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GENDERING THE GOP: RHETORIC, REPRESENTATION, AND REPUBLICAN
CONGRESSWOMEN AS PARTY MESSENGERS

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Gendering the GOP: Rhetoric, Representation, and Republican Congresswomen as Party

Messengers

By CATHERINE WINEINGER

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Susan J. Carroll

This dissertation examines the evolution of Republican women's congressional representation from the 103rd/104th Congresses (1993-1996) to the 113th/114th Congresses (2013-2016). The overarching question that drives my research is: In what ways do party polarization and competition in Congress affect the way Republican congresswomen represent women? Through elite interviews and content analyses of floor speeches, I show that Republican congresswomen work increasingly as party messengers, advocating for Republican policies and principles while speaking as and on behalf of women. At the same time, in-depth case studies of women's caucuses and female House Conference leaders show that Republican congresswomen advocate on behalf of their own institutional interests not simply as women or as Republicans, but as Republican women. By revealing how Republican congresswomen navigate interpersonal, institutional, and political dynamics in an era of heightened party polarization and competition, this dissertation helps to explain the descriptive and substantive underrepresentation of Republican women in Congress.

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I want to stress – if it is not already abundantly clear – that this has been far from an individual endeavor. I am the beneficiary of sacrifices made by those mentioned here and by those whom I have never met. To every woman and person of color who blazed this trail for me, I offer my sincerest gratitude and a promise to pay it forward.

DEDICATION

For Elena Aurora Wineinger-Beam,
the coolest Bean with the tiniest foot.

“Never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams.”

-Hillary Rodham Clinton

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

On the brink of a government shutdown in April 2011, Democratic women senators held a press conference during which they blamed House Republicans for stalling budget negotiations and condemned a Republican-backed policy provision that would eliminate federal funding for Planned Parenthood.¹ Later that day, Republican women in the House of Representatives held their own press conference, defending their party's proposed budget and accusing Democratic senators of wasteful spending. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, then-vice chair² of the House Republican Conference, opened the press conference by emphasizing her four-month-old daughter's share of the national debt. "No mom runs a family budget this way," McMorris Rodgers argued, "and neither should the federal government."³ Standing on stage with 13 of her Republican women colleagues, Mary Bono of California added, "I'd like to say what an honor it is to be up here with these amazing women. I think it's the first time we've all been together like this as a group, and it's pretty powerful and beautiful."⁴ It was an acknowledgement not only of the important perspectives women bring to the policymaking arena, but also of the significance of speaking collectively as *Republican* women.

This scene is particularly intriguing when considering the relative underrepresentation of Republican women in congressional politics. Over the past two decades, we have seen both a gradual increase in the number of Democratic women and a

¹ "Democratic Women Senators on 2011 Budget." 8 April 2011. *C-SPAN Video Library*. <<https://www.c-span.org/video/?298931-1/democratic-women-senators-2011-budget&start=12>>.

² Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) served as vice chair of the House Republican Conference from 2009-2013. She then served as chair from 2013-2019, after which she was succeeded by Liz Cheney (R-WI).

³ "House Republican Women on 2011 Budget." 8 April 2011. *C-SPAN Video Library*. <<https://www.c-span.org/video/?298940-1/house-republican-women-2011-budget>>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

stagnation in the number of Republican women elected to Congress. This partisan discrepancy has continued through the most recent 2018 midterm election: House Democratic women gained 28 seats, bringing their total number to 89; Republican women lost 10 seats, leaving the GOP with only 13 women in the House.⁵ The causes of Republican women's consistent, descriptive underrepresentation in Congress is a subject to which gender politics scholars have recently turned their attention (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018; Kitchens and Swers 2016; Och and Shames 2018; Thomsen 2015).

Yet another important question lies in the consequences of polarization on women's substantive representation. Previous studies of women's congressional representation have largely focused on the difference women make in the legislative process. Given their gendered life experiences, women on both sides of the aisle have long expressed a commitment to working on behalf of women (Carroll 2002; Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018). As such, they have sponsored and prioritized issues related to women (Dodson 1998; Swers 2002; 2005; 2013), have succeeded in getting those issues onto the legislative agenda, and have worked effectively across the aisle to keep their bills alive throughout the policymaking process (Anzia and Berry 2011; Atkinson and Windett 2018; Jeydel and Taylor 2003; Rinehart 1991; Thomas 1994; Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013). But growing ideological polarization and intensifying party competition in recent decades raise new questions about the way congresswomen represent women.

Indeed, polarization has had effects not only on legislative gridlock (Binder 2003; 2016; Lee 2009; 2016; Sinclair 2006), but also on the composition and characteristics of

⁵ Press Release. "Results: Women Candidates in the 2018 Elections." 29 Nov 2018. Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University.

women elected to Congress. While members on both sides of the aisle are more ideologically extreme than in previous decades, the effects are most notable among Republican women, who are no longer more moderate than their Republican male counterparts (Frederick 2009). Thus, as Republican congresswomen struggle to gain seats, grow further apart ideologically from their Democratic women colleagues, and operate in an increasingly partisan environment, it becomes important to develop a more nuanced understanding of “the difference women make” (Swers 2002) in Congress.

In this chapter and throughout my dissertation, I make the case that focusing on the representational behavior of Republican women enhances our understanding of women’s political representation more broadly. The overarching question that drives my research is: In what ways do party polarization and competition in Congress affect the way Republican congresswomen represent women? Through an in-depth analysis of the evolution of rhetoric and gender dynamics within the House GOP, I show how Republican congresswomen work increasingly as party messengers, speaking and acting at the intersection of their partisan and gender identities. In doing so, I contribute to understandings of the gendered impact of congressional polarization and complicate notions of the relationship between Republican women’s descriptive and substantive (under)representation in Congress.

Early Studies of Women’s Congressional Representation

In her seminal work, Hanna Pitkin (1967) argues that representation consists of four main dimensions: formalistic, symbolic, descriptive, and substantive. That is, as political representatives are given formal authority and reasonable means of

accountability through elections, they have the ability to “stand for” and “act for” their constituents. “Standing for” the represented encompasses both symbolic and descriptive representation in that representatives can engage in representation merely through the emotions they evoke (symbolic) or the identities they possess (descriptive). Substantive representation goes further and is defined by Pitkin as “acting in the interests of the represented in a manner responsive to them” (Pitkin 1967, 209). Indeed, as elected officials in a representative democracy, members of Congress are tasked with representing the policy interests of their constituents. Whether and how members substantively represent their constituencies has been a primary focus for congressional scholars, who have found that myriad factors – including public opinion, campaign resources, potential challengers, and issue salience – affect the representational behavior of legislators (Fenno 1977; Mayhew 1974).

Expanding our understanding of congressional representation, scholars of politically marginalized groups have emphasized that legislators also have the desire and ability to represent people outside of their geographic districts. For instance, functioning as “surrogate” representatives (Mansbridge 2003), women members of Congress have expressed an obligation to represent the interests of women across the country (Carroll 2002; Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018). Understanding this connection between descriptive and substantive representation has been the principal goal of those who study the legislative representation of politically underrepresented populations (Dovi 2002; 2007; Mansbridge 1997; Phillips 1995).

In Congress specifically, women and minorities have had to work within committees, parties, and chambers whose formal rules and informal networks favor

cisgender white men. Though women and people of color must work harder to have their voices heard in Congress (Hawkesworth 2003), scholars have typically found that, in many ways, descriptive representation is an important factor for substantive representation. For racial (Hero and Tolbert 1995; Wallace 2014), sexual (Hansen and Treul 2015), and gender minorities (Carroll 2001; Dodson 2006; Evans, 2005; Rosenthal 2002; Swers 1998; 2002; 2013; Thomas 1994; Vega and Firestone 1995), the identity of the legislators can have significant effects on legislation.

Notably, when measuring the substantive impact of women legislators, scholars have most often focused on the way members advocate for certain issues, finding that women members are more likely than their male counterparts to introduce, co-sponsor, and vote for bills related to “women’s issues” (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Burrell 1994; Dodson and Carroll 1991; Dodson 1995; Dodson 2006; Gelb and Palley 1996; Norton 1999; Swers 1998, 2002; 2013; Thomas 1994). There have been three main conceptualizations of “women’s issues” within the gender politics literature. The first encompasses issues that are “explicitly feminist” in nature (Bratton and Haynie 1999, 665), such as expanding abortion access or advocating for equal pay. Second are issues that directly impact the lives of women, which can include both feminist and *anti-feminist* issues like abortion restrictions or the elimination of affirmative action programs for women and minorities (Swers 2002, 37). A final conceptualization involves issues that deal with “women’s traditional areas of interest,” including “bills that reflect women’s roles as caregivers both in the family and in society and thus address issues in health care, care of the elderly, education, housing and the environment” (Dodson and Carroll 1991, 53).

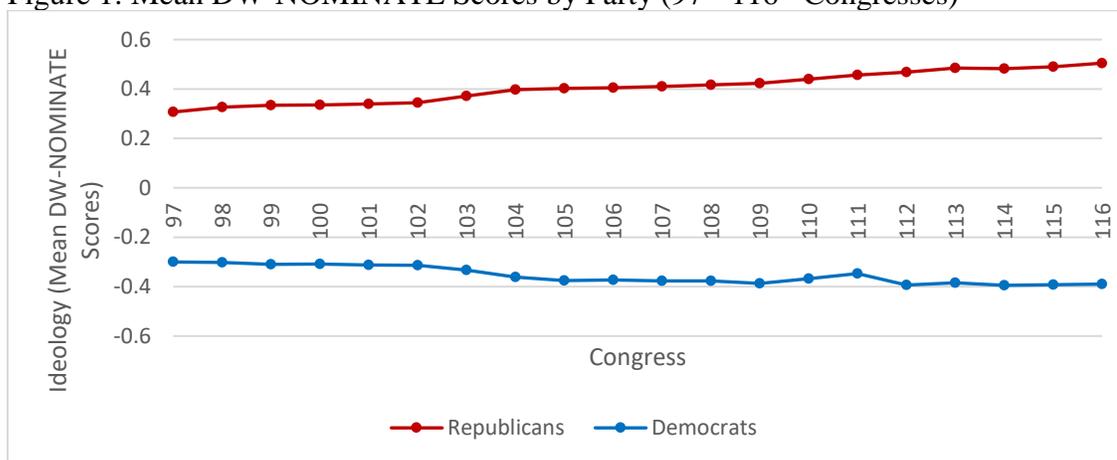
These issues – what I refer to in this dissertation as “conventional women’s issues” – are not mutually exclusive and capture a broad range of ideologies; nevertheless, it should be noted that they are issues which have been identified by *researchers*, rather than by the legislators themselves. While early studies of women in Congress have typically operationalized women’s substantive representation as the promotion of conventional women’s issues, more recent scholarship has challenged the method by which these issues are identified. Reingold and Swers (2011), for instance, advocate for an “endogenous approach” to the study of women’s representation: “If we begin with the assumption that women’s interests are socially constructed, politically contested, and empirically contingent, then we can further explore how and why the meaning and significance of women’s interests vary across time, space, institutions, groups, and individuals” (430). One goal of this dissertation is to expand scholarly understandings of women’s interests by empirically examining changes in the way Republican congresswomen discuss the impact of various policies on women’s lives.

In the following sections, I show how institutional changes – in particular, increasing party polarization and competition – have forced scholars to begin to reassess the legislative impact of women in Congress. I further argue that these changes require both a broader interpretation of women’s issues and a more in-depth analysis of the way congresswomen represent women within the confines of their party culture and at the intersection of their gender and partisan identities.

The Gendered Effects of Party Polarization and Competition

Perhaps one of the most widely studied issues among congressional scholars is that of party polarization (Binder 2016; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Sinclair 2006; Theriault 2008). Based on roll call data and developed by Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal, DW-NOMINATE (Dynamic Weighted Nominal Three-step Estimation) scores are commonly used as a measure of members' ideology; ranging from -1 to 1, a higher DW-NOMINATE score signals a more conservative ideology. Figure 1 depicts the mean DW-NOMINATE scores by party in the House of Representatives from the 97th Congress (1981-1984) to the most recent 116th Congress (2019-2020). Even since 1981, the gap between the mean DW-NOMINATE scores of Democrats and Republicans has widened from .660 to .894, with the election of increasingly liberal Democrats and – to a greater extent – increasingly conservative Republicans (Poole 2007; Mann and Ornstein 2012).

Figure 1: Mean DW-NOMINATE Scores by Party (97th-116th Congresses)



Data source: Lewis, Jeffrey B., Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, Adam Boche, Aaron Rudkin, and Luke Sonnet (2019). *Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database*. <https://voteview.com/>

In more recent years, the use of DW-NOMINATE scores as evidence that party polarization is the result of shifting individual ideological preferences (Poole 2007) has

been called into question (Lee 2009). Indeed, while DW-NOMINATE scores measure voting patterns, they do not specifically measure positions taken on issues. That said, DW-NOMINATE scores have consistently reflected the ideological scores reported by various interest groups like Americans for Democratic Action and the U.S. Chamber of Congress (Burden, Caldeira, and Groseclose 2000; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Thus, throughout this dissertation, I use DW-NOMINATE scores to quantify members' ideology on a liberal-conservative spectrum.

Importantly, however, congressional polarization must be understood both in terms of ideology *and* partisanship. While it is true that ideological differences between the Democratic and Republican parties have grown significantly since the 1970s due to demographic changes and regional shifts in partisan constituencies (Alphonso 2018; Karol 2009; Noel 2013), institutional dynamics between party leaders and rank-and-file members also help to explain the widening gap between congressional parties. What party polarization shows, after all, is a strengthening of party discipline – that members are more likely to vote together as a party. Within party politics literature, debates have emerged about the ability of party leaders to control members' legislative behavior. While some scholars have argued that parties function as cartels with strong leaders (Cox and McCubbins 1993), others have painted a more complex picture, with parties acting more like “teams” (Downs 1957; Lee 2009) and power dynamics between leaders and members fluctuating depending on electoral interests (Aldrich and Rohde 2000; Cox and McCubbins 2005; 2010; Koger and Lebo 2017; Pearson 2015).

Increasing polarization in Congress must also be understood in the context of a competitive political environment. Prior to 1995, Republicans had been deemed the

“permanent minority” in Congress, with Democrats retaining majority party status for four decades (Connelly and Pitney 1994; Mann 1988). The relatively low level of party competition at this time meant there was also a smaller cost to working across the aisle and compromising on certain policies. This dynamic changed following the 1994 “Republican Revolution” during which Republicans campaigned aggressively on conservative policies and won control of the House for the first time in 40 years (Lee 2016; Koger and Lebo 2017). Indeed, between 1995 and 2019, control of the House has switched three times. And since 2007 (when Democrats regained control of the House for the first time following the Republican Revolution), Democrats have held a majority in the House in three⁶ Congresses and Republicans have held a majority in four⁷ Congresses. As the potential for a shift in party control of government has increased over time, so have the stakes in each congressional election. As a result, we have seen an intensification of interparty competition and a growing incentive for members of the minority party to actively oppose and campaign against the policies proposed by the majority (Lee 2016).

Several scholars have documented the consequences of party polarization and competition on the policymaking process in Congress, including the implementation of “unorthodox” rules (Sinclair 2016), less deliberation, stronger party leaders, and increasing legislative gridlock (Binder 2003; 2016; Lee 2009; 2016; Pearson 2015). Within the women and politics literature, we have also begun to see the gendered implications of these institutional changes. For instance, while female legislators on both sides of the aisle continue to view themselves as surrogate representatives (Dittmar,

⁶ House Democrats held the majority in the 110th, 111th, and 116th Congresses.

⁷ House Republicans held the majority in the 112th, 113th, 114th, and 115th Congresses.

Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018), they increasingly act for women within the context of their own parties and ideological beliefs. Republican women, for instance, are more likely to adopt anti-feminist policy alternatives (Osborn 2012; Swers 2002) and are less likely than Democratic women to pursue conventional women's issues (Swers 2016). Moreover, despite previous studies showing women legislators are more likely to collaborate across party lines (Kathlene 1994, Duerst-Lahti 2002; Gelb and Palley 1996), Democratic and Republican women are no longer more bipartisan than their male counterparts (Lawless, Theriault, and Guthrie 2018). One result is that conventional "women's issues" are less likely to make it out of committee and through the legislative process (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2018).

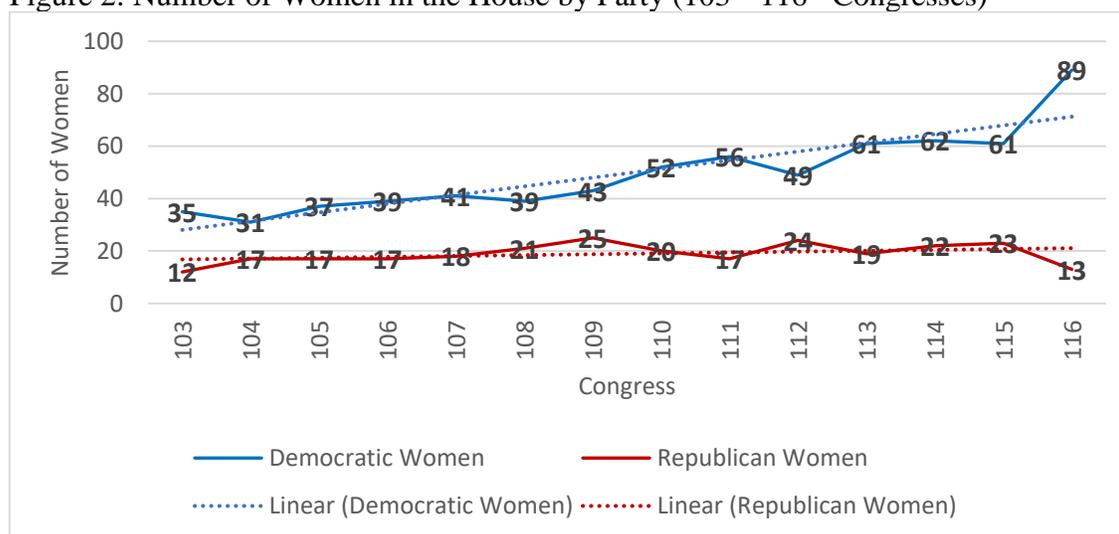
One objective of this dissertation is to enhance our current understandings of the gendered impact of party polarization and competition. I contribute to this literature by examining how these institutional changes have affected, first, the way Republican congresswomen conceptualize women's issues, and second, how they work together as women. Importantly, I do not seek to interrogate the causes of polarization. Nevertheless, through an in-depth examination of Republican women's representational behavior and interactions with party leaders, I am often able to distinguish between the effects of ideological cohesion, partisanship, and interparty competition. In doing so, I also expand existing literature on party politics in Congress.

