they can walk away. You don't smother your kids, you let them learn how to fly on their own. Try to create an environment that they know no matter what they do, or how they act, or what happens to them, they can always come home and you will always be there to love them. You're their support, emotionally, physically—and monetarily until they're able to get out on their own. You don't want to make them little clones of yourself, but help them to become the best person they are.

Women spoke about how motherhood was fulfilling, yet difficult. They praised it as the highest form of self-actualization and the most important job in society. The ever-bubbly Ruth was in her element speaking of the joys of motherhood: "it's what makes, in the end, your life worthwhile. You were a *mother*, you know? You get to raise your child to believe in God, to be happy, to be kind, to make their difference in this world. There's no greater calling." As Ruth says mother, she shouts it in exuberance, as if she is marveling at the fact she gave life to another person. Mothers seemed to be overwhelmed and amazed by what motherhood has meant to them.

Not all of the young women I interviewed looked forward to motherhood with the same delight, however. Megan and Caroline both said that they were "terrified" of becoming mothers

because they felt it was such an important job. Megan admitted to me that she had never been close with her mother, or had a good relationship with her. She said, “sadly when I think of children, when I think of motherhood, it sounds miserable to me.” Megan realized what that maternal bond was supposed to be in her life. She felt that because mothers are so important to children, lacking a good relationship with her mother impacted her in many ways. She did not want to fail a child in the same way, but she never learned how to be a “good mom” from her own mother. Caroline had the opposite problem; her mother had dedicated her entire life to her children and had been an extraordinary mom. Caroline observed that her mother had sacrificed so much more of herself to feel like a good mom than her father had to be a “good dad.” It did not seem fair that her father “got to go work out in the real world and come home to the same amount of love,” while her mother did everything else possible to care for a family. Her mother raised her to believe that mothers who did not stay at home with their children loved their children less, “less than their money, less than their jobs, just, less.” Caroline now feels this was a toxic narrative that hurt her mother once her children were grown, and her mother had to find a new sense of purpose. Caroline has complex feelings, however, because she also feels her mother’s sacrifices gave her the best life possible. Caroline believes, “I am who I am because of my mom. Being a mother is one of the most powerful things you can do shaping people and I think that it changes you as a person. I also don’t think it’s an obligation at all, I think that it’s a calling. It’s really something that you have to do with your whole heart or not do at all.” The sentiment that motherhood changes you was echoed by most of the moms I interviewed. They told me that once they became a mom their politics shifted a lot; suddenly, they cared much more about issues like public education and community safety.

9. Misunderstandings

Not a single woman answered no to the question “is there anything that you feel is often misunderstood about conservative women?” This was unexpectedly the question that tended to open the floodgates for the interviewees and everyone’s answers echoed common themes. Each woman felt that the complexity and nuance of both her personal life and her political views had been minimized and discounted. That sentiment expressed itself in several ways. Nancy, along with most of the other women I interviewed felt that people viewed her as close-minded, and she specifically wanted people to know that she was “not a stick in the mud or a fuddy-duddy.” Many others echoed this sentiment, including Ruth who said, “we like to have fun... we are not just a bunch of goody two shoes, Pollyanna types... besides, just because we have a moral code does not mean we are not open to new ideas.”

Two of the most impassioned stories that I received came from minority, immigrant women who were genuinely frustrated with the fact that people disbelieved they could be conservatives. Even more upsetting, they both admitted that they often faced people who treated them like they were “traitors.” Agnes, born to a Mexican woman as the last of ten children, said that people always assume conservative women “can’t be Hispanic... they think all conservatives, especially women, must have been from a really rich family and have had everything handed to them.” Though Agnes is very highly educated and lives well-off now, nothing was ever handed to her. Shortly after she was born her father left the family, and her Spanish-speaking mother raised all of her children without any sort of government aid. As soon as the children were old enough, they began working in the fields as migrant workers. Agnes is inspired by her mother whose thought was “if we can't provide for ourselves, why would your government provide for us?” Agnes has received vitriol from all sorts of people, from stay-at-

home moms in her neighborhood who judged her negatively for hiring a nanny, to people who cannot believe she would dare vote for Trump. Ultimately though, she is happy with her career and loves her family—including her mother who is in her nineties and still in perfect health.

Agnes has a simple message, “people don't realize where people really come from, seeing who they are now. There's history behind us all.”