In what follows, I discuss changes in the composition and characteristics of women in Congress and maintain that focusing on the representation of *Republican* women, in particular, allows us to more fully understand the challenges we face toward reaching gender parity in Congress.

Republican Women in the House

The 1992 “Year of the Woman” marked a sharp increase in the election of women to the U.S. Congress. Women gained 22 seats that year, bringing their total number to 54, or 10%, of the 535 members.⁸ At the time of this writing, 127 women hold congressional seats, comprising 23.7% of the 116th Congress.⁹ Yet these increases in the number of congresswomen have not been consistent on both sides of the aisle. In the House, while Democratic women hold 89 seats, Republican women hold only 13 seats.¹⁰ Figure 2 shows the breakdown of the number of women in the House by party; despite a gradual increase in the number of Democratic women, the number of Republican women elected to the House has remained relatively stagnant since 1993.

Figure 2: Number of Women in the House by Party (103rd-116th Congresses)



Data source: Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University

⁸ This number does not include Delegates to the House of Representatives. For the number of women in Congress over time, see: “History of Women in the U.S. Congress.” Center for American Women and Politics at The Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. <<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/history-women-us-congress>>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Gender politics scholars have sought to understand this partisan discrepancy among women in Congress (Thomsen 2015; Och and Shames 2018). Current literature shows that, while all women candidates must learn to navigate a gendered campaign environment (Dittmar 2015), Republican women face specific ideological and cultural barriers. Women candidates of both parties are generally stereotyped as being more liberal than their male counterparts, less competent on issues related to the military and national security, and more capable of handling issues like healthcare and education (Carroll and Schreiber 1997; Dolan 2010; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; McDermott 1997; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009). Voters also perceive women to be more feminine and prefer them to act as such.¹¹ This becomes particularly challenging for Republican women, whose party is viewed by voters as more competent on “masculine” issues (Winter 2010) like national security and crime (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik et. al. 2003; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). The disconnect between what voters expect of women candidates and what they expect of Republican candidates makes it difficult for Republican women to win elections – and, in particular, to convince primary voters that they are conservative enough (King and Matland 2003; Schneider and Bos 2016).¹²

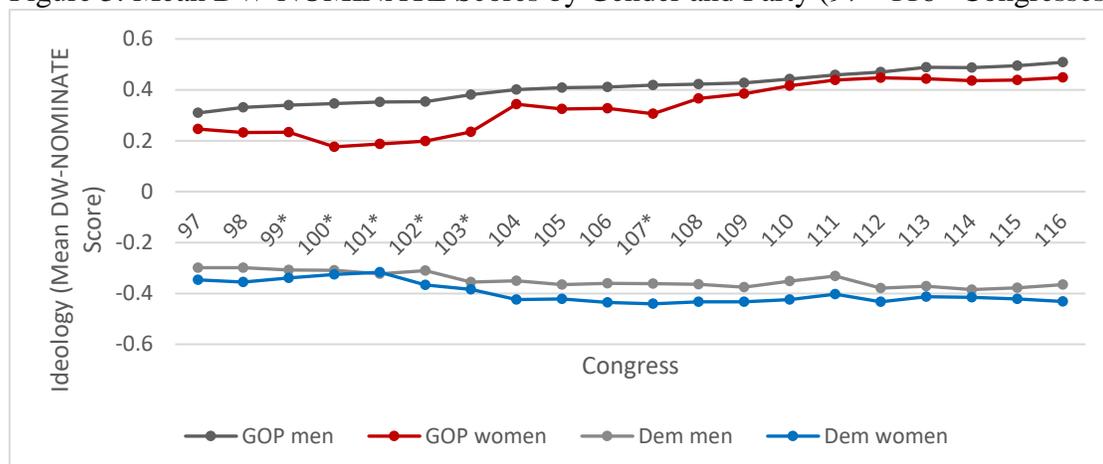
The ideological barriers Republican women face in primary elections are compounded by cultural barriers that are specific to GOP politics. Republican Party

¹¹ Carroll (2009), for example, argues that women in political leadership must learn to strike a balance between femininity and masculinity in a way that men do not. She writes, “Margaret Thatcher, for example, struck this balance, in part, by always dressing stylishly, carrying a handbag, and wearing her signature pearls. She consciously adopted a very feminine appearance to complement her very masculine political behavior.”

¹² Also see CAWP analysis: Dittmar, Kelly. 2013. “Primary Problems: Women Candidates in US House Primaries.” A Closer Look. *Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University*. <<http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/primary-problems-10-1-13.pdf>>.

culture – and, specifically, the party’s rejection of group identity politics (Freeman 1986) – gives Republican women access to fewer identity-based resources (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018; Elder 2012; Kitchens and Swers 2016). While liberal women’s organizations like EMILY’s List help to fund Democratic women candidates, Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman (2018) find that Republican women’s organizations are largely ineffective, in part due to the fact that party donors care more about conservative ideology than gender.

This electoral terrain has implications not only for the number of Republican women in Congress, but also the ideological characteristics of those women. While Republican women in the electorate tend to be more moderate, on average, than Republican men, many moderate Republican women opt out of running for Congress due to these partisan and ideological constraints (Thomsen 2015; 2017). Thus, the Republican women who are elected to Congress are increasingly conservative (Frederick 2009; 2013). Figure 3 presents the mean DW-NOMINATE scores of members of Congress by gender and party over time. While Republican congresswomen were significantly less conservative than their male Republican colleagues in the 1980s and early 1990s, there is no longer a statistical gender difference in the ideologies of House Republicans.

Figure 3: Mean DW-NOMINATE Scores by Gender and Party (97th-116th Congresses)

*Statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Note: P-values were generated from a Welch's two-sample t-test for the difference of means between male and female Republicans.

Note: Independents and members with no recorded DW-NOMINATE scores were excluded.

Data source: Lewis, Jeffrey B., Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, Adam Boche, Aaron Rudkin, and Luke Sonnet (2019). *Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database*. <https://voteview.com/>

That GOP women in the House are both more conservative and more ideologically aligned with their male colleagues raises important questions about changes in the way Republican congresswomen represent women. While political scientists have long acknowledged the significance of conservatism in American politics, feminist scholars have at times portrayed conservative women as political pawns or victims of “false consciousness” (Dworkin 1983, 17). Yet those who study conservative women activists have consistently found that they, like feminist activists, possess a gender consciousness. Rebecca Klatch, for instance, notes that socially conservative women are well aware of their interests as women and have often worked to defend those interests (Klatch 1987, 10). Indeed, conservative women have organized collectively around their shared gendered experiences (Gurin and Townsend 1986) and have “framed their policy goals in terms of women’s interests” (Schreiber 2002, 331). Notably, these conservative women’s groups have been influential throughout American history, and particularly

when it comes to mobilizing political opposition to feminist policies. Discussing conservative women's opposition to suffrage in the United States, Kristen DeLegard (2012) writes, "In a lesson that would be repeated many times over the course of the twentieth century, progressive women discovered how difficult it was to exercise political influence in the face of female foes who rallied to defeat subversion under the banner 'It takes women to fight women'" (221).

The historical effectiveness of conservative women activists suggests it is important for feminists to take seriously the impact of increasingly conservative women elected to Congress (see also: Carroll and Liebowitz 2003). Thus, throughout this dissertation, I treat conservative women as legitimate political actors with agency. As Reingold and Swers (2011) contend, "The increased polarization of the political parties and the expanding number of conservative Republican women at the national and state level require us to examine how gendered life experiences and political ideologies shape legislators' competing definitions of women's interests/issues" (433). I maintain that in order to understand the development of competing definitions of women's interests and to fully capture the evolution of women's representation in Congress, Republican women must not be regarded as mere pawns. Instead, it is important to examine the intricacies of intraparty gender dynamics and to take the words and actions of Republican congresswomen seriously. Thus, rather than relying on a defined set of "women's issues," I begin this dissertation with an analysis of Republican congresswomen's rhetoric to help reveal changes in the way they claim to represent women.

Rhetoric as Representation

As polarization and competition have intensified in Congress, so has the importance of party communication and messaging strategies. Interparty competition, in particular, has caused individual members to focus on fundraising and reelection campaigns (Heberlig and Larson 2012; Lee 2016). Collectively, congressional parties have increasingly devoted resources to communications and public relations staff – especially when they are in the minority (Lee 2016) or when they disagree with the president (Malecha and Reagan 2012). These institutional changes and broader technological advances have led congressional scholars to more closely examine not only the way representatives communicate with their constituents (Fenno 1978; Fridkin and Kenney 2014; Grimmer 2013), but also with the general public (Lipinski 2004; Meinke 2016; Malecha and Reagan 2012; Sellers 2010). “Communication,” Patrick Sellers (2010) writes, “is central to politicians’ work, particularly in the U.S. Congress” (1).

Studies of congressional communication have shown that the rhetoric of individual members is increasingly partisan (Lipinski 2004), in part because party leaders work to shape and develop collective party messaging strategies (Malecha and Reagan 2012). Importantly, these messaging efforts are not the same on both sides of the aisle. In her analysis of senators’ Twitter activity, Annelise Russell (2018) illustrates the asymmetry of partisan communication, finding that Republican senators are more likely than their Democratic counterparts to engage in explicitly partisan rhetoric. These findings are consistent with the claim that partisan polarization is driven more so by the rightward shift of the GOP than by the leftward shift of Democrats (Mann and Ornstein 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012).

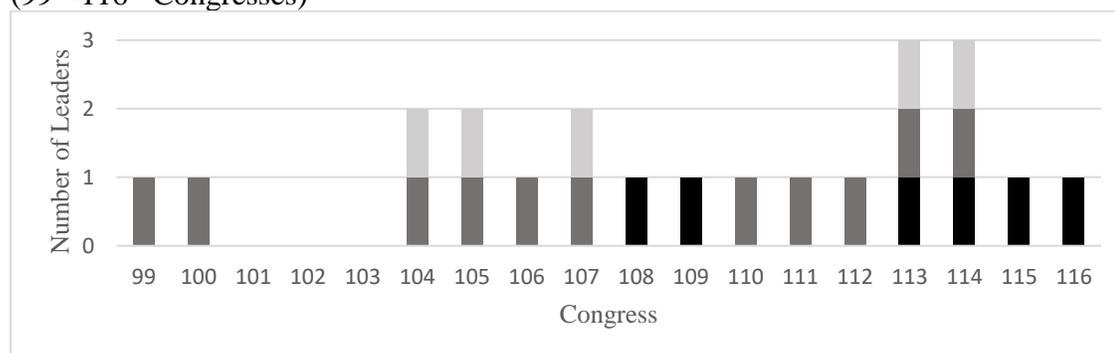
Communication differences also exist at the intersection of gender and partisanship. Women in Congress are more likely than their male counterparts to participate in floor speeches (Pearson and Dancey 2011a) and to reference women in those speeches (Pearson and Dancey 2011b; Osborn and Mendez 2010; Shogan 2001). Colleen Shogan's (2001) analysis of "woman-invoked rhetoric" in House floor speeches during the 105th Congress shows that, while Republican and Democratic congresswomen invoke women in their speeches at similar frequencies, they tend to speak about different issues. For instance, Republican women more often discuss the ways in which tax, business, and pension law affect working women, while Democratic women are more focused on funding for state welfare programs (Shogan 2001).

While these analyses provide valuable insight into the way representatives speak for women in the context of the party, there has yet to be an in-depth, qualitative study of 1) changes in the nature of this gendered rhetoric over time or 2) the politics of women as party messengers. I argue that these questions are especially important to consider within the realm of GOP politics, given Republican women's overrepresentation in Conference leadership positions.

A major role of the House Republican Conference – comprised of a chair, vice chair, and secretary – is to help create and disseminate party messages (Lee 2016). In the 99th Congress (1985-1986), Lynn Morley Martin was elected the first female vice chair of the Conference, holding that position for two terms. It took a decade for the second woman to be elected to Conference leadership in 1995; however, since then, women have held top Conference leadership roles in every Congress, including chair in the four most recent Congresses (see Figure 4). Indeed, as Kanthak and Krause (2012) show,

Republican women are more than four times likely than Democratic women to be elected to Conference leadership positions.

Figure 4: Number and Position of Female House Republican Conference Leaders (99th-116th Congresses)



Legend:

- = Conference Chair
- = Conference Vice Chair
- = Conference Secretary

That Republican women are increasingly found in party messaging roles raises questions not only about changes in the gendered and partisan nature of congressional communication, but also about the ways in which we study women’s representation. As previously discussed, gender politics literature has tended to focus on the way descriptive representation affects substantive representation – do women represent women? More recently, critics of this approach have urged scholars to “focus not on when women make a difference but on *how* the substantive representation of women occurs” (Childs and Krook 2006; emphasis added).

Michael Saward’s (2006) concept of “representative claims-making” is a useful tool for expanding studies of women’s representation. Saward argues that political elites have the potential to shape public interests through the claims they make, emphasizing a more dynamic process of political representation. Thus, rather than defining women’s representation as the enactment of specific “interests” that have been assumed a priori,

we should instead view “the politician as maker of representations” (Saward 2010, 16). In other words, how do representatives *claim* to act for women? Beginning with this question gives us the opportunity “to uncover patterns in representation that would have remained hidden in traditional studies” (de Wilde 2013) and to expand our understandings of who can substantively represent women and what, exactly, that entails (Celis et. al. 2008).

Examining *conservative* claims about women, for example, can paint a more complex picture of the relationship between ideology and women’s interests (Celis and Childs 2012; 2018). In this dissertation, I begin with an analysis of the way Republican congresswomen speak as and on behalf of women: which issues do they discuss, what types of claims do they make, and how has this evolved over time? Understanding, first and foremost, changes in rhetoric allows me to then delve deeper into Republican women’s mechanisms of representation in Congress. By pairing my rhetorical analysis with an in-depth examination of the institutional and interpersonal dynamics Republican women navigate, I begin to reveal the process through which gendered representative claims become part of a unified party message.

A Partisan Gender Identity

Growing ideological cohesion among Republican congresswomen is also important to consider in terms of the way women are represented in Republican Party politics. In her analysis of women’s representation in Congress, Michele Swers (2002) finds that Republican women became more partisan in the 104th Congress after Republicans gained control of the House. Needing to credential themselves as

ideologically conservative and aligned with the goals of party leadership, Republican women were less likely to deviate from their party's positions on women's issues than they had been in the 103rd Congress (Swers 2002). In a later piece, Swers and Larson (2005) illustrated the diverse views of Republican women in the 108th Congress, identifying three Republican women "archetypes": 1) the socially conservative woman, 2) the woman who denies gender differences, and 3) the feminist woman (125-128). The socially conservative woman and feminist woman both embrace their identities as women and claim to act in women's interests, though the socially conservative woman does so from a distinctly conservative standpoint in which her roles as a mother and wife are emphasized. The woman who denies gender differences denies the existence of distinct women's interests or, at least, chooses not to focus on them (Swers and Larson 2005).

Increasingly, evidence of this ideological diversity among House Republican women has been weakening. As Danielle Thomsen (2015) demonstrates, a more polarized electoral terrain in which potential candidates evaluate their "fit" with one party or the other helps to explain why "one of these archetypes—the conservative Republican woman—can succeed in an increasingly conservative and homogeneous Republican Party" (315). The creation of the Republican Women's Policy Committee in 2012 – a caucus in which all Republican women in the House are members – provides further evidence that the GOP is comprised not merely of conservative, gender-blind Republican women, but of conservative women who acknowledge the significance of their gender identity. This is, perhaps, one reason that press conferences led exclusively by Republican women – like the one detailed at the beginning of this chapter – have become more prevalent in recent Congresses.

I delve deeper into this concept throughout my dissertation, exploring the development and representational effects of what I call a *partisan gender identity*, defined as: an intersectional identity in which female lawmakers work as and on behalf of partisan women. More specifically, I examine if and how Republican congresswomen view themselves as distinct from both Democratic women and Republican men, with interests that lie at the intersection of their partisan and gender identities.

Because my ultimate goal is to deepen our understandings of *how* – not just if and when (Childs and Krook 2006) – women are represented in an environment of heightened party polarization and competition, I focus my analysis on rhetoric and institutional gender dynamics rather than legislative output. Examining changes in the way Republican women speak, identify, and work as women can help to produce a more detailed picture of women’s congressional representation. Additionally, an in-depth analysis of the way women navigate the institutional and cultural norms of the GOP has the potential to deepen our understandings of the political underrepresentation of women in the Republican Party. In the following section, I describe the methodological approach used to explore this theory.