Caroline, a college woman, delivered this extended polemic which I am including in-full because I believe it succinctly and eloquently touched upon all of the major threads I heard from the participants:

I think that given the evolving politics of our day, and how contentious issues are getting, I think that very liberal women want to paint conservative women as the ultimate enemy, as like, traitors to the movement. I was thinking about it the other day, and the feminist movement is like women going on strike about all these things that they won't accept anymore and then they see conservative women as the scabs⁶ of their strike... like they're ruining the whole thing for everyone because they're not thinking enough, or they're stupid, or they're listening to the men in their lives, rather than thinking deeply about the issues. But I see conservative women as much more than that in my life. I've also seen conservative women who aren't thinking deeply about issues, but I am someone who identifies as very fiscally conservative and I'm someone who thinks very deeply about these things and I study them. I think part of what makes me so mad about this impression that conservative women are just idiots is that I think it takes a lot of courage to stand against the herd and to refuse to just have your politics handed to you because you're a woman, or a person of color. I think it takes some deep introspection to get out of that mindset and I think that a lot of times liberal women don't do that introspection as much. Painting all conservative women as the problem because they aren't “woke enough” or whatever, is hypocritical, and that makes me frustrated.

Patty, who I would guess is at least as old as Caroline's grandmother, said something similar in a much plainer way: “they think just because we're not out there on the street beating our gums, we aren't very smart, that we don't have the sense enough to think for ourselves, but in reality, we are much smarter than those women out there in those big demonstrations.” Patty and Caroline are the bookends— the oldest and youngest participants represented in my study. I

⁶ Another term for strike breakers.

appreciate that despite the age difference, their responses struck the same chord, especially because age seemed to be one of the biggest demographic factors that dictated differences amongst my participants. And yet, conservative women young and old feel many of the same frustrations.

B. Conservative Women's Organizations

When I decided to learn more about the groups which represent conservative women I assumed that there would be one premier national organization. Instead, I found that there are two very different leading organizations dedicated to the interests of conservative women in America.

Then again, when I began this project I assumed that conservative women were a relatively niche category that hadn't had large, organized group interests since Phyllis Schlafly rallied the forces of conservative women to defeat the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s. In reality, that could not be further from the truth.

There is very little mission overlap between the two leading organizations. Concerned Women of America represents *social* conservatism and the other, the Independent Women's Forum represents *fiscal* conservatism. Given the ideological divide between the top two organizations, one might expect that most women either identified predominantly with fiscal or social conservatism. In reality, most women identified simply as "conservative" across the board when asked the question "do you identify as fiscally conservative, socially conservative, both, or with a different political description?" What, then, should we make of the schism between conservative women that has manifested itself on an organizational level?

Conservative women's organizations serve the purpose of institutionalizing anti-feminism and act as spokeswomen for conservatism (Schreiber 23). The first goal is, in essence, just a way of saying that these organizations built themselves as foils to feminist institutions such

as the National Organization for Women (NOW). The second goal is clearly where the organizations begin to divide because the messages each seeks to deliver are often opposed to one another. CWA supports biblical values and wants more government regulation in some areas, such as pornography. IWF supports free-market values and small government policies. CWA primarily targets religious women with families, whereas IWF is interested in bringing collegiate women and professionals into their fold. Thus, their communication strategies are very different. CWA provides women educational materials to hand out around their community, and encourages grassroots groups like church circles. IWF takes a different approach. It is less of a grassroots movement. Their website is incredibly savvy and modern. IWF also has a growing presence on college campuses that “aims to gain adherents through negative construction of feminist ideology.” IWF lists its chief policy goals as limited government interference, limited social programs, lower taxes, and less regulation. CWA, on the hand, lists its chief policy goals as opposition to gay marriage, pro-life values, anti-pornography, and support for Israel (Schreiber 26).

For this study, I wanted to speak to some conservative women’s organizations, so I chose one that focused on social issues and one that focused on fiscal issues. After several attempts to contact the social organization, including emails and phone calls, they seemed unwilling to speak to me. They also seemed unwilling to turn my interview request down cold, however; I spent several weeks answering questions about the nature of my work before they eventually stopped replying. I sent a few follow-up emails for good measure but they simply were not willing to speak with me.

I had a totally different experience with the fiscally conservative organization that I contacted, perhaps because they see a college woman as more inside of their target demographic.

I was able to quickly schedule a fascinating phone interview with their senior policy analyst. She asked me about my background and we had an earnest chat about my life and this project for about ten minutes. She very warmly offered to help me in any way that she could and then we got started with the interview.

The first thing that we spoke about were the issues most important to women in her view. She told me that the top four issues moving women were “not what you would expect.” She pulled up some data and explained by saying,

it is not so-called women’s issues. It actually tends to be economic issues, security issues, and right now that’s rounded out by healthcare and senior’s issues. While we see a lot about things covered as women’s issues, every day women are thinking not just about their bodies, but about how they’re going to pay their mortgage, how they’re going to pay for their ailing parents or their own healthcare needs, about how secure our nation is—and that includes the border and immigration, how to keep their kids safe.

That certainly seemed to reflect the policy concerns raised by my interviewees. I thought of all the women who had spoken to me about their worries concerning the economy, their children’s safety, and social security for their parents. When I asked her about the organization, and how it might compare to NOW, she described it as follows:

We are an educational organization which means we are a non-profit and we are educating on how more freedom will help our nation to be prosperous. WE believe in limited government and free market capitalism. We believe that allowing people to make their own choices, that is the best way to ensure their success. NOW called the tax cuts led by the republican congress a nightmare. In fact, nine out of ten workers will have a bigger paycheck as a result of the tax cuts. This will benefit single and working moms, that benefit female workers. We are probably diametrically opposed to NOW on most issues. We agree that women should be empowered, but we believe that empowerment comes from greater personal individual freedom and choice, not greater government intervention.

The most carefully-worded and rehearsed answers that I received came after I asked “which aspects of President Trump’s platform do you feel aligned with your organizational values? Are there any policy areas where you feel his stances may have diverged from your own?” She

responded very diplomatically but genially; I hope her organization knows how good she is at her job. Her abbreviated response was as follows:

Trump has pursued as very pro-growth policy and we are very encouraged by what we have seen with the tax cuts and what that means for women. We're encouraged by the roll-back in regulations. That has an impact in how small businesses can run and grow. I do think one of the recent areas that we have challenged and questioned and continue to hold free market views on is tariffs. We believe that free markets make societies flourish and prosper. I think every day Americans benefit because we have access to a lot more choice and purchasing power... So, we have come out against the new tariffs proposed on steel and aluminum, for example. History has shown that tariffs often hurt the very industries that they are meant to help... We recognize that the Trump administration is, for example, using the tariffs as a bargaining tool to get better deals for this country and we support getting America better deals... At the end of the day, as women, we are seeing lower prices at the grocery store.

Finally, I asked what her organization's vision for the future of American women was and she responded:

We want women to be able to achieve what they want to achieve, do what they want to do, and not be limited by regulations that make no sense, or be limited by an economy that is not robust enough to let them reach their potential... From a policy level, how do we remove barriers that are blocking women from reaching their potential? ... We want to change the mentality that women are victims; we are actually very powerful.

C. Female Religious Leaders

When I described my study to others I would often field the question, "so, why interview female pastors, especially when they may not even be politically conservative?" I would always laugh and admit that I actually did not have a very well-defined reason. I just thought it would be incredibly interesting and I wanted to see what I would find, with hopes that I could somehow tie it all neatly back into my project. Then, I had a realization as I was interviewing for a position within a non-profit which represents religious citizens opposed to the government overreach by the far-right (such as legislative proposals to replace evolution with creationism in public school textbooks). In the process of sharing how my background aligned well with the organization's mission, I mentioned this project on a lark. Without much forethought, I explained that female

pastors seemed intuitively as though they may provide a prototype for how to live out faith in a way that promotes social justice. More crucially, I realized that to me female pastors represented a model for women might publicly embrace religious ideals without being pegged with accusations of weakness or complicity in misogyny. In retrospect, my automatic impulse to include female pastors in this project is probably rooted in the fact that I have long turned to my religious leader for guidance thinking through the most complex questions of my life. I assumed their answers would provide me insight. And they did.

The first questions that I asked each pastor were “how did you receive your calling to become a religious leader?” and “what was the process of becoming a pastor like?” and I learned that the process from calling to ordination was often long, challenging, and most of all, winding. They all had at least one interesting story to tell when I asked about pushback or disapproval they had received as female pastors. One such memorable story came from a woman who is now in her fifties and serves as a church superintendent.

My most visible pushback was just a few years ago, maybe around 2012. I was serving as a lead pastor and I’d been asked to visit someone at the jail. My church was by the jail, and to make a clergy visit you had to first bring in copies of your ordination paperwork, to prove that you were allowed to be there. The jail staff just did not want to accept that. I had been a pastor for thirty years, so that was amazing to me. I just never had someone argue with me like that- to tell me that I wasn’t ordained! I was the first female pastor at six churches over the years, but that was the first time I ever encountered that sort of blunt pushback.

The same pastor, Lauri, told me that one of her jobs as superintendent is to meet with churches during times of transition and help find new leadership for them. Apparently, sometimes people will specifically try to request that they not receive a female pastor. Lauri will turn that around on them and ask, “oh so you don’t want me?” That usually changes people’s tone, but if they try to say that they trust her in a way that they would not trust an “unproven” woman, Lauri asks if they want “one of their primary qualifications for church leadership to be the candidate’s

genitalia.” Her church doctrine stipulates that any qualified leader be considered, regardless of gender, race or age and she takes that seriously. She says that she tries to evaluate areas where a particular congregation might need to “grow its heart” and tries to gently coordinate that growth by introducing leadership that meets their need.