Methodology

Given the growing relevance of communications and public relations in Congress, my dissertation analyzes the evolution of Republican women’s representation, focusing primarily on their use of gendered rhetoric and their role as party messengers. First, I examine how increased ideological polarization and party competition has affected the way Republican congresswomen speak for and organize as women. While an analysis of

shifts in representational behavior is in itself an important endeavor, the overarching goal of this project is to deepen scholarly understandings of institutional gender dynamics within the GOP and Congress more generally. Thus, I use a mix-methods approach in which qualitative and quantitative analyses of congressional floor speeches are supplemented with case studies of women's caucuses and female Conference leaders. In-depth, in-person interviews with women members of Congress are also a fundamental aspect of this project, as they work to unveil the motivations behind the use of gendered rhetoric as well as the personal relationships and institutional opportunities/constraints Republican women must navigate. Broadly, while I hypothesize that Republican congresswomen increasingly communicate and work collectively as *partisan women*, I also expect to see party leaders function as gatekeepers in ways that both expand and limit the representational power of Republican women.

A Comparison of Two Congressional Eras

To test the effects of polarization and party competition, I compare the representational behavior of Republican congresswomen in two congressional eras, comprised of four different Congresses: the 103rd/104th Congresses (1993-1996) and the 113th/114th Congresses (2013-2016). I chose these time periods for several reasons. First, lawmakers were working in similar political environments. In the 104th, 113th, and 114th Congresses, Republicans controlled the House with a Democratic president in the White House.¹³ That Democrats held the majority in the 103rd Congress also allows me to better isolate the effects of party competition, which I discuss further in the next paragraph.

¹³ Bill Clinton and Barack Obama served as President during the 103rd/104th and 113th/114th Congresses, respectively.

Another important characteristic of these time periods is the relevance of gendered issues – and the willingness of Republican leadership to promote women in their party as a result. In both congressional eras, Republican leaders were forced to reckon with a widening gender voting gap as well as explicitly gendered issues, thus creating opportunities (as least symbolically) for women in their party.¹⁴ Throughout this dissertation, I delve deeper into the role party leaders play in advancing Republican women’s congressional representation.

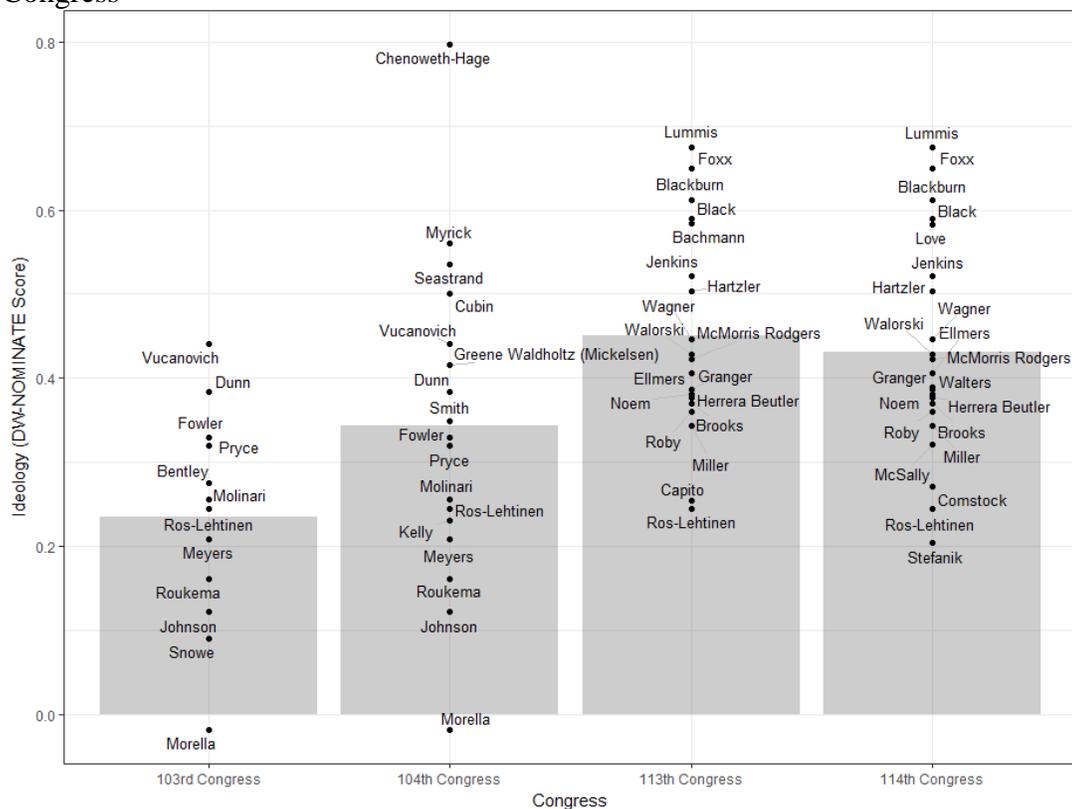
Second, comparing these time periods allows me to best analyze the effects of increasing ideological polarization and party competition. The transition from the 103rd to the 104th Congress marks the transition into a more competitive congressional environment. As discussed previously, the 1994 election gave Republicans control of the House for the first time in four decades, incentivizing members of both parties to continue to compete for control of the government. It is also in this election that we begin to see an increase in the number of ideologically conservative Republican women. For the first time in at a decade, the mean DW-NOMINATE score of House Republican women was statistically ideologically indistinguishable from Republican men (see Figure

¹⁴ Among other issues, Anita Hill’s testimony during the 1991 congressional hearing of Supreme Court nominee, Clarence Thomas, brought issues of sexual assault to the forefront during the 1992 election. The 103rd Congress was the result of the “Year of the Woman,” in which a record number of Democratic women were elected to Congress. President Clinton won his 1992 election with a 4-point gender gap and his 1996 election with an 11-point gender gap. Well aware of the need to reach out to women voters, Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House in the 104th Congress, actively sought out women as candidates and spokespeople for the party.

Gendered issues played a similar role two decades later. Throughout this time, the Republican Party was accused of fighting a “war on women” and President Obama’s gender gap widened from 7 points in 2008 to 10 points in 2012. The Republican National Committee addressed this in a 2013 “autopsy” report titled the “Growth and Opportunity Project,” which outlined recommendations for reaching out to women and minority voters through messaging tactics and candidate recruitment. The National Republican Congressional Committee also founded Project GROW, which was devoted to recruiting and training Republican women candidates across the country.

3). Importantly, though, the range of individual ideologies among Republican women in the 104th Congress was significantly larger than in the later Congresses. Figure 5 shows the individual and mean DW-NOMINATE scores of Republican women in each Congress; the range of DW-NOMINATE scores was .815 in the 104th Congress compared to .431 and .460 in the 113th and 114th Congresses, respectively. Thus, comparing the actions of Republican women in these two congressional eras becomes a good test not only for the effects of interparty competition, but also intraparty ideological cohesion.

Figure 5: Republican Women's Individual and Mean DW-NOMINATE Scores by Congress



Data source: Lewis, Jeffrey B., Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, Adam Boche, Aaron Rudkin, and Luke Sonnet (2019). *Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database*. <https://voteview.com/>

Finally, researchers at the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University conducted in-depth interviews with women members of Congress in the 103rd, 104th, and 114th Congresses. Access to these transcripts affords be a more detailed, behind-the-scenes understanding of the motivations for various forms of representational behavior. In the following section, I elaborate on the methodology as well as on my role in conducting these interviews during the 114th Congress.

Importantly, my comparison of the 103rd/104th and 113th/114th Congresses focuses on members of the House of Representatives, rather than the Senate, for a number of reasons. First, the House functions under relatively rigid debate rules compared to the Senate.¹⁵ This helps to provide consistency across cases and makes it easier to pinpoint institutional factors that may shape political rhetoric. Second, because they represent smaller, often gerrymandered, geographic districts, House members tend to be more extreme in their positions and more loyal to party leadership. Thus, focusing on the House allows me to paint a more accurate picture of the effects of polarization in Congress. Finally, the larger number¹⁶ of Republican women in the House compared to the Senate, while still difficult to examine statistically, provides a better opportunity to analyze variations in rhetoric and behavior.

¹⁵ Unlike in the Senate, “rules in the House of Representatives typically limit the time allowed for floor speeches and require debate to be germane to pending business” (Schneider, Judy. 26 Nov 2012. “Special Order Speeches and Other Forms of Non-Legislative Debate in the House.” Congressional Research Service.)

¹⁶ Number of Republican women by Congress and chamber: 103rd: 2 senators, 12 representatives; 104th: 4 senators, 17 representatives; 113th: 4 senators, 19 representatives; 114th: 6 senators, 22 representatives. Source: “History of Women in the U.S. Congress.” Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University. <<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/history-women-us-congress>>.

Elite Interviews with Women Members of Congress

This project relies heavily on elite interviews with women members of Congress conducted as part of two larger studies at the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. The CAWP Study of Women in the 103rd and 104th Congresses¹⁷ included a total of 82 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with women members of Congress. The first round of interviews was conducted between June and October 1995 with 43 of the 55 women who had served in the 103rd Congress (36 representatives, 6 senators, and 1 delegate – a response rate of 78%). The second round of interviews took place between October 1997 and July 1998 with 39 of the 58 women who had served in the 104th Congress (35 representatives, 3 senators, and 1 delegate – a response rate of 67%). Some interviews were conducted by phone, but most were conducted in person and ranged in length from about 15 minutes to one hour. Each interview was recorded and done on the record, though members could choose to go off the record at any point during the interview.

The CAWP Study of Women in the 114th Congress¹⁸ included a total of 83 interviews with women members of Congress.¹⁹ As a research assistant at CAWP, I personally conducted 24 in-person interviews. The interviews took place between September 2015 and April 2017, with a response rate of 77% -- 68 representatives, 13

¹⁷ This study was made possible with funding from the Charles H. Revson Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

¹⁸ The study was made possible with funding from the Political Parity Project at the Hunt Alternatives Fund.

¹⁹ CAWP's public report can be found here: Dittmar, Kelly, Kira Sanbonmatsu, Susan J. Carroll, Debbie Walsh, and Catherine Wineinger. 2017. *Representation Matters: Women in the U.S. Congress*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

<<https://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/representationmatters.pdf>>.

Also see: Dittmar, Kelly, Kira Sanbonmatsu, and Susan J. Carroll. 2018. *A Seat at the Table: Congresswomen's Perspectives on Why Their Presence Matters*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

senators, and 2 delegates. Almost all of the interviews were conducted in person on Capitol Hill, although a few were conducted by phone to accommodate member schedule. The semi-structured interviews ranged from 12 to 77 minutes in length, with the average interview lasting 29 minutes. All interviews were done on the record although members could choose to go off the record at any point.

As this dissertation seeks to understand the experiences of Republican congresswomen, I focused primarily on interviews with Republicans, though interviews with Democratic women were also helpful in providing additional context. The response rates among Republican women in the House of Representatives were: 100% (12 of 12) in the 103rd Congress, 65% (11 of 17) in the 104th Congress, and 73% (16 of 22) in the 114th Congress (see Appendix A for a full list of Republican women interviewees). General questions in both time periods focused on representational goals, policy priorities and achievements, party polarization, and perceptions of gender dynamics within Congress. Other questions were more individualized and tailored to members' specific legislative actions or leadership roles. In the 114th interviews, we also asked Republican congresswomen about the creation and role of the Republican Women's Policy Committee, and whether/how they believe they approach conservative issues differently than their male Republican colleagues (see Appendix B for sample protocol). These interviews, paired with content analyses and case studies, are used throughout my dissertation in various ways to inform my evaluations of institutional and interpersonal dynamics within Congress. In the methods section of each subsequent chapter, I detail the specific ways in which interview data was analyzed.

Content Analyses of Floor Speeches

The first step in understanding the evolution of Republican women as party messengers is to examine shifts in the messages themselves. Using *The Congressional Record*, I collected every substantive floor speech given by each House Republican woman in the 103rd, 104th, 113th, and 114th Congresses. Every speech was considered to be substantive unless it pertained exclusively to congressional protocol. For example, constitutional authority statements, motions to adjourn, and committee elections were excluded from the analysis. In total, 3,979 substantive speeches were collected.

I apply Colleen Shogan's (2001) concept of "woman-invoked rhetoric" to determine when Republican congresswomen made claims about women. First, I used *NVivo* to extract speeches that contained variations of gendered key words, including: "women," "girls," "mother," "daughter," "grandmother," "wife," "female," and "gender." I also searched for words like "son," "husband," "spouse," and "children" to understand if and how Republican congresswomen were talking about themselves as wives and mothers. I then read each speech that contained one or more of these words. Simply mentioning women did not qualify a speech as containing woman-invoked rhetoric. Rather, a speech with woman-invoked rhetoric was coded as such when a woman 1) claimed to represent women or girls in some way, or 2) invoked her own identity as a woman to make a statement about the issue at hand. A total of 694 floor speeches given by Republican congresswomen contained woman-invoked rhetoric (17.4% of all floor speeches). These speeches were then examined quantitatively and qualitatively for shifts in policy priorities, speech type, and rhetorical frames. In Chapters 2 and 3, I elaborate on the exact methodologies used for each analysis.

While other forms of communication – like press releases or media interviews – are also important measures of public claims made by politicians, I have chosen to examine floor speeches for several reasons. First, because most floor speeches are given during policy debates, I am better able to capture changes, if any, in the way Republican congresswomen conceptualize “women’s issues.” In which types of policy debates are women being invoked, and how has this changed over time? Second, floor speeches in the House are regulated by institutional rules, which helps to limit variation in types and lengths of speeches among members. At the same time, distinguishing between types of speeches – debate, one-minute, or special order²⁰ – can also help to reveal the motivations behind the use of woman-invoked rhetoric. For instance, both one-minute and special order speeches have increasingly been used as party messaging tools (Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Taddy 2018; Harris 2005) and as a way for individual members to demonstrate party loyalty (Harris 2005; Pearson and Dancey 2011a; Pearson 2015). Thus, an analysis of floor speeches can be used to understand how, if at all, the rhetoric used by individual legislators aligns with broader party messaging tactics.

A final reason I focus on congressional floor speeches is that they have become significant forms of public political communication. Beyond legislative deliberation,

²⁰ Legislative debates in the House are subject to restrictions that are recommended by the Rules Committee. Unlike in the Senate, no member can hold the floor for more than one hour. Most bills and resolutions are considered for a maximum of 40 minutes on the House floor. One-minute and special order speeches are forms of non-legislative debate in the House. One-minute speeches are no longer than one minute in length and are typically given at the beginning of the legislative day. Special order speeches by individual members can be up to five minutes in length or up to 60 minutes in length, are typically given at the end of the legislative day, and are reserved in advance through party leadership. (For more information, see: Schneider, Judy. 26 Nov 2012. “Special Order Speeches and Other Forms of Non-Legislative Debate in the House.” Congressional Research Service. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS21174.pdf> and Davis, Christopher M. 13 Dec 2018. “The Legislative Process on the House Floor: An Introduction.” Congressional Research Service. <https://www.senate.gov/CRSpubs/8098f506-ee7b-42c7-a003-92f13aaec0bc.pdf>).

floor speeches function as a mechanism for representative claims-making. The creation of C-SPAN in 1979 has given representatives a way to communicate directly to the public from the House floor, and party leaders have been able to take advantage of such technological advancements. In particular, Newt Gingrich often encouraged rank-and-file Republican members to push a party message through special order speeches. As described by Frantzich and Sullivan (1996), “When asked whether he would be the Republican leader without C-SPAN, Gingrich...gave an uncharacteristic and unqualified one-word answer: ‘No.’...C-SPAN provided a group of media-savvy House conservatives in the mid-1980s with a method of circumventing the more liberal press and winning a prime-time audience” (275). Even today, with television becoming less popular, representatives are able to effectively use C-SPAN footage of floor speeches on other mediums like Facebook and Twitter.²¹ And so, analyses of congressional floor speeches can reveal *how* members of Congress are claiming to represent women as well as whether these are individual or collective messages.

In this dissertation, I use the term “woman-invoked rhetoric” (Shogan 2001) rather than “representative claims-making” (Saward 2006) because my analysis is not limited only to *representative claims*: those which overtly represent a constituency. Also included are what I call *identity claims*: those in which women members invoke their own gender identity to speak *as* women. This distinction is important, particularly when examining the gendered claims made by Republican women, who must work within a party culture that ideologically rejects the notion of representation based on group

²¹ One of the most recent examples of this is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s (D-NY) first congressional floor speech. In January 2019, Ocasio-Cortez tweeted a C-SPAN video of her speech, which garnered 1.16 million views within the first 12 hours. (Gajanan, Mahita. 18 January 2019. “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s First House Speech Broke a C-SPAN Record. Here’s What She Said.” *Time Magazine*.)

identity, or “identity politics.” By speaking as women,²² rather than on behalf of women, Republicans may be better able to represent women within the confines of their party culture. That said, the overarching concept of representative claims-making – that claims made by political elites have the potential to shape public conceptualizations of women’s interests – is still central to my project, and I often discuss the implications of woman-invoked rhetoric in those terms.

Findings from this analysis, described further in Chapters 2 and 3, reveal notable shifts in the use of woman-invoked rhetoric on the House floor. In particular, I show that, compared to those in the early 1990s, Republican congresswomen in the later Congresses more frequently engage in explicitly *partisan* woman-invoked rhetoric– gendered claims that closely align with Republican policies, messaging strategies, and culture. Such findings inform my methodological approach for Chapters 4 and 5, which I discuss below.

Case Studies: Women’s Caucuses and Conference Leaders

In my analysis of congressional floor speeches, I find evidence that Republican congresswomen are more likely now than in the 1990s to speak explicitly and collectively as *Republican* women. In several speeches, representatives referenced their membership in the Republican Women’s Policy Committee (RWPC), established in 2012 as the first and only Republican women’s caucus in Congress. In contrast, women in the earlier Congresses rarely spoke as partisan women and, in fact, would reference their membership in the bipartisan Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues (CCWI). This

²² Hinojosa and Woodall (2018) call this “descriptive presentation.”

particular finding provided initial evidence of the increasing recognition of a *partisan gender identity* among Republican congresswomen. Thus, in Chapter 4, I explore the development and eventual institutionalization of this partisan gender identity through case studies of the CCWI and the RWPC.

Originally founded as the Congresswomen's Caucus in 1979, the CCWI is a bipartisan, bicameral congressional member organization (CMO) dedicated to working on legislation that improves the lives of women. While the CCWI continues to exist today, increasing polarization and institutional changes have limited the effectiveness of the caucus in addressing issues that are more substantive than symbolic²³ (Gertzog 2004). Meanwhile, both Democratic and Republican women in the House have created their own partisan caucuses: the Democratic Women's Caucus (formerly the Democratic Women's Working Group until March 2019) and the RWPC. While the intricacies of a partisan gender identity on both sides of the aisle are important to understand, this dissertation continues to focus specifically on Republican women in order to deepen scholarly understandings of Republican Party culture and identity politics on the Right.

Through in-depth analyses of elite interviews, media coverage, and primary and secondary sources from The National Archives and The Library of Congress, I investigate the politics of the CCWI and RWPC. By focusing on Republican women's collective action and the ways they have navigated ideological tensions between their partisan and gender identities, I am able to disentangle the complex relationship between

²³ In the 1980s and early 1990s, the CCWI played an important role in legislation like the Child Support Enforcement Act, the Violence Against Women Act, and the Family and Medical Leave Act. More recently, while the caucus has been active on issues of human trafficking in the 114th Congress, a lot of its activity has been more symbolic and uncontroversial in nature, such as advocating for a women's history museum.

Republican congresswomen and male party leaders in an increasingly competitive and polarized institution. My findings, detailed in Chapter 4, show that Republican congresswomen view themselves as *partisan women* – with interests distinct from those of Democratic women and Republican men – and that they have taken advantage of political opportunities to organize collectively around that identity. The opportunities and constraints they have encountered from male party leaders further reveal the ways in which Republican Party culture limits women’s role within the GOP primarily to loyal messengers.

Given the formal collective organization of Republican women in the House, the increasingly consistent overrepresentation of women in Republican Conference leadership positions, and the focus on women as party messengers, my final analysis examines the evolving representational role of women as Conference leaders. I conduct in-depth case studies of three female Conference leaders: Susan Molinari, vice chair in the 104th Congress; Jennifer Dunn, vice chair in the 105th Congress; and Cathy McMorris Rodgers, chair in the 113th and 114th Congresses. I again rely on interviews, news articles, and archival sources to analyze each woman’s 1) pathway to leadership, 2) gendered goals/priorities, and 3) experiences in attempting to carry out those goals.

While Jennifer Dunn was not in leadership in either the 103rd nor 104th Congresses, I include her in this analysis for two main reasons. First, there were no women in Republican leadership positions during the 103rd Congress. Second, in our interview with Cathy McMorris Rodgers, she explicitly cited Jennifer Dunn as a role model and trailblazer for her own leadership goals. Thus, personal and ideological similarities between Dunn and McMorris Rodgers can help pinpoint institutional reasons

for any discrepancies between their individual leadership experiences. The overarching goal of these case studies is to understand the evolving role of women as Conference leaders and to unveil changes in the way the voices of Republican congresswomen are amplified by the GOP.

Outline of Chapters

The first objective of this project is to examine how institutional changes in Congress have affected the way Republican congresswomen speak as and on behalf of women. In Chapters 2 and 3, I analyze the congressional floor speeches of Republican women in the House of Representatives to determine shifts in the use of woman-invoked rhetoric. Chapter 2 focuses on the issues members discuss when engaging in woman-invoked rhetoric, as well as the positions they take on those issues. It also explores the types of speeches being made – one-minute, special order, or debate – and the various narratives within those speeches. Findings reveal a shift toward woman-invoked rhetoric that is increasingly in line with official Republican Party policy positions and messaging strategies.

Chapter 3 more closely examines changes in the types of claims made by Republican congresswomen as well as the rhetorical frames being implemented. In this chapter, I demonstrate that Republican congresswomen increasingly speak as and on behalf of women within the confines of their party culture. For example, as members of a party that explicitly touts family values and rejects group identity politics, Republican congresswomen in more recent Congresses are increasingly speaking about themselves as mothers, rather than claiming to represent women as a whole. Taken together, Chapters 2

and 3 highlight a shift toward the use of *partisan woman-invoked rhetoric* – gendered claims that align with Republican policies, messaging strategies, and culture. In each of these chapters, I explain why ideological polarization and party competition are likely explanations for this shift.

Chapter 4 focuses on the collective action of Republican women in the House. Through case studies of the Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues (CCWI) and the Republican Women’s Policy Committee (RWPC), I analyze the way Republican congresswomen have navigated tensions between their gender and partisan identities over time. I demonstrate how institutional changes intensified the recognition of a *partisan gender identity* among Republican congresswomen in the 104th Congress. I further show how that partisan gender identity became formally institutionalized through the creation of the RWPC. Importantly, Chapter 4 also reveals the various institutional challenges faced by Republican congresswomen and the significance of male party leaders as gatekeepers.

In Chapter 5, I compare the experiences of three female Republican Conference leaders: Susan Molinari, Jennifer Dunn, and Cathy McMorris Rodgers. Once again using in-depth case studies, I highlight similarities in each woman’s pathway to office – particularly, the importance of male party leaders in encouraging and endorsing women as Conference leaders. Additionally, I illustrate how ideological cohesion among Republican women, along with the existence of the RWPC, has made it possible for recent female Conference leaders to amplify a collective, gendered message.

Chapter 6 concludes my dissertation with a discussion of the theoretical and electoral implications of Republican congresswomen as party messengers. I argue that

Republican congresswomen have empowered themselves through the formal recognition of a collective *partisan gender identity*, while simultaneously upholding the ideological and cultural barriers that prevent Republican women from winning congressional seats. I end with a detailed discussion of my contributions to political science, and in particular, literature on women's representation, Congressional politics, and party culture.

CHAPTER 2 – PARTISAN WOMAN-INVOKED RHETORIC: SPEAKING FOR WOMEN AS REPUBLICANS

In a 2015 special order speech given on the House floor, Representative Renee Ellmers (R-NC) discussed the importance of national security and urged President Obama to take military action against the Islamic State (ISIS). While her positions on national security were in line with those of her male Republican colleagues at the time, the premise of her speech was different – and explicitly gendered. “Today, I stand with my fellow members of the Republican Women’s Policy Committee,” she said, “to discuss an issue of concern that’s on the mind of every American, especially moms.”¹

In the House, special orders are given at the end of the day and are not subject to the rules and restrictions that govern legislative debates.² Yet, while they can speak on any issue they choose, members must “reserve special orders in advance through their party’s leadership.”³ And since the 1990s, special order speeches have frequently been used both by individual members and party leadership to broadcast their party’s messages (Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Taddy 2018; Harris 2005; Rocca 2007). As chair of the Republican Women’s Policy Committee (RWPC) – a House caucus of Republican women that formed in 2012 – Ellmers scheduled special order speeches to give the women of the RWPC an opportunity to speak on issues they deemed important. While national security is not a conventional women’s issue,⁴ Republican women spoke about

¹ Representative Ellmers (NC). “Imminent Threats to Our National Security.” 161: 109. (July 14, 2015). p. H5153.

² Schneider, Judy. 26 Nov 2012. “Special Order Speeches and Other Forms of Non-Legislative Debate in the House.” Congressional Research Service. <<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS21174.pdf>>.

³ Schneider, Judy. 1 Apr 2008. “Special Order Speeches: Current House Practices.” Congressional Research Service. <https://archives-democrats-rules.house.gov/CRS_Rpt/rl30136.pdf>.

⁴ As discussed in Chapter 1, conventional women’s issues are those which scholars have typically identified as 1) advancing women’s equity in society (equal pay, family leave, etc.), 2) addressing women or women’s particular needs, even from a neutral or anti-feminist standpoint (abortion, domestic

this issue together *as women*, taking an explicitly conservative stance that was in line with the position of their party. Delving deeper into how, when, and why Republican women talk about women can expand our understanding of women’s congressional representation in an era of increasing polarization.

In this both this chapter and the following chapter, I use Colleen Shogan’s (2001) concept of woman-invoked rhetoric to ask: How do Republican congresswomen speak as and on behalf of women in their floor speeches, and how has this changed over time? Examining the speeches from the 103rd/104th (1993-1996) and 113th/114th (2013-2016) Congresses in which Republican congresswomen invoke women, I use this chapter to look specifically at 1) the issues that are being discussed, and 2) the types of speeches that are being made (debates, special orders, or one-minute speeches). In Chapter 3, I delve deeper into the types of claims that are being made. Given recent literature on gender and party polarization, I expect to find Republican congresswomen increasingly engaging in what I call *partisan woman-invoked rhetoric*: gendered rhetoric that aligns with the policy platform, messaging strategies, and cultural norms of their party.

“Women’s Issues” from a Republican Perspective

Interviews with members of Congress⁵ can help to uncover the nuances of women’s political representation in the context of party politics (Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018). While public claims made by political elites can be an important mechanism for representation (Celis et. al. 2008; Celis and Childs 2012; Seward 2006;

violence, recognizing women’s achievements, etc.), or 3) being associated with women’s traditional roles as caregivers (education, healthcare, welfare, etc.).

⁵ See Chapter 1 for a detailed description of interview data.

Shogan 2001), I argue it is necessary to first understand the relationship between woman-invoked rhetoric in the House and Republican congresswomen's conceptualizations of "women's issues." Such insight works to deepen our understanding of the representational function and purpose of floor speech rhetoric for women in the Republican Party.

First, when asked about the ways in which they represent women, Republican congresswomen often argue that, while they bring an important perspective to Congress, that perspective is not issue-specific. On the contrary, as Nancy Johnson (R-CT) put it in her 1995 interview, "Women's issues are all the issues. There are no distinctly women's issues."⁶ In 2016, Ann Wagner (R-MO) made similar claim, saying, "I'm not a believer in women's issues. I think all issues are women's issues. We just may come at them from a different perspective and, from living our lives and the complexity of it all, we may have a different approach to so many different issues."⁷ Indeed, Republican and Democratic women alike have argued that the gendered life experiences women bring with them to Congress are important to every issue – not just those deemed "women's issues" (Carroll 2002; Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018).

Importantly, though, for Republican congresswomen, the claim that "all issues are women's issues" also functions as a way to distinguish themselves from Democratic women. When asked in her interview about the ways Republican women differed from "liberal Democratic women," Sue Myrick (R-NC) said, "We don't just single out specific issues. I mean, we are very concerned about fiscal matters, as I said, the education issues,

⁶ Johnson, Nancy. (07 August 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁷ Wagner, Ann. (2016 April 28). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

the crime and violence issues. All of those affect women very dramatically.”⁸ Martha Roby (R-AL) responded similarly in 2016:

[Republican women] don’t believe that there are issues that are women’s issues. The same things that are important to our male colleagues are important to us... Energy is important. We have members that serve on eight committees that can talk about trade and tax reform... You have women that have served in the military, that, you know, can talk about issues from that perspective.⁹

Indeed, while the rejection of an explicitly defined set of “women’s issues” can be seen on both sides of the aisle, the justification for this rejection must be understood in the context of party culture. As discussed in Chapter 1, the issue-ownership literature tells us that Democrats are viewed as most competent on issues like healthcare, education, and welfare services – issues that are typically deemed “women’s issues” (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik et. al. 2003; Winter 2010). Thus, working on “women’s issues” puts Democratic congresswomen in line with their party’s legislative agenda. When Democratic women reject the notion of “women’s issues,” they often argue that the issues they work on are of national importance and should not simply be viewed as issues affecting women. For example, Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) was adamant in her 1995 interview that issues like abortion and healthcare should not be pigeonholed as “women’s issues”:

There are many women in this body who will fight like hell for a woman's right to choose. Now clearly, maybe the women have a more basic interest in that. But there again, if you don't have men and women voting on that issue in this place, you cannot win it. So it is not just a narrowly defined women's issue. It's a national issue. Health care is a national issue. Does it makes sense to include women in the equation when we're doing research at the National Institutes of Health? Yes. But that's not a “women's issue.” That's a national issue...And I'll tell you, in this body, I think that one of the things that has hurt women the most is defining women's issues and [saying] that women come here to work on women's issues. And I won't be a part of it. I will not be a part of it.¹⁰

⁸ Myrick, Sue. (25 February 1998). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁹ Roby, Martha. (2016 February 2). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

¹⁰ DeLauro, Rosa. (30 June 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

Karen Thurman (D-FL) also argued that she is not simply representing women when she works on issues that affect women, saying, “I would like to think that by supporting women, I am also supporting their families – I mean, male, female, whatever.”¹¹

In contrast, the issues “owned” (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik et. al. 2003) by Republicans – crime, national security, the economy, etc. – are stereotypically “masculine” (Winter 2010) and not typically viewed as “women’s issues.” Thus, when asked to specify which issues are important to them as women, many Republican congresswomen rejected the concept of “women’s issues” while arguing that traditional Republican issues directly impact the lives of women. Kay Granger (R-TX), who served as chair of the Appropriation Committee’s State-Foreign Operations Subcommittee from 2011-2017 and chair of the Defense Subcommittee beginning in 2017, said that national security has always been one of her top priorities. She argued that defense issues are important to women, especially as more women enter the military: “I love defense because I go to the bases all over the world. But every time, it’s more women, every time. And I’ll say, what made you join the Navy? And it’s so interesting to hear their reasons and what they’re doing.”¹² In the 103rd Congress, Representative Helen Delich Bentley (R-MD) said that she focused “on the issue of jobs” and “fair trade” because she believed “all economic issues are women’s issues as well.”¹³ Similarly, Representative Tillie Fowler (R-FL), a member of the Armed Services Committee in the 103rd Congress, argued that “defense is a women’s issue.”¹⁴ Notably, however, despite their claims that

¹¹ Thurman, Karen. (30 June 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

¹² Granger, Kay. (07 January 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

¹³ Bentley, Helen Delich. (02 August 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

¹⁴ Fowler, Tillie. (03 August 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

these issues are important to them as women, none of these three representatives invoked women in their floor speeches when speaking on these issues.

These interviews with women members of Congress illustrate two main points about the relationship between “women’s issues” and woman-invoked rhetoric. First, women from both parties acknowledge that they bring important life experiences as women to every issue. Importantly, woman-invoked rhetoric cannot capture all of these gendered perspectives and should thus not be the only measure of women’s representation in Congress. Second, the disconnect between what Republican congresswomen claim to be “women’s issues” and their use of woman-invoked rhetoric suggests that such rhetoric should also be understood as a political decision rather than simply a genuine belief about what is beneficial for women.

Thus, the goal of this analysis is not to determine the validity of Republican women’s claims. That is, I do not seek to judge whether or not Republican congresswomen are *actually* acting in the best interests of women, though that is an important endeavor (Celis and Childs 2018). Rather, my goal is to delve deeper into the claims made by Republican women. While other scholars have shown the ways in which Republican congresswomen differ from their Democratic women counterparts, I explore the evolution of Republican women’s gendered claims over time. Through an in-depth analysis of woman-invoked rhetoric, I work to unveil changes in the way Republican congresswomen speak for women, and, more importantly, what this tells us about congressional polarization and the role of women in Republican Party politics.

Data & Methods

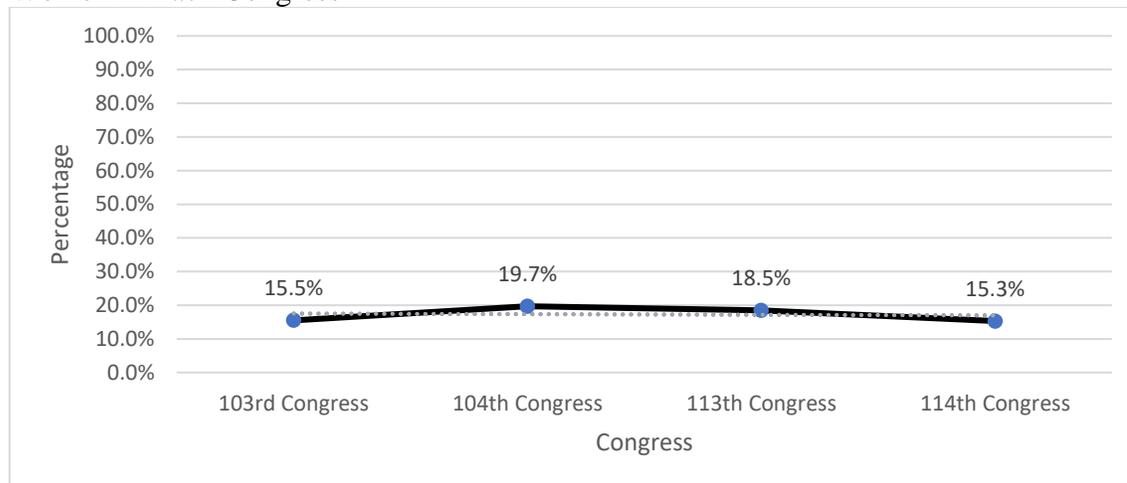
This chapter draws on data from congressional floor speeches as well as elite interviews with women members of Congress. I conduct quantitative and qualitative analyses of floor speeches to understand changes in the way Republican congresswomen speak as and on behalf of women. As discussed in Chapter 1, floor speeches have played a significant role in party messaging strategies since the 1990s, as they have given members a way to speak to their constituents via C-SPAN and, in later Congresses, online platforms. An examination of woman-invoked rhetoric in floor speeches thus gives me the opportunity to examine if and how party polarization has affected the gendered messages being put forth by Republican congresswomen to the public. In-person interviews with women members of Congress deepen this analysis by providing additional context and illuminating the motivation behind the use of such rhetoric.