Each pastor that I spoke with had engaging answers to the question “do you feel there is anything unique that you bring to your congregation as a woman?” One pastor, Glenda, shared that she had experienced infertility, struggled, and that hearing her story allowed people to feel immediately close with her. Glenda said, “I gave them permission to share that because my story was out there. People long to share those things. It’s because of infertility, but it’s also because I am a woman that those conversations can happen.” Overall, each pastor expressed that one of the powerful things they were able to do as a woman in church leadership was allow people to see that “the voice of God doesn’t have to be deep and booming. It can be soft and feminine.” Lauri expanded upon this by saying, “I give a voice to oppressed people, I think that raising up women’s voices also raises up all the other voices that are not the white male voices that have dominated for so long. Being a woman, I can relate to people who have been overlooked, or oppressed.”

Each pastor also had complex, scripturally-backed understandings of gender as presented by the bible. They all pointed to slightly different places as their favorite scriptural defenses of gender equality, but the overall message was that God supported women and their ability to lead. In their telling, the bible was a radical text that promoted women’s advancement. Lauri said that she viewed the roles of male and female in the bible as “largely descriptive, not prescriptive.” She explained that it is wrong to use biblical example of subjugation to say God wants women to be subjugated because those are actually “more descriptive of broken people exercising power in

a fallen world.” Overall, “the way of God and the way of the Gospel is that people should have more equality, and more voice, and be more collaborative. The bible was always trying to bring voices to the surface that weren’t being listened to at the time.”

V. Conclusion

Many conservative women feel largely unheard and unrepresented by the current political system. Out of the ten women who answered the question “do you feel adequately represented by your chosen political party?” only three said yes, and of those three, only one said that they felt fully represented by their chosen party. Of the majority who answered no, each gave thoughtful responses, ranging from suggestions for improvement to outpourings of anguish. One woman said, “I really try to stay out of politics because it’s too painful.” Another young woman, a Mexican –American and a Jehovah’s witness, confided in me that not only did she felt she lacked political representation, she felt she lacked any positive representation at all, saying “I don't feel that there is a lot of representation of minorities, and even more so religious minority women. The only representation that we have as Mexican women is that we get up in the morning and make tortillas and then getting slapped around by our abusive Mexican husband.” Perhaps most memorable was the young woman from central Virginia who became audibly upset as she said, “In the two-party system I feel completely ignored and I get really frustrated all the time. I feel failed by the political system. Both the Democrats and the Republicans are hypocrites and I think they’re mainly just power hungry. They don't care about actually helping people.”

A. Beyond Friedan

When I was interviewing the pastors, my last question was always “have you ever felt that there is a contradiction between occupying a progressive role by virtue of being a female religious

leader and preaching traditional values?” All of them said yes, but one said something that sparked my imagination:

Yes, I always joke that I know what it is like to be the most liberal person in the room or the most conservative person in the room, depending on the room... I see myself as a bridge person. I show yes, you can be progressive in how you view women's equality and social justice and still really value the scripture and the history that God has given us. By virtue of being a woman and in church leadership, you kind of have a foot in each side. It gives people a picture of how those things don't always have to be either or.

A few different things about this answer stuck out to me. For one, Nancy had complained that she felt as though people assumed that she saw everything as black and white. In other words, she wanted people to know that things “don't always have to be either or.” Perhaps seeing a woman who is devoted deeply to Christian values serve as a leader will help people see all the colors in between that Nancy sees. Perhaps it will help them understand that when they stand next to Nancy and look at a painting, all the details are coming through just the same for her.

Even more compelling was the language of being a “bridge person,” which reminded me of feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the “borderlands,” a metaphor she uses as a way of articulating the intersectional nature of a “mestiza consciousness,” which arises from embodying contradictory identities. The gift of the mestiza consciousness is that it brings a subsequent emergence of newfound flexibility and strength (Anzaldúa 38-45). Mestiza, as it defines someone of mixed ancestry, is a term which inherently admits ambiguity and contradiction. The metaphor of borderlands acknowledges the sense of not belonging to group or space that one is a part of by virtue of belonging to another. Ambiguity and uncertainty are embraced as flexibility becomes a source of strength in the space of the borderlands. It seems that being a “bridge person” allows female pastors to help bridge the gap between two spaces (the traditional and the progressive). The strength that they exhibit by virtue of inhabiting the borderland between woman and Christian leader helps others navigate the borderlands and reach