Content Analyses of Floor Speeches

As detailed in Chapter 1, I used the *Congressional Record* to extract every substantive floor speech given by House Republican women in the 103rd, 104th, 113th, and 114th Congresses. I then applied Colleen Shogan's (2001) concept of "woman-invoked rhetoric" to identify speeches in which congresswomen 1) claim to represent women or girls, or 2) invoke their own identity as a woman to make a statement about a particular issue. A total of 694 floor speeches given by Republican congresswomen contained woman-invoked rhetoric (17.4% of all floor speeches). Figure 1 shows the total percentage of speeches containing woman-invoked rhetoric given by Republican women in each Congress. Despite changes in the ideology of Republican congresswomen over

the last two decades, I find there is no significant difference in the frequency of woman-invoked rhetoric speeches given by Republican congresswomen across these four Congresses.

Figure 1: Total Percentage of Woman-Invoked Rhetoric Speeches Given by Republican Women in Each Congress



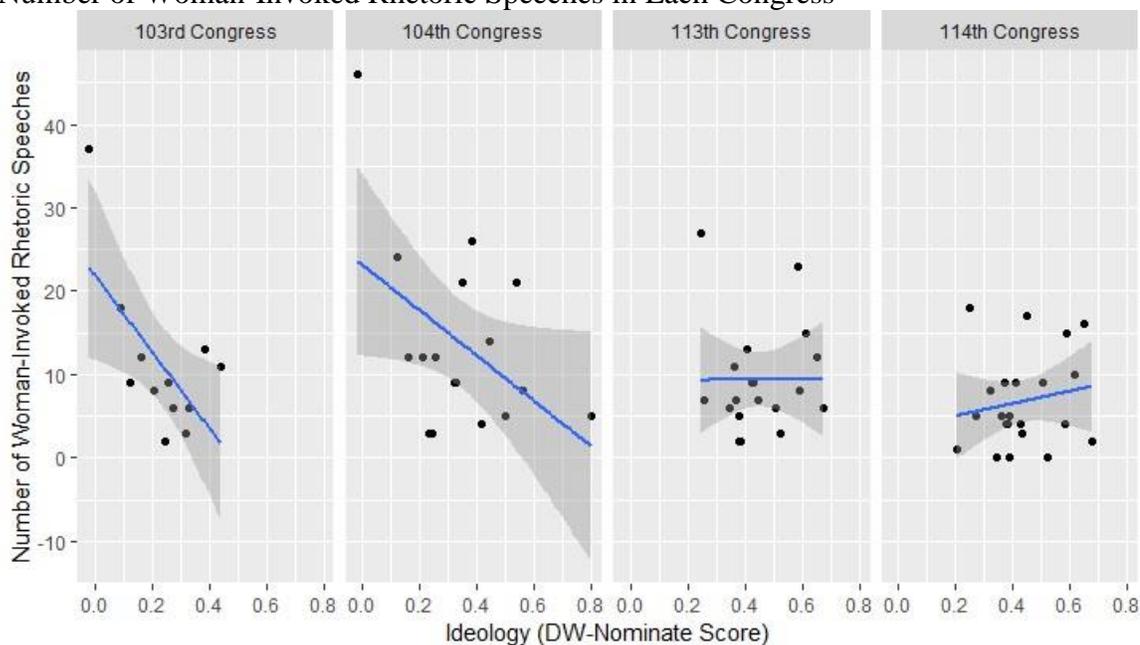
N = 134 of 862 in 103rd; 234 of 1,189 in 104th; 178 of 963 in 113th; 148 of 965 in 114th

To get a better sense of the potential effects of congressional polarization, I examined the relationship between ideology and the number of woman-invoked rhetoric speeches made by Republican women in each Congress. Figure 2 shows the correlation between Republican congresswomen's DW-NOMINATE scores and the total number of woman-invoked rhetoric speeches they gave in each Congress. I find a strong negative correlation between conservative ideology and woman-invoked rhetoric speeches in both the 103rd and 104th Congresses.¹⁵ No such correlation exists in the 113th and 114th

¹⁵ The correlations in the 103rd and 104th Congresses are statistically significant at the .05 and .10 levels, respectively. In both Congresses, Connie Morella (R-MD) was an outlier, giving the most woman-invoked rhetoric speeches. If I remove her from the analysis, the results are no longer statistically significant. That said, the point of this analysis is not to determine how individual ideology drives the use of woman-invoked rhetoric; rather, it is to better understand the collective messages about women that are being put forth in each Congress. This is also why I chose to analyze the total number of woman-invoked

Congresses. In other words, while the frequency of woman-invoked rhetoric speeches has remained consistent over time, these speeches are no longer being disproportionately made by ideologically moderate women.

Figure 2: Relationship Between Republican Congresswomen's Ideology and Total Number of Woman-Invoked Rhetoric Speeches in Each Congress



Pearson's correlation for each Congress: 103rd = -0.644**; 104th = -0.472*; 113th = 0.006; 114th = 0.172

**Statistically significant at $p < .05$

*Statistically significant at $p < .10$

Source for DW-NOMINATE data: Lewis, Jeffrey B., Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, Adam Boche, Aaron Rudkin, and Luke Sonnet (2018). *Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database*.

Given these findings, I conduct both quantitative and qualitative content analyses of woman-invoked rhetoric speeches to gain a deeper understanding of changes over time. I begin with a descriptive quantitative analysis that examines changes in 1) the issues that are discussed in these speeches and 2) the types of speeches being made. To do so, I coded for the issue discussed in each speech and whether or not that issue is a

rhetoric speeches instead of the percentage of said speeches for each member. In doing so, I show that Republican women's messages about women were coming most frequently from moderate voices.

conventional women's issue.¹⁶ Issues that were not coded as conventional women's issues were labeled *unconventional women's issues*. I then coded for the type of speech: debate, one-minute, or special order.

I test two specific hypotheses that are derived from the literature discussed in Chapter 1. First, because the Republican Party “owns” issues that are not considered conventional women's issues – such as national security, crime, and economics (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik et. al. 2003; Winter 2010) – I expect to see the more conservative women of the 113th/114th Congresses discuss these types of issues when engaging in woman-invoked rhetoric. Thus, my first hypothesis is:

H1: Women in the 113th/114th Congresses will be more likely than women in the 103rd/104th Congresses to discuss *unconventional* women's issues in their woman-invoked rhetoric speeches.

Second, both one-minute and special order speeches have become increasingly partisan. One-minute speeches are given most frequently by those who are disadvantaged within Congress, such as junior members, members of the minority party, and women, often as a way to demonstrate party loyalty (Maltzman and Sigelman 1996; Harris 2005; Morris 2001; Pearson and Dancey 2011a; Pearson 2015). Special order speeches have also become tools for party leaders and rank-and-file members to promote unified party messages (Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Taddy 2018; Pearson 2015; Rocca 2007). Thus, in this era of heightened party polarization, I expect to see Republican women more likely to engage in special order and one-minute speeches. My second hypothesis is:

¹⁶ As discussed in Chapter 1, conventional women's issues are those which scholars have typically identified as 1) advancing women's equity in society (equal pay, family leave, etc.), 2) addressing women or women's particular needs, even from a neutral or anti-feminist standpoint (abortion, domestic violence, recognizing women's achievements, etc.), or 3) being associated with women's traditional roles as caregivers (education, healthcare, welfare, etc.).

H2: Among woman-invoked rhetoric speeches given by Republican women, the percentage of *debate* speeches will be smaller in the 113th/114th Congresses compared to the 103rd/104th Congresses.

Finally, given shifts in the ideologies of Republican congresswomen engaging in woman-invoked rhetoric, I also conduct in an in-depth, qualitative reading of these speeches to reveal any changes in the way issues are being framed. In general, I predict that Republican congresswomen in the more recent Congresses will have more ideologically cohesive narratives about how women are being affected by various issues and that the policy positions they take will more be more consistently aligned with the policy positions of the national Republican Party platform.

Elite Interviews

From CAWP's studies¹⁷ of the 103rd, 104th, and 114th Congresses, I draw primarily on interviews with Republican women in the House of Representatives.¹⁸ More specifically, I examine their responses to questions regarding women's representation and their discussions of specific policy issues. These interviews supplement my content analyses of Republican congresswomen's speeches by providing further context and a more in-depth understanding of the political motivations behind choosing to invoke women (or not) in their House floor speeches.

¹⁷ See Chapter 1 for detailed descriptions of interview data. Also see Appendix A for the list of Republican women interviewed in each Congress and Appendix B for a sample interview protocol.

¹⁸ The response rates among Republican women in the House of Representatives were: 100% in the 103rd Congress, 65% in the 104th Congress, and 73% in the 114th Congress.

When is Woman-Invoked Rhetoric Used?

To understand the evolution of Republican women's claims over time, I first examine the issues that are being discussed in speeches containing woman-invoked rhetoric. Figure 3 and Figure 4 present the issues discussed in woman-invoked rhetoric speeches by percentage during the 103rd/104th Congresses and 113th/114th Congresses, respectively. Contrary to my prediction in Hypothesis 1, I find that, while Republican congresswomen in both congressional eras engaged in woman-invoked rhetoric on a wide range of issues, they were most likely to invoke women when speaking about conventional women's issues. Specifically, abortion and health were two of the most frequently discussed topics in both the 103rd/104th and 113th/114th Congresses. In the following section, I present findings from my qualitative content analysis to show how the framing of these issues has changed over time.

Figure 3: Issues Discussed in Woman-Invoked Rhetoric Speeches: 103rd/104th Congresses

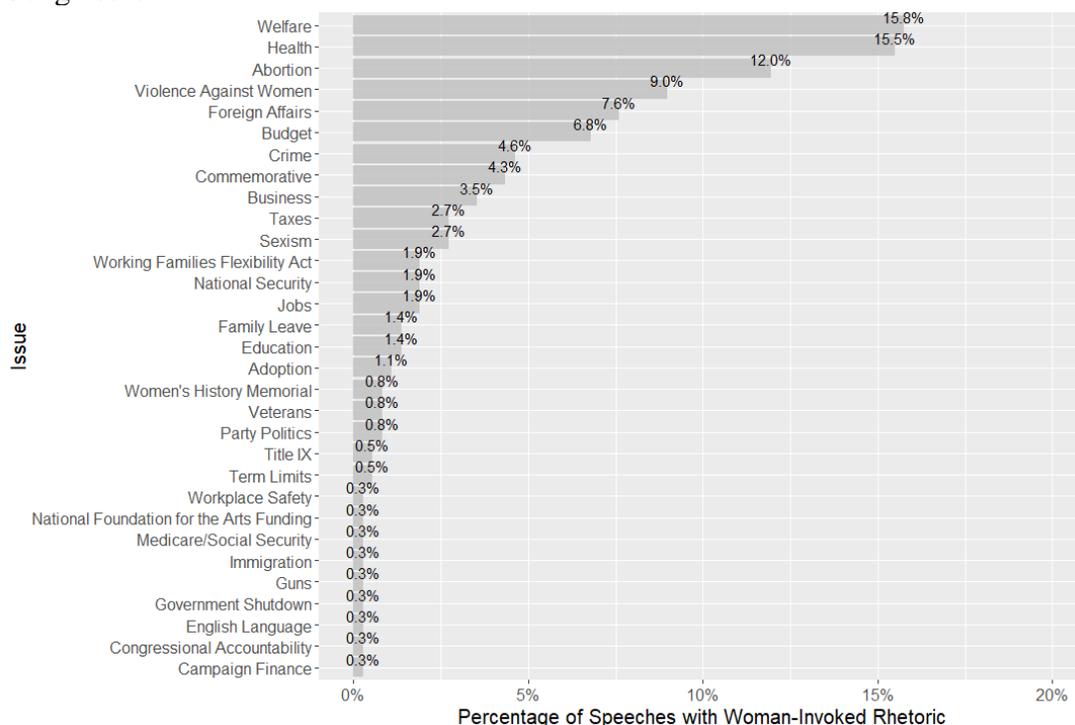
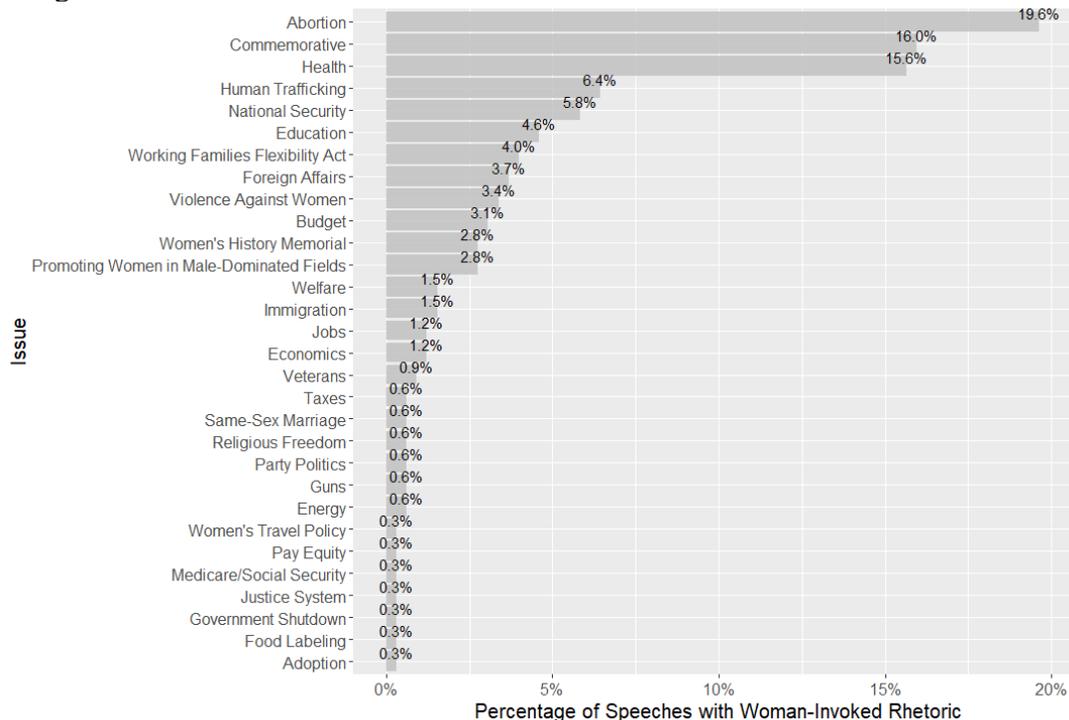


Figure 4: Issues Discussed in Woman-Invoked Rhetoric Speeches: 113th/114th Congresses



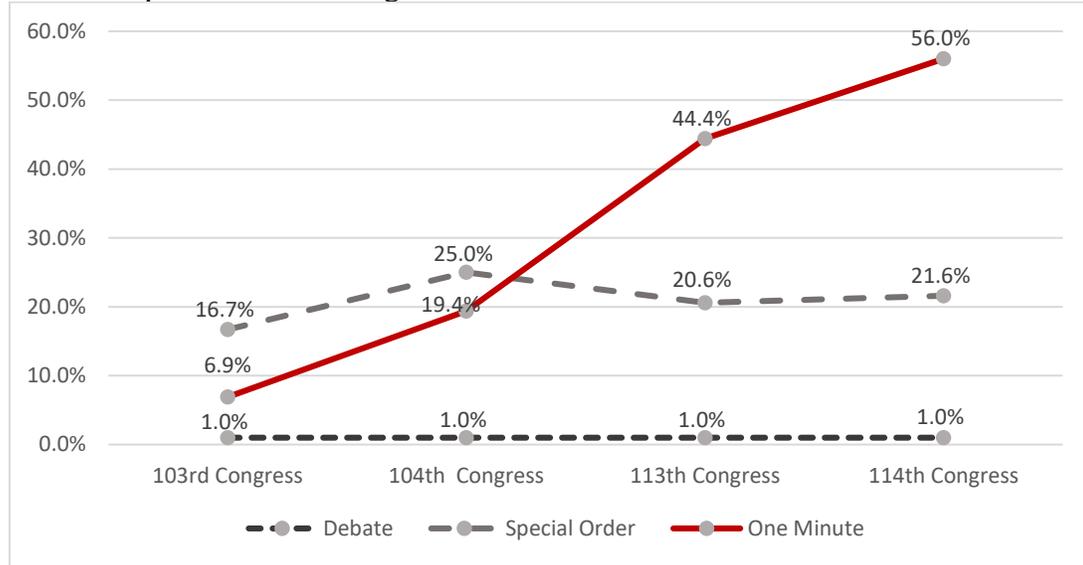
The issue most frequently discussed during the 103rd/104th Congresses was welfare (see Figure 3). The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), a top priority in the Republican “Contract with America,”¹⁹ passed a Republican-controlled Congress and was signed into law by President Clinton in 1996. While Republican women overwhelmingly supported welfare reform, the more moderate, senior Republican women were able “to temper or moderate some of the harsher effects of the proposed legislation and...to expand the legislation in a

¹⁹ The Contract with America, discussed further in Chapter 4, was a pledge led by Newt Gingrich and signed by Republican congressional candidates during the 1994 election that said they would work to enact ten conservative policies within their first 100 days of office, if Republicans gained control of the House. Welfare reform was a central component of the Contract with America. The ten policies in the pledge were: the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the Taking Back Our Streets Act, the Personal Responsibility Act, the Family Reinforcement Act, the American Dream Restoration Act, the National Security Restoration Act, the Senior Citizens Fairness Act, the Job Creation and Wage Enhancement Act, the Common Sense Legal Reform Act, and the Citizen Legislature Act.

way that many feminists would find desirable” (Carroll and Casey 2001, 130). Indeed, these Republican congresswomen – most significantly, Representatives Nancy Johnson, Connie Morella, and Olympia Snowe – fought to include provisions for childcare, child support, and child protection (Carroll and Casey 2001). Because many of these policies explicitly affected women – or “welfare mothers” – it is unsurprising that welfare was such a prominent issue for the Republican congresswomen engaging in woman-invoked rhetoric in the 104th Congress.

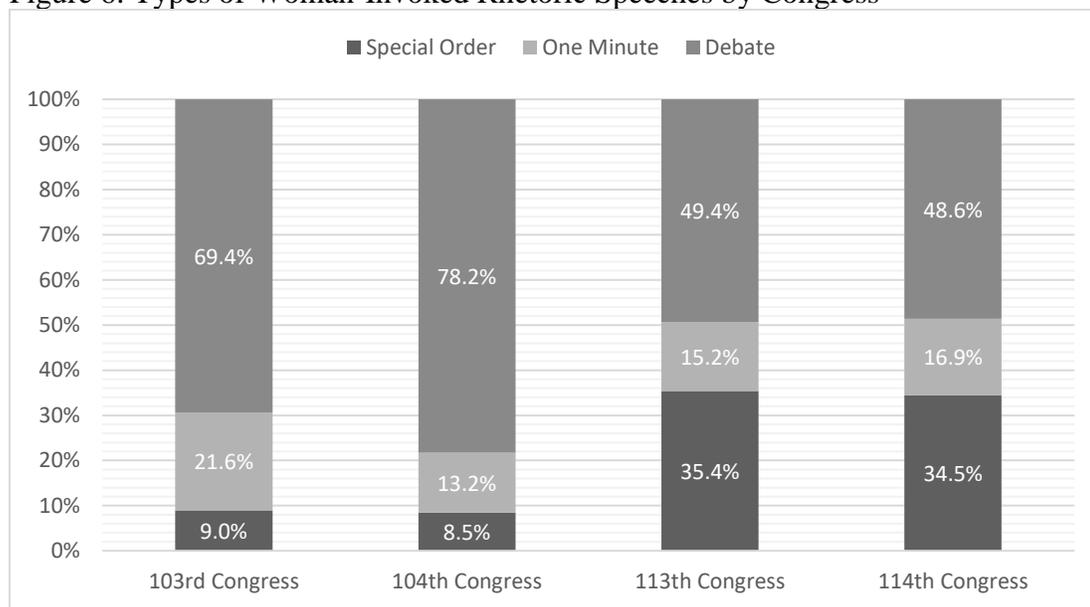
In the 113th and 114th Congresses, the large percentage of *commemorative* speeches is also notable and provides insight into the impact of party polarization among women in Congress. I labeled speeches “commemorative” when they symbolically represented women but were not connected to any piece of substantive legislation. Examples include support for a women’s organization, praise for women veterans, a recognition of women’s achievements, etc. As shown in Figure 5, commemorative speeches comprise an increasingly significant percentage of Republican women’s one-minute speeches. In the 114th Congress, the majority of the one-minute speeches in which Republican women engaged in woman-invoked rhetoric were commemorative.

Figure 5: “Commemorative” Speeches as a Percentage of Type of Woman-Invoked Rhetoric Speech in Each Congress



As mentioned previously, one-minute and special order speeches have been used frequently in recent years as party messaging tools. In support of Hypothesis 2, a comparison of types of speeches across these four Congresses reveals that Republican congresswomen in recent Congresses are engaging in woman-invoked rhetoric less often in policy debates and more frequently in one-minute and special order speeches (see Figure 6). Indeed, the percentage of special order speeches more than tripled from the 103rd/104th Congresses to the 113th/114th Congresses, suggesting that Republican congresswomen may be increasingly engaging in partisan messaging strategies.

Figure 6: Types of Woman-Invoked Rhetoric Speeches by Congress



N = 134 in 103rd; 234 in 104th; 178 in 113th; 148 in 114th

A qualitative analysis of commemorative speeches provides further evidence that the woman-invoked rhetoric used by Republican women on the House floor aligns with the Republican Party's broader gendered messaging tactics. In 2016, Cynthia Lummis (R-WY) scheduled a special order on the topic of Women's History Month. She was joined by two female and three male Republican colleagues – Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Renee Ellmers (R-NC), Ken Buck (R-CO), Matt Salmon (R-AZ), and Steve King (R-IA). Lummis opened the special order:

This month of March we are blessed with the opportunity to discuss the opportunities particularly presented by the Republican Party and the philosophies of the Republican Party as they relate to women, women's history and women's future and the opportunity to be involved in building women up and providing opportunities in the future, an opportunity culture that is shared by men and women to make sure that our homeland is safe and secure, to make sure that our families are in an environment that will be uplifting. These are some of the topics we will be discussing today.²⁰

²⁰ Representative Lummis (WY). "Women's History Month." 162:42. (March 16, 2016). p. H1404.

For the remaining 60 minutes of the speech, the Republican representatives emphasized their party's commitment to women.

The rhetoric used throughout this special order was directly aligned with national party messaging tactics at the time. After a loss in the 2012 presidential election in which Republican candidates faced large gender and racial voting gaps, the Republican National Committee (RNC) released an “autopsy report” titled the Growth and Opportunity Project. The report suggested that the GOP more actively reach out to women and minority voters, and it laid out specific recommendations on how to do that. One suggestion was to “use Women’s History Month as an opportunity to remind voters of the Republicans Party’s historical role in advancing the women’s rights movement.”²¹

The authors of this autopsy report – a team of Republican advisors and consultants – made clear that they “weren’t making recommendations only to the RNC.”²² Indeed, the theme of women’s “opportunity” could be seen across national and state party organizations: six²³ Republican committees in 2013 led a collaborative effort called Women on the Right UNITE to elect more Republican women to office; at the congressional level, the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) launched Project GROW (short for Growing Republican Opportunities for Women), which focused on candidate recruitment. That Lummis and her colleagues explicitly discussed Women’s History Month in a way that highlighted the GOP’s “opportunity

²¹ Barbour, Henry, Sally Bradshaw, Ari Fleischer, Zori Fonalledas, Glenn McCall. 2013. “Growth and Opportunity Project.” Republican National Committee.

²² Ibid.

²³ The six organizations were the Republican National Committee, National Republican Congressional Committee, National Republican Senatorial Committee, Republican Governors Association, Republican State Leadership Committee, and College Republican National Committee

culture” for women suggests that these speeches were part of a broader party messaging effort.

Changes in the use of woman-invoked rhetoric among Republican congresswomen can enhance our understanding of the gendered effects of party polarization. Indeed, the increasing use of special order speeches, the large percentage of commemorative speeches, and the alignment of these speeches with established party messaging strategies illustrate that Republican congresswomen are not only more ideologically conservative, but are also more *partisan* in the way they speak about women. In the following section, I present findings from in-depth case studies of the most frequently discussed issues, illustrating that this shift to a *partisan woman-invoked rhetoric* can be seen in the discussions of specific policies as well.

Reframing Conventional Women’s Issues: Abortion and Health

Despite little change over time in the frequency with which Republican congresswomen discuss conventional women’s issues in their woman-invoked rhetoric speeches, I do find significant shifts in the way these issues are framed. Abortion²⁴ and health have consistently been among the top three issues discussed in speeches containing woman-invoked rhetoric, together making up about one-third of these speeches. In what follows, I show the effects that party polarization and competition have had on the way these issues are framed by Republican women in Congress.

²⁴ Only domestic policies were coded as “abortion” issues. Abortion issues related to populations outside of the United States were coded as “foreign affairs.”

From Women's Decision to Women's Protection

While abortion has always been a controversial conventional women's issue, the framing of this issue by Republican congresswomen has evolved significantly over the past two decades. For one thing, many congresswomen in the early 1990s were explicitly pro-choice. Barbara Vucanovich (R-NV) takes note of this in her interview: "In the 103rd Congress, there were very few of us who were pro-life women."²⁵ Indeed, Marge Roukema (R-NJ) stated her support for the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act in a floor speech by emphasizing that "it is absolutely vital to protect a woman's ability to exercise her constitutional right to an abortion."²⁶ In support of the same bill, Connie Morella (R-MD) used the term "anti-choice" in a floor speech rather than "pro-life" to describe a protester who murdered a women's clinic doctor. She went on to say that "women must be able to safely and privately obtain medical services from health clinics."²⁷

Other Republican congresswomen, like Representative Helen Delich Bentley (R-NV), resented the fact that abortion was even discussed in the House of Representatives. In her interview with CAWP, Bentley argued, "I don't think it's an issue that belongs on the floor of Congress. I don't think it's an issue that belongs in political circles. And even though I was pro-life basically, I repeatedly told our people that we didn't need that issue tacked on every bill. I felt it did more people harm than it was good."²⁸

²⁵ Vucanovich, Barbara. (20 July 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

²⁶ Representative Roukema (NJ). "Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act of 1993." 140. (Nov. 18, 1993). p. H10090.

²⁷ Representative Morella (MD). "Pass the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act." 140. (March 11, 1993). p. H1175.

²⁸ Bentley, Helen Delich. (02 August 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

Even as the 104th Congress brought more pro-life women into the House, many of these conservative congresswomen were hesitant to engage on this particular issue. For example, when asked in an interview how she would describe her role in the abortion debate, Vucanovich responded, “Very reluctant. You know, I don’t like to get up and be confrontational. But somebody had to speak... On the Republican side, Ileana [Ros-Lehtinen] is pro-life, but she would never speak on the issue. She would always vote for the issue, but she wouldn’t speak on it.”²⁹ Indeed, only 2 (fewer than 1%) of Ros-Lehtinen’s 359 total speeches in the 103rd, 104th, 113th, and 114th Congresses were related to abortion, and only one of those included woman-invoked rhetoric. Representative Sue Myrick (R-NC) responded similarly to the same question: “Pretty much I just voted. I’m a pro-life person, I always have been, so I support that position. The concern I’ve always had on that issue is that it’s a no-win issue.”³⁰

These interviews with women members thus reveal what an analysis of floor speeches alone cannot: many conservative Republican women felt engaging in abortion debates was unproductive, despite holding policy positions that were consistent with the national party’s stances at the time. The 1992 National Republican Party Platform reads:

We believe the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed. We therefore reaffirm our support for a human life amendment to the Constitution, and we endorse legislation to make clear that the Fourteenth Amendment's protections apply to unborn children. We oppose using public revenues for abortion and will not fund organizations which advocate it. We commend those who provide alternatives to abortion by meeting the needs of mothers and offering adoption services. We reaffirm our support for appointment of judges who respect traditional family values and the sanctity of innocent human life.³¹

²⁹ Vucanovich, Barbara. (18 November 1997). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

³⁰ Myrick, Sue. (25 February 1998). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

³¹ “The Vision Shared: The Republican Platform, Uniting Our Family, Our Country, Our World.” August 17, 1992. The American Presidency Project: Political Party Platforms. University of California, Santa Barbara.

That moderate Republican women were most outspoken on this issue also means that the abortion narrative being put forth by women in the party explicitly deviated from official party stances.

That said, there were instances of more conservative pro-life women engaging in woman-invoked rhetoric when speaking on abortion. In these cases, women tended to invoke their own identities as mothers or grandmothers. For example, Representative Linda Smith (R-WA) supported the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 1996 in a floor speech: “As a mother and grandmother, it is mind boggling to imagine having labor induced, to be giving birth, only to have the opportunity to be a mother stopped in midstream.”³² Less often, conservative pro-life women talked about protecting women from pro-choice legislation. In her support of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act, Representative Andrea Seastrand (R-CA) said in a floor speech, “Mr. Speaker, today this body of Representatives decides one of the most profound moral debates in the history of our Nation. Our children will look upon this day to see if we stood for principle. Will we vote to *defend and protect the women and future children of this Nation?* Will we vote for principle over political party?”³³ [emphasis added]

This protection framework, used by only the most conservative women in the 1990s, dominates the abortion debate 20 years later. Republican congresswomen in the 113th and 114th Congresses are not only more ideologically conservative; they are also more homogenous in their policy stances, with every Republican woman identifying as

³² Representative Smith (WA). “Senate Amendments to H.R. 1833, Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act.” 142: 44. (March 27, 1996). p. H2927.

³³ Representative Seastrand (CA). “Discharging the Committee on the Judiciary from Further Consideration of the President’s Veto of H.R. 1833, Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 1995.” 142: 130. (Sept. 9, 1996). p. H10612.

pro-life. (In Chapter 4, I delve deeper into the role that ideological cohesion on this issue has played in helping to build and strengthen Republican women’s coalitions).

In 2011, an unlicensed Philadelphia abortion provider, Kermit Gosnell, made headlines across the nation when was convicted of murder and involuntary manslaughter.³⁴ Outcry ensued from both ends of the political spectrum as details of his illegal and unethical abortion practices were revealed. Democrats used this case as an argument for greater access to safe abortion, and Republicans used it to support stricter regulations. In a 2013 floor speech in which she advocated for the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, Michele Bachmann (R-MN) argued that the bill “not only protects the unborn, it protects the mom against the lethal practices of abortionists like Gosnell. And women deserve better than abortion.”³⁵

This protection framework is seen throughout abortion debates in the 114th and 114th Congresses.³⁶ In calling for the defunding of Planned Parenthood, Representative Vicky Hartzler (R-MO) argued that abortion is harmful not only to “babies,” but to women as well:

Planned Parenthood ended the beating hearts of these innocent victims while *deluding vulnerable women* that their choice wouldn't have any harmful consequences, and they did so with taxpayer funding, over \$500 million in 2011. This must stop. Abortion does have consequences. It destroys babies. *It harms women physically and emotionally*, and it harms men, too.³⁷ [emphasis added]

³⁴ Williams, R. Seth. January 14, 2011. “IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA CRIMINAL TRIAL DIVISION IN RE : MISC. NO. 0009901-2008 COUNTY INVESTIGATING : GRAND JURY XXIII.” Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report.

³⁵ Representative Bachmann (MN). “Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act.” 159: 87. (June 18, 2013). p. H3732.

³⁶ See Roberti (2017) for an analysis of how this type of framing is being used in regulatory abortion legislation at the state level.

³⁷ Representative Hartzler (MO). “Forty Years of Victims’ Legacy of Abortion.” 159: 7. (January 22, 2013). p. H211.

Representative Ann Wagner made a similar claim about Planned Parenthood in the 114th Congress, saying, “We must protect women and unborn children from these dangerous procedures that are designed to increase revenue for this group and profit from the destruction innocent life.”³⁸ And Martha Roby (R-AL), who describes herself as “unapologetically pro-life,” argued in her CAWP interview that abortion “has very harmful effects on the woman who made that decision.”³⁹ She said in a 2014 floor speech: “Recently, important legislative actions have been taken to defend the unborn and protect women from the brutality of late-term abortions. These include measures to tighten restrictions and raise health and safety standards for abortion providers.”⁴⁰

Importantly, tying their pro-life stance on abortion to the protection of women is consistent with both the policy positions and rhetorical strategy of the national Republican Party. The GOP’s 2012 party platform takes the same pro-life stance, but also includes an additional clause, stating, “We affirm the dignity of women by protecting the sanctity of human life. Numerous studies have shown that abortion endangers the health and wellbeing of women, and we stand firmly against it.”⁴¹

And, unlike the pro-life Republican congresswomen of the 103rd and 104th Congresses, many of those in the 113th and 114th Congresses believe that they should be the ones delivering this message to the public. House Republican Conference Chair, Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA), has been a strong advocate for changing the messengers of the party to better relate to women voters on every issue,

³⁸ Representative Wagner (MO). “Defund Planned Parenthood Act of 2015.” 161: 135. (July 21, 2013). p. H6163.

³⁹ Roby, Martha. (12 February 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁴⁰ Representative Roby (AL). “The Pro-Life Caucus.” 160:9. (January 15, 2014). H454.

⁴¹ “We Believe in America: 2012 Republican Platform.” August 27, 2012. The American Presidency Project: Political Party Platforms. University of California, Santa Barbara.

including abortion. In her interview, she stated, “Anyone who finds themselves in a position where they are even considering an abortion is in a very difficult situation. And so, from a woman’s perspective, it’s very important that we’re a part in leading that discussion.”⁴² Representative Renee Ellmers (R-NC) further discussed Republican women’s role in the abortion debate in terms of party strategy:

When an older man is leading on an issue that affects women, it just doesn’t connect. It tends to cause people to question, “Do they even understand that this is a woman’s issue?” Now, I maintain, and so do all my colleagues, that every issue is a woman’s issue... But [abortion is] specific to women and our bodies... The perception is: “A man is up there telling me what I should be doing with my body.” And that has never gone over well. And those are things that, I think, in the Republican Party, we should be looking to change. And so, it is very important that women are out there having the discussions.⁴³

That Republican congresswomen view themselves as party messengers on the issue of abortion suggests an evolution not only in the claims made by Republican women, but also in their relationship to the party’s broader electoral goals.