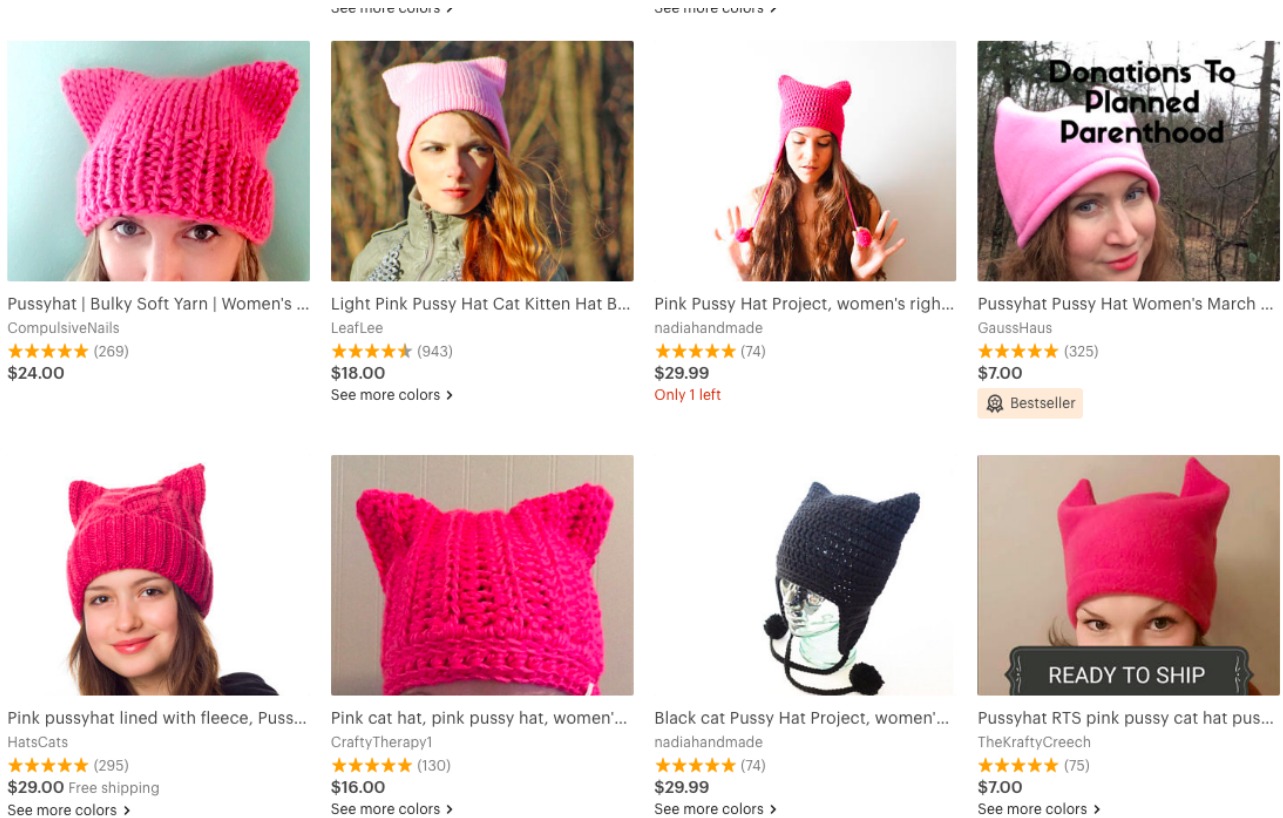
across empathy gaps more effectively. We may have relegated much of Betty Friedan's work to the bookshelves of our past, but when feminists like Anzaldúa pick up her work they are better able to create new feminist theory. Modern feminists like Anzaldúa equip us with new metaphors and understandings that we need to flourish in today's society.

C. We All Want to be Heard

The desire to be heard is a human impulse. We all crave it. This project has only confirmed that to me. Providing critiques of modern feminism and concrete suggestions is outside of the scope of this paper, which exists primarily so that people *feel heard*. Beyond the broad suggestion that female religious leadership demonstrates that conservative, Christian women are capable of being empowered leaders, my takeaways are simple and based purely on observation. Many women do not feel as though feminism respects their voice. They do not feel as though feminists want to dialogue about with them about their lives, and they certainly do not feel represented by the feminist movement, given those realities. One of the issues that Betty Friedan wrote about was deep loneliness and feelings of disconnectedness. Feminism has made great progress, but many women, even high-powered working women, express loneliness. It is much easier to acknowledge these problems than it is to fix them. I hope that this project has, at the very least, contributed to our ability to understand our own feminist movement, and acknowledge the work yet to be done.

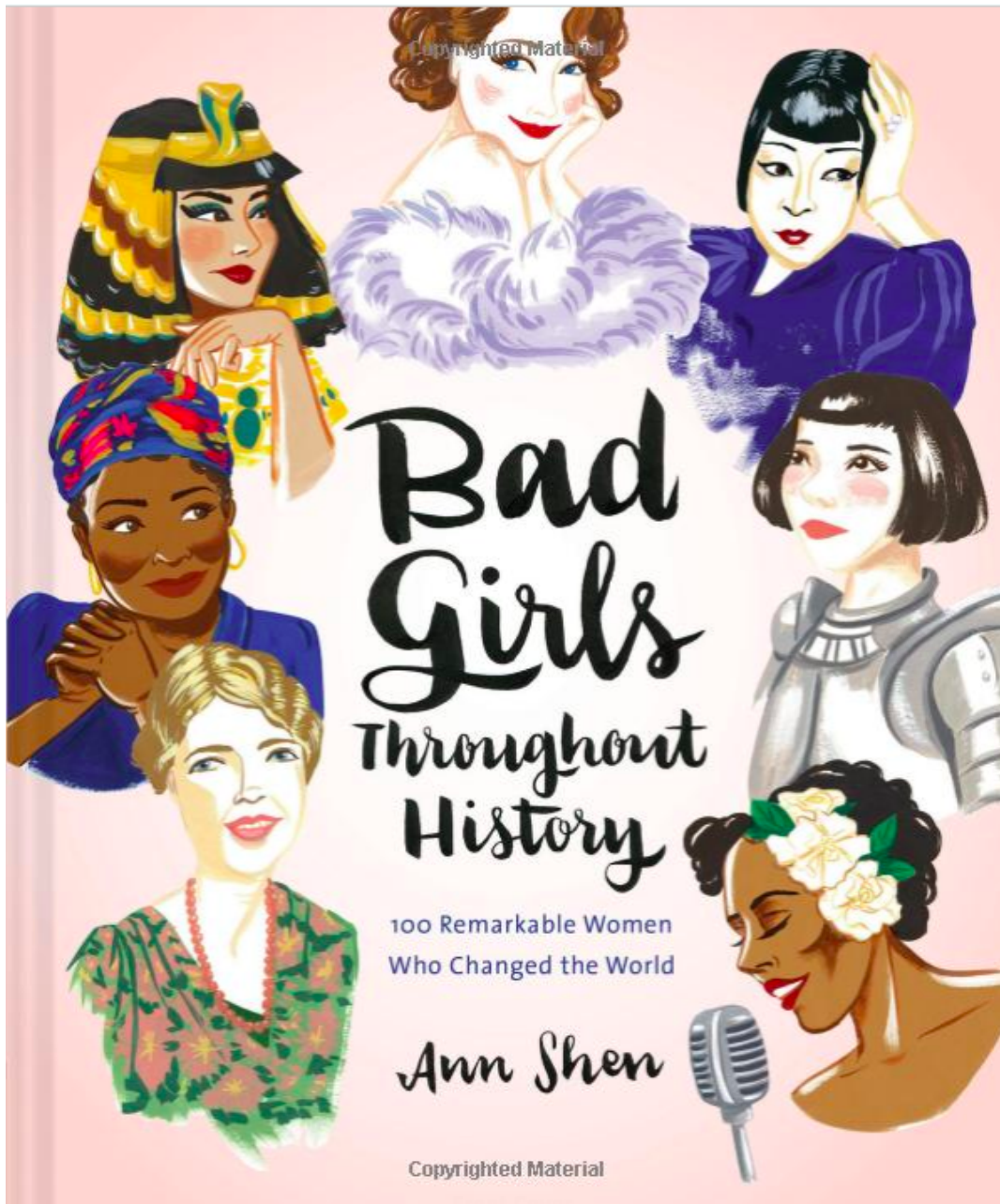
Appendix A. Bad Girl Aesthetics

Fig. 1



A selection of the 4,439 products that come up on Etsy when one searches "Pussy Hat."
URL: <https://www.etsy.com/search?q=pussy%20hat>

Fig. 2



A screen shot of the cover art of *Bad Girls Throughout History* from the Amazon product page for the book.

URL: [https://www.amazon.com/Bad-Girls-Throughout-History Remarkable/dp/1452153930](https://www.amazon.com/Bad-Girls-Throughout-History-Remarkable/dp/1452153930)

Appendix B. Research Questions

Questions for Conservative Women (General)

1. Thinking back to the last election, what were your top 3 concerns that motivated your choice of candidate?
2. Which candidate did you think best met your concerns and why?
3. Why did you choose each of the three concerns that you listed in question one?
4. Do you identify as fiscally conservative, socially conservative, both, or with a different political description?
5. Are there any stories from your own life that you feel have shaped your political opinions? If yes, are you comfortable sharing how those formative experiences have influenced your voting preferences?
6. What are your beliefs regarding gender roles in today's society? (In regard to division of household chores, household income, parenting, and any other category you consider pertinent to gender differences.)
7. What is your opinion of the women's movement?
8. What is your opinion of the term feminist? Would you self-identify as a feminist?
9. Do you feel adequately represented by your chosen political party?
10. What is your religious background?
11. If you are religious, do your religious beliefs influence your political stances, and if so, in what ways?
12. What does motherhood mean to you?
13. What does conservatism mean to you?
14. Is there anything that you feel is often misunderstood about conservative women?