Overall, this analysis reveals: 1) a decrease in ideological diversity among Republican women’s positions on abortion, 2) a move toward framing anti-abortion stances as women’s representation/protection, and 3) an increased desire among Republican congresswomen to position themselves as spokespersons for their party. The implications of these findings, including the evolving role of women in Conference leadership positions, are analyzed further in Chapters 4 and 5.

⁴² McMorris Rodgers, Cathy. (04 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁴³ Ellmers, Renee. (02 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

From Women's Health to Women's Economic Empowerment

Health is another area in which Republican congresswomen have consistently talked about women, with health speeches comprising about 15% of woman-invoked rhetoric speeches in both of these time periods. In coding for this project, I included both issues directly related to health (such as cancer research funding) as well as issues related to healthcare reform (such as the repeal of the Affordable Care Act) as health issues. Just as with the abortion issue, I find there are notable changes in rhetoric over time.

Under the broader umbrella of health issues, healthcare reform was a salient topic during both of these congressional eras. Introduced in March 1993 and defeated in 1994, the Health Security Act (informally referred to as “Hillarycare” by many Republicans) was a hotly debated issue in the 103rd Congress. And of course, once healthcare reform passed in 2010 in the form of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (also known as “Obamacare”), Republican members of the House attempted to repeal or reform it numerous times. As this issue was most salient in the 113th Congress (Rocco and Haeder 2018), I focus my analysis of the changes in health rhetoric on the 103rd and 113th Congresses.

In both the 103rd and 113th Congresses, Republican women denounced the Democratic healthcare plans and talked specifically about the negative economic impact these pieces of legislation would have on women. Representative Nancy Johnson (R-CT) argued against the employer mandate provision in the Clinton health plan, saying, “For women, this mandate will mean isolation, it will mean dead-end jobs, it will mean stagnation. For women, that bifurcated premium structure is terminal to their dreams.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Representative Johnson (CT). “Health Care Reform.” 140. (June 16, 1994). p. H4651.

Representative Jan Meyers (R-KS) further emphasized what she viewed as an economic hardship for women business-owners:

Mr. Speaker, as the ranking member of the Small Business Committee, I am concerned about the harm we will inflict on the 6.5 million women-owned small businesses if we endorse President Clinton's employer mandate as a part of health care reform. Women collectively employ more people in the United States than the Fortune 500 companies employ worldwide... We should assist our small women-owned businesses, not burden them with further mandates.⁴⁵

A similar economic frame was used by Republican women throughout the 113th Congress to highlight the gendered implications of the Affordable Care Act. Yet, notably, this later rhetoric also included references to a “war on women.”

Following the 2010 midterms, in which Republicans flipped 63 seats in the House, Democratic politicians and feminist activists increasingly engaged in rhetoric that accused Republicans of engaging in a “war on women.” Recognizing this as an effective tactic, Republicans developed a strategy to defend themselves against such rhetoric after losing the 2012 presidential election. In their 2012 autopsy report, the RNC recommended:

Republicans should develop a more aggressive response to Democrat rhetoric regarding a so-called “war on women.” In 2012, the Republican response to this attack was muddled, and too often the attack went undefended altogether. We need to actively combat this, better prepare our surrogates, and not stand idly by while the Democrats pigeonhole us using false attacks. There are plenty of liberal policies that negatively impact women, and it is incumbent upon the party to expose those and relentlessly attack Democrats using that framework.⁴⁶

Indeed, many Republican women used this tactic when engaging in healthcare debates. Diane Black (R-TN), for example, argued against a specific employer mandate

⁴⁵ Representative Meyers (KS). “Employer Mandate Would Harm Women-Owned Businesses.” 140. (June 21, 1994). p. H4730.

⁴⁶ Barbour, Henry, Sally Bradshaw, Ari Fleischer, Zori Fonalledas, Glenn McCall. 2013. “Growth and Opportunity Project.” Republican National Committee.

provision that defined fulltime employees as those who work 30 hours per week. She said in a floor speech, “For all the talk about the supposed ‘war on women,’ it is ObamaCare that is waging a war against female workers. That is why I am proud to stand in support of women across this country to repeal this arbitrary, 30-hour, full-time workweek.”⁴⁷

Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) agreed: “I have to tell you, it really is a war on jobs. It is a war on women...63 percent of those affected by the adverse impact of the President’s health care law are women.”⁴⁸ Thus, I find that Republican congresswomen are not only making policy arguments in their speeches related to health; they are also actively engaged in responding to gendered attacks against their party as a whole.

Moreover, while a gendered economic frame is present in the health speeches from both congressional eras, I also find this frame is much more prevalent in the 113th Congress (see Figure 7). I argue that this discrepancy exists for two main reasons. First, in addition to financial implications, women in the 103rd Congress emphasized quality of care while women in the 113th Congress stressed economic choice and empowerment. Deborah Pryce (R-OH) notes in her 1995 interview that Republican congresswomen “firmly believed that the Clinton healthcare plan was a negative, not just for the country, but for women in particular. If you look at the fact that you had one physician and only one, and most families have a pediatrician and an OB/GYN and a general [physician]... We felt it was very negative. From what I can remember of it, we encouraged others to make floor statements to that effect.”⁴⁹ And indeed, Republican congresswomen did frame their speeches in those terms. In a floor speech, Nancy Johnson (R-CT) said:

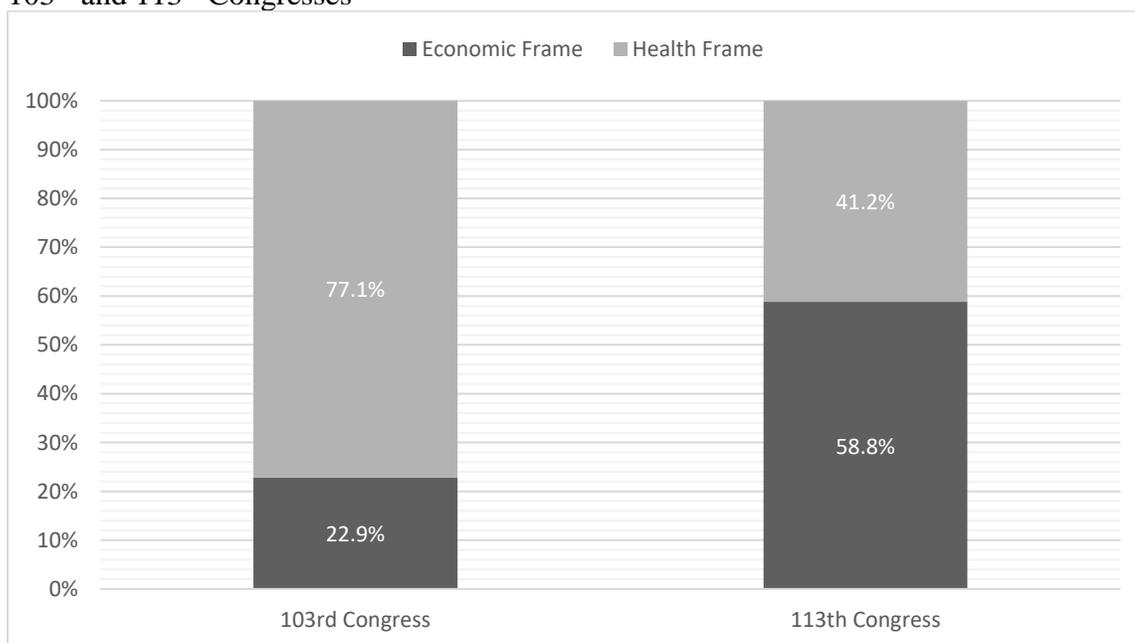
⁴⁷ Representative Black (TN). “Save American Workers Act of 2014.” 160: 54. (April 3, 2014). p. H2866.

⁴⁸ Representative Blackburn (TN). “Save American Workers Act of 2014.” 160: 54. (April 3, 2014). p. H2868.

⁴⁹ Pryce, Deborah. (28 September 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

Most doctors believe that women need to have a baseline mammogram at the age of 35 and should have one every year thereafter from the age of 40 on. Now, the document to which my colleague referred, the President's health plan, denies women coverage for mammograms until they reach age 50 and then provides every 2 years until age 65. Many, many women in America enjoy much better insurance benefits than that.⁵⁰

Figure 7: Economic vs. Health Frames in “Health” Woman-Invoked Rhetoric Speeches: 103rd and 113th Congresses



N = 35 in 103rd; 34 in 113th

This rhetoric differs from that used in the 113th Congress, which often framed women as the financial decision-makers of their home. Representative Elise Stefanik (R-NY), for example, underscored the importance of listening to women’s perspectives on healthcare reform: “Eighty percent of healthcare decisions are made by women, whether it’s for their spouse, whether it’s for their kids or their elderly parents. And we see this even on the constituent services basis when oftentimes if an elderly constituent is

⁵⁰ Representative Johnson (CT). “Health Care Debate.” 140. (March 16, 1994). p. H1423

struggling working through the bureaucracy it's sometimes the daughter or daughter-in-law making the phone call more often than not."⁵¹ Indeed, this statistic was repeatedly used in debates on the House floor to argue that the Affordable Care Act undermined women's financial choices. Renee Ellmers (R-NC) said in a floor speech:

Nationwide, women in this country make the health care decisions. Over 80 percent of the health care decisions that are made are made by women. That means that wives, mothers, or single women who are choosing health care coverage for themselves have now been told by the President and the Democrats who voted for this bill, and who knew full well that you wouldn't be able to keep your health care plan if you liked it: Do you know what? What you chose for you and your family--what was affordable to you--is not adequate, and we know better than you do for your family.⁵²

This rhetorical shift from quality of care to economic empowerment is consistent with shifts in Republican Party healthcare messaging more broadly. The 2012 GOP platform, for example, placed emphasis on efforts to “empower consumer choice” in healthcare.⁵³ That Republican congresswomen have worked to gender this narrative is also notable and, as discussed further in Chapter 4, can be attributed to a collective effort among Republican women to ensure that their party is viewed as welcoming to women.

A second reason economic frames were more prevalent in the 113th Congress is that Republican congresswomen discussed healthcare reform more frequently in their “health” woman-invoked rhetoric speeches than they did in the 103rd Congress. Figure 8 shows that less than 30% of the health speeches containing woman-invoked rhetoric made by Republican women in the 103rd Congress were related to healthcare reform. Instead, Republican women emphasized other health issues. For example, Representative

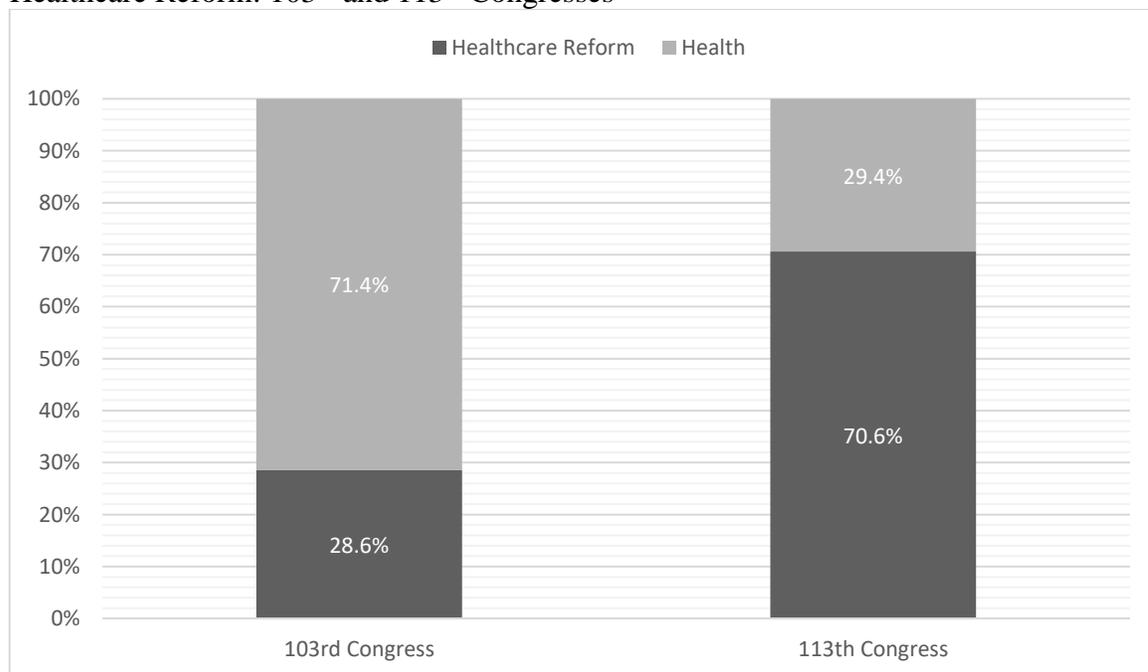
⁵¹ Stefanik, Elise. (20 October 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁵² Representative Ellmers (NC). “ObamaCare.” 159: 170. (December 3, 2013). p. H7437.

⁵³ “We Believe in America: 2012 Republican Platform.” August 27, 2012. The American Presidency Project: Political Party Platforms. University of California, Santa Barbara.

Olympia Snowe (R-ME) spoke in support of the Minority Health Improvement Act of 1994, arguing that “For far too long, at the Federal level, women’s health has been neglected.”⁵⁴ Sharing the same sentiment, Connie Morella (R-MD) underscored the importance of congressional action on women’s health, saying, “Without leadership from Congress, women's needs in the HIV epidemic will continue to be given less priority, and women's programs will continue to be underfunded... We are running out of time for a generation of young women--we cannot afford to wait.”⁵⁵ While women in the 113th Congress spoke of women’s health concerns, like breast cancer and lupus research funding, these types of speeches were overshadowed by discussions of healthcare reform (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Percentage of “Health” Woman-Invoked Rhetoric Speeches Pertaining to Healthcare Reform: 103rd and 113th Congresses



N = 35 in 103rd; 34 in 113th

⁵⁴ Representative Snowe (ME). “Minority Health Improvement Act of 1994.” 140. (May 23, 1994). p. H3826.

⁵⁵ Representative Morella (MD). “Women and AIDS.” 140. (June 10, 1993). p. H3439.

Overall, this analysis of health rhetoric reveals an important shift in the way Republican congresswomen are invoking women in their speeches. Republican women are increasingly using gendered narratives that align with the broader economic and healthcare messages of the Republican Party. A limitation of this analysis, of course, is the lack of comparison across gender and party lines. Without such a comparison, it is unclear whether an increased discussion of healthcare reform is simply a general trend among all members of Congress. Still, the central takeaway here is not whether or how Republican congresswomen differ from their colleagues, but rather, how their rhetoric has changed over time and what this might mean for women's representation within the context of the Republican Party. It is this question that I continue to investigate and build on throughout this dissertation.

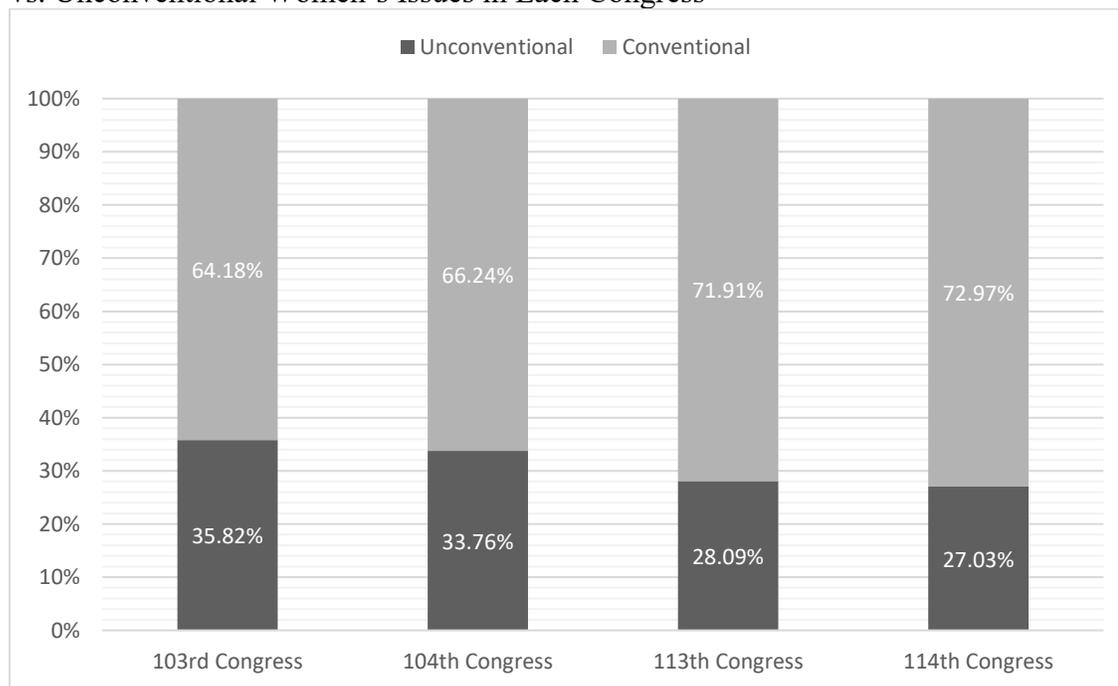
Unconventional Women's Issues

While Republican congresswomen primarily discussed conventional women's issues when engaging in woman-invoked rhetoric in floor speeches, it is also important to understand how they are speaking about issues that are not commonly perceived as "women's issues" and how this has changed over time. The fact that Republicans are viewed by voters as more competent on "masculine" issues (Huddy and Terklidsen 1993; Winter 2010) like national security and crime (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik et. al. 2003) suggests that Republican women could benefit from discussing these issues in ways that Democratic women may not. Understanding how Republican women engage in gendered discussions of issues not typically deemed "women's issues" and how this has changed

over time can also give scholars better insight into the effects of party competition and polarization in Congress.