Questions for Conservative Women's Organizations

1. What is your position within the organization?
2. What do you think drives the voting habits of the average woman?

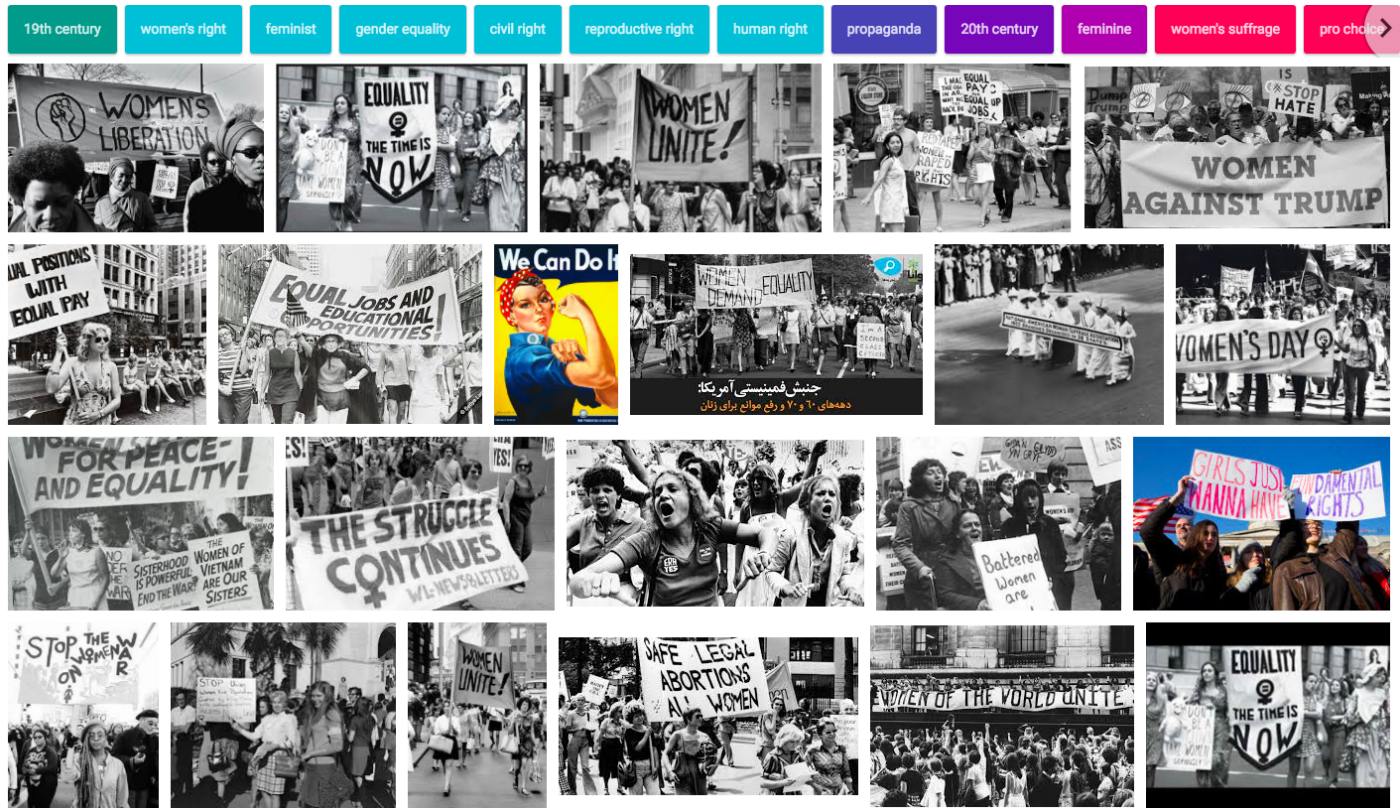
3. What is the role of your organization vis-a-vis other women's organizations such as NOW?
4. Did your organization endorse President Trump during the 2016 election?
5. If so, which aspects of President Trump's platform do you feel aligned with your organizational values? Are there any policy areas where you feel his stances may have diverged from your own?
6. What is your organization's vision for the future of women in America?

Questions for Female Pastors

1. How did you receive your calling to become a religious leader?
2. What was the process of becoming a pastor like?
3. Did you ever encounter any pushback to pursuing a religious career as a woman?
4. Do you ever encounter those who openly express to you disapproval for female church leadership?
5. Do you feel there is anything unique that you bring to your congregation as a woman?
6. What is your philosophy about gender as it is presented in the bible? Specifically, can you speak to gender inequality?
7. Have you ever felt that there is a contradiction between occupying a progressive role by virtue of being a female religious leader and preaching traditional values?

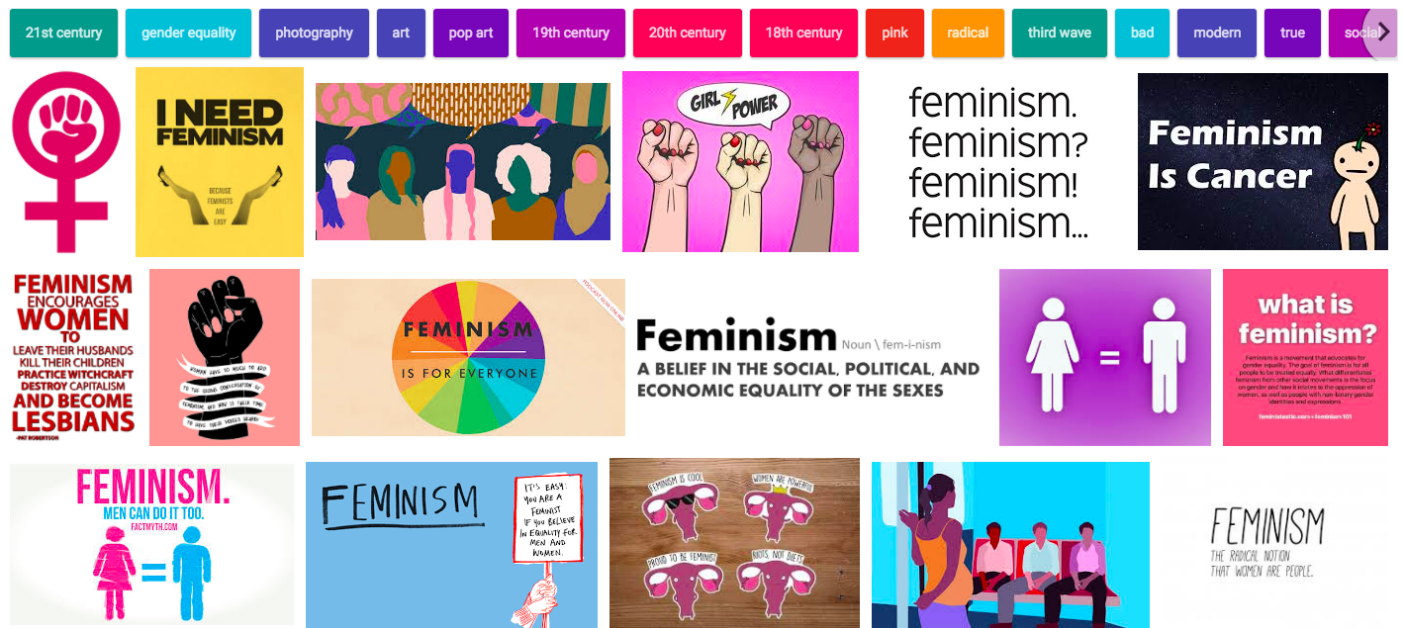
Appendix C.

Fig. 1



A screenshot of the search term “women’s rights movement” entered into Google images.

Fig. 2



A screenshot of the search term “feminism” entered into Google images.

Appendix D.

Thinking back to the last election, what were your top 3 concerns that motivated your choice of candidate?

Participant	Answer 1	Answer 2	Answer 3
A	Pro-life	Uplifting Christian Values	Religious Freedom
B	Immigration	Economics	The Candidate
C	Abortion (Anti)	Opposition to voting along gender lines	Economic Policy
D	The Economy	Debt	Creeping Socialism
E	Mental Health	Small Government	The Military
F	Extreme Changes	Political Extremism	Equality
G	Abortion (Pro)	The Economy	Nuclear Politics
H	Abortion (Anti)	The Economy	Education
I	Trust	Care for the People	Less Liberal Than the Clintons
J	Trust	Interest in America	Honesty and Morals

Color Key: Policy Concerns Conceptual Motivators Personality Traits

I tried to retain the original language used by each participant, or at least boil it down to a smaller phrase which reflected the words used to describe a concept. Some of these are merely the closest facsimiles that I could manage; for example, the cell that reads “the candidate” came from a point in my conversation with participant B when she said, “to be honest, my concerns and what *really* motivated me were maybe different.” She proceeded to explain that she voted for the person who she felt would be best for the job.

Appendix E.

Which candidate did you think best met your concerns?

Participant	Candidate (First Choice/ Voted for in the General)
A	Ted Cruz
B	Trump
C	John Kasich/ Trump
E	Trump
F	Abstained From Voting
G	Gary Johnson/ Clinton
H	Trump
I	Trump
J	Trump

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