Figure 9 shows the percentages of “conventional” and “unconventional” women’s issues discussed in woman-invoked rhetoric speeches in each Congress. Once again, contrary to Hypothesis 1, I find that, when invoking women in their speeches, Republican women in recent Congresses are not more likely than those in earlier Congresses to discuss unconventional women’s issues. Given this, I turn to an in-depth, qualitative content analysis of these speeches to determine which issues were being discussed most frequently and how these narratives have changed over time.

Figure 9: Percentages of Woman-Invoked Rhetoric Speeches Pertaining to Conventional vs. Unconventional Women’s Issues in Each Congress



N = 134 in 103rd; 234 in 104th; 178 in 113th; 148 in 114th

Figure 10 and Figure 11 show the types of unconventional women’s issues discussed in speeches containing woman-invoked rhetoric in the 103rd/104th Congresses

and 113th/114th Congresses, respectively. In both congressional eras, issues related to foreign policy were most frequently discussed. Foreign affairs (defined as issues dealing with other countries, excluding national defense/military issues) made up 7.6% of these speeches in the 103rd/104th Congresses (See Figure 10). In the 113th/114th Congresses, national security (defined as issues related specifically to the military or national defense) comprised 5.8% of these speeches (See Figure 11). Indeed, as Sara Angevine (2017) finds, women in Congress, regardless of party, are more likely than their male counterparts to introduce “women’s foreign policy” legislation. Given this, I focus my analysis on issues of foreign policy.

Figure 10: Unconventional Women’s Issues: 103rd/104th Congresses

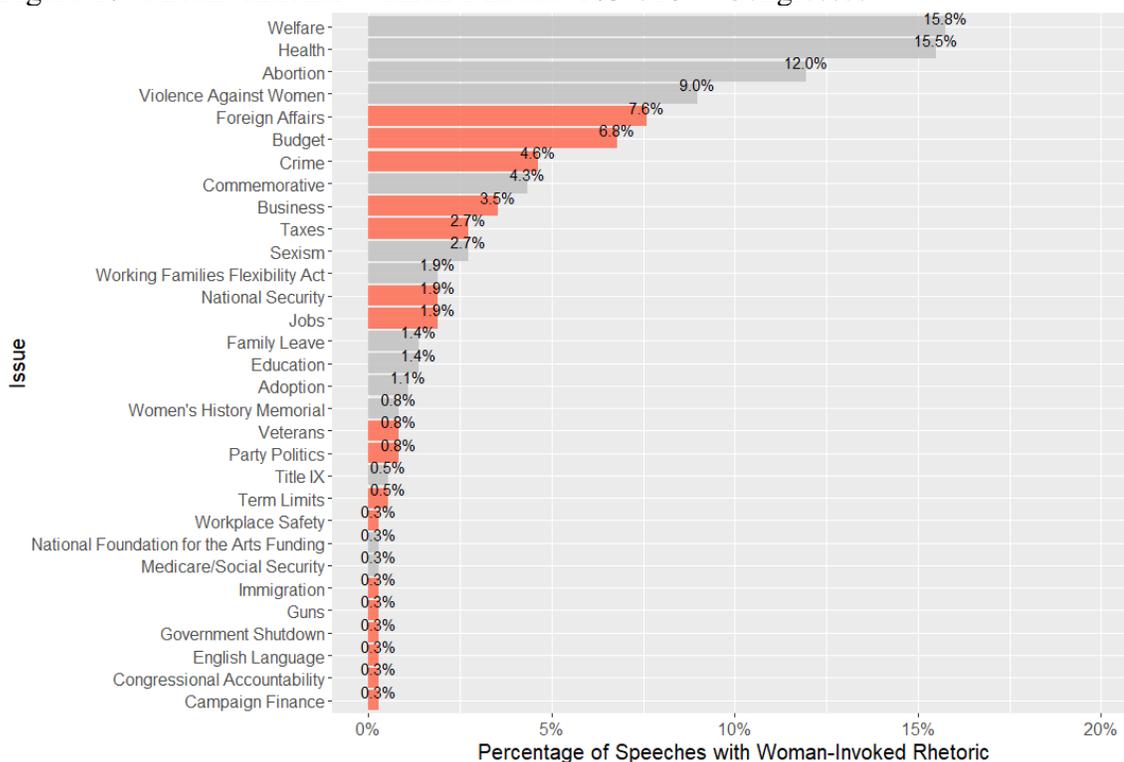
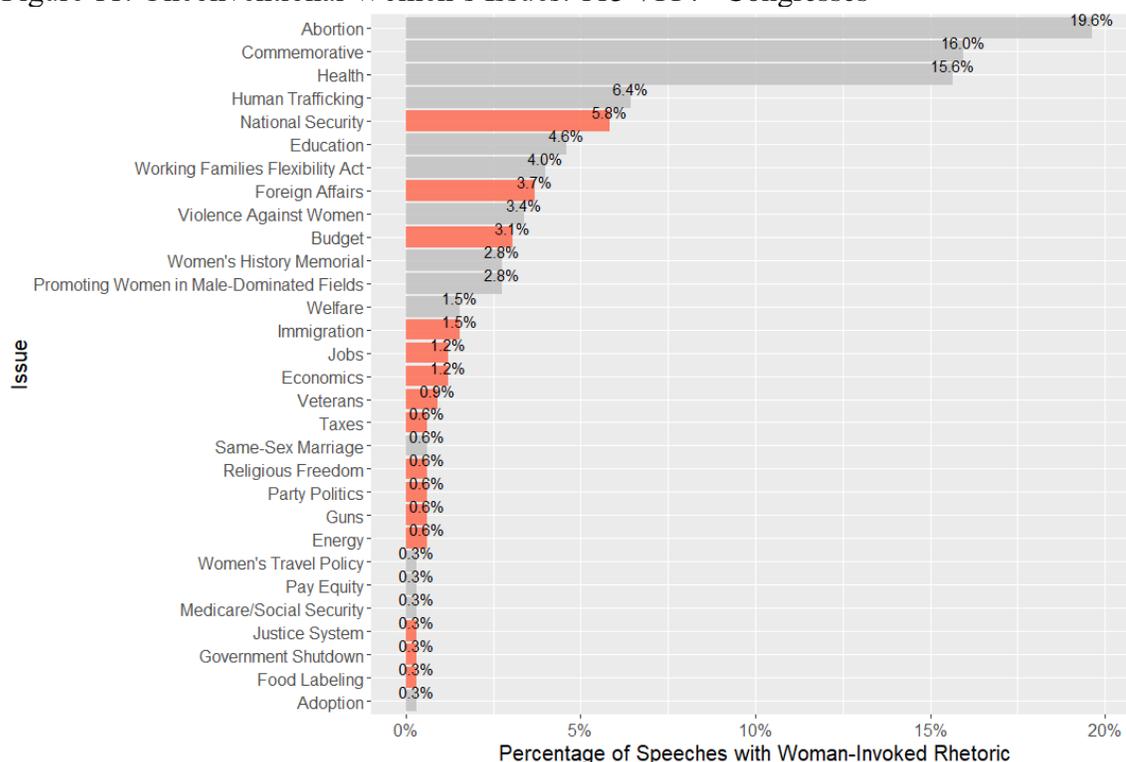


Figure 11: Unconventional Women's Issues: 113th/114th Congresses

Reframing Foreign Policy: From Women's Rights to Security Moms

Changes in the frequency and framing of foreign affairs and national security issues support the idea that Republican congresswomen are increasingly engaging in partisan woman-invoked rhetoric. In the earlier Congresses, when Republican women invoked women in foreign affairs speeches, they typically did so to bring light to conventional women's issues within the realm of foreign policy. These more moderate congresswomen, for example, advocated for women's literacy; fought against female genital mutilation; and condemned the United States' global gag rule, "which prohibits aid to foreign nongovernmental organizations that engage in abortion services or advocacy with non-U.S. funds" (Barot and Cohen 2015). Jan Meyers (R-KS) spoke out against the defunding of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in a 1993 floor speech:

Defunding of UNFPA has not prevented a single coerced abortion in Communist China. What it has prevented is the provision of voluntary family planning services to thousands and millions of women in poor countries. It has prevented poor women from acquiring the knowledge and the ability to have only the number of children they want, when they want them. It has prevented women from getting the information they needed to save their lives, as a pregnancy killed them.⁵⁶

Indeed, conventional women's issues were discussed in 24 of the 28 (85.7%) woman-invoked rhetoric speeches related to foreign affairs in the 103rd/104th Congresses, and abortion was specifically referenced in 21 (75%) of the speeches. The centrality of the abortion debate in foreign affairs speeches and the deep divide between pro-choice and pro-life Republican women suggests that there was no collective gendered narrative put forth by Republican women on the issue of foreign affairs. For example, while pro-life women were less vocal on this issue, they would, at times, take the opposite stance on foreign affairs issues as pro-choice Republican women. In a 1995 floor speech, Seastrand (R-CA) used the issue of sex-selective abortion to condemn foreign governments, arguing, "The Chinese population control policy forces women to have abortions. I can think of few established policies that are more antiwoman or policies that are making women victims."⁵⁷ In the later Congresses, we see a shift in the way foreign affairs issues are framed, as well as a more homogenous message from Republican congresswomen on foreign policy issues more generally.

In the 113th and 114th Congresses, none of the 12 foreign affairs speeches in which Republican congresswomen invoked women were related to conventional women's issues. Instead, these speeches were in line with Republican Party policy

⁵⁶ Representative Meyers (KS). "State Department, USIA, and Related Agencies Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994-1995." 140. (June 16, 1993). p. H3675.

⁵⁷ Representative Seastrand (CA). "American Overseas Interests Act of 1995." 141: 87. (May 24, 1995). p. H5498.

stances and were used mainly to criticize the actions of the Democratic president and the United Nations (UN). For example, Florida representative and Cuban-American, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, condemned President Obama's visit to Cuba, arguing that women are still victims of human rights violations:

In December 2015, President Obama said in an interview that he would go to Cuba only when the human rights situation on the island had improved. Well, Mr. Speaker, this is what human rights looks like on the island, the valiant Ladies in White, who walk peacefully in Cuba to their church—and you see one being dragged away in the lower corner. This is what happens to them every week in Castro's Cuba. They are harassed. They are beaten. This is not what an improved human rights situation looks like at all, Mr. President.⁵⁸

And in a 2015 speech, Virginia Foxx spoke out against a UN resolution that condemned the actions of the Israeli government: “Well, last week, the United Nations really went off the deep end when its Commission on the Status of Women adopted a resolution that singles out and condemns Israel for violating the rights of women. That's right...It accused the only country in the Middle East that fully respects the rights of women with violating the rights of women.”⁵⁹

More often, Republican congresswomen in the later Congresses invoked women in foreign policy issues that dealt specifically with national security. In these speeches, Republican women often defended or supported military intervention by arguing that governments and terrorist organizations hurt women. Mia Love (R-UT) said in a 2015 speech, “Iran is a snake in the grass. Its leaders have made it very clear that they want to implement sharia law, not freedom. Iran does not value human life the way we do. They have actually shown that they are willing to support terrorists. They have shown that they

⁵⁸ Representative Ros-Lehtinen (FL). ““Ladies in White and President Obama's Trip to Cuba.” 162:44. (March 21, 2014). H1467.

⁵⁹ Representative Foxx (NC). “The Hypocrisy of the United Nations.” 161:48. (March 23, 2015). H1810.

are willing to hurt their own women and children.”⁶⁰ This differs significantly from the rhetoric used in the earlier Congresses: only 1.9% of woman-invoked rhetoric speeches in the 103rd and 104th Congresses pertained to national security, and the majority of those speeches (4 of 7) centered on supporting women in the military. For example, in support of the conference report on the National Defense Authorization Act, Tillie Fowler (R-FL) said in a 1993 speech: “There are a number of important achievements in this year's bill. We have provided a much-deserved cost-of-living increase to our service personnel, enhanced critical logistics capabilities, and moved forward on our next generation of submarines. I am also especially pleased that we have opened up many new opportunities to women in the military.”⁶¹

Notably, one gendered national security narrative present in both congressional eras was the idea that defense issues are inherently important to women *as mothers*. In the 103rd and 104th Congresses, it was the most conservative Republican women who made this connection between security and motherhood. For example, Chenoweth (R-ID) argued in a floor speech that President Clinton did not pass what she called “the mother’s test”:

I guess my major claim to fame is the fact that I am a mother. I am a mother of a military man who would respond to the command of his Commander in Chief, because that is the way he has been raised. But my heart breaks to think of mothers across this Nation having to let their sons and daughters go because of a President who does not understand what his role is and the role of the military, his responsibility as Commander in Chief; because, since the beginning of civilization, mothers have been willing to send their sons off to war to protect the interests of the country or the tribe or the community, to preserve the peace and

⁶⁰ Representative Love (UT). “Imminent Threats to Our National Security.” 161:109. (July 14, 2015). p. H5155.

⁶¹ Representative Fowler (FL). “Conference Report on H.R. 2401, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1994.” 140. (November 15, 1993). H9647.

tranquility of their existence, to make sure that freedom and liberty will reign for their future generation. That silent mother's test.⁶²

With the increase in conservative women elected to Congress, this motherhood narrative became more prominent in the 113th and 114th Congresses. During the special order on national security scheduled by RWPC chair, Renee Ellmers (R-NC), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) said, “Madam Speaker, when you talk about issues that are women's issues, right now national security is at the top of the heap. As we have talked about soccer moms and Walmart moms and all of these other iterations and descriptions during the years, right now we are looking at a category of security moms because the issue of security is what mothers are talking about.”⁶³ In her interview with CAWP, Kristi Noem (R-SD) delved deeper into the reasoning behind her focus on national security, arguing that women bring an important perspective to this issue specifically because they are mothers:

Every mom in the country, their number one priority is that their kids are safe. And that is central to the discussion that we need to have when it comes to national security and our military. And that perspective has to always be interjected into these conversations that we have, whether we are talking about a new next generation bomber or if we are talking about adequately training and equipping our military. That mom’s perspective should be in that discussion, too. And it’s always made it a much more fruitful conversation.⁶⁴

This shift to a focus on “security moms” also shines light on the effects of party competition. As Susan J. Carroll (2008) notes, the “security mom” – a new, post-September 11th female voter – garnered national media attention during the George W. Bush administration and the 2004 presidential election. According to media reports, security moms were the swing voters candidates should be working to sway; they were

⁶² Representative Chenoweth (ID). “Bosnia and the Budget.” 141:194. (December 7, 1995). p. H14234.

⁶³ Representative Blackburn (TN). “Imminent Threats to Our National Security.” 161: 109. (July 14, 2015). p. H5156.

⁶⁴ Noem, Kristi. (17 November 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

white, married mothers concerned about future terrorist attacks and their children's safety. However, as Carroll (2008) finds, the claim that security moms were swing voters was largely unfounded. Ideologically conservative and solidly Republican, the security mom voted overwhelmingly for Bush in the 2004 election. Nevertheless, the portrayal of this group of women as swing voters gave Bush an opportunity "to appear to be responsive to women voters without making specific commitments that he might have had to follow through on once elected" (Carroll 2008, 87). As congressional Republicans today work to defend their party against claims of a "Republican war on women," speaking as and on behalf of security moms allows them to advocate for conservative policies while simultaneously claiming to represent women.

Importantly, women in the 113th /114th Congresses were not simply speaking differently than women in the 103rd /104th Congresses about foreign policy issues – they were also speaking collectively, as women. First, the narratives they used were increasingly consistent both with one another and with the positions of the Republican Party more broadly. Second, several of the national security speeches were part of the 2015 RWPC special order, in which seven⁶⁵ Republican congresswomen joined Renee Ellmers to make a collective argument about why conservative stances on national security are important to women. In Chapter 4, I elaborate on the significance of the RWPC and its role in building and advancing a unified, gendered voice among Republican congresswomen. Overall, this analysis of foreign policy speeches supports the notion that the woman-invoked rhetoric used by Republican congresswomen is increasingly partisan.

⁶⁵ The Republican women who participated in the July 2015 special order on national security were: Diane Black, Marsha Blackburn, Vicky Hartzler, Mia Love, Cynthia Lummis, Martha McCally, and Ann Wagner.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I conducted a study of floor speech rhetoric to examine changes in the gendered claims made by Republican congresswomen over the past two decades. My quantitative data show there has been little change over time in both the frequency with which Republican congresswomen invoke women in their floor speeches and the issues discussed in those speeches. Nevertheless, a qualitative analysis of speeches and interviews with members unveils the emergence of what I call *partisan woman-invoked rhetoric* among Republican congresswomen. Specifically, I show that the rhetoric used by Republican congresswomen is increasingly aligned with their party's policy platform and broader messaging tactics.

I find, for instance, an increasing use of special order speeches as well as a tendency to use one-minute speeches to symbolically commemorate women, which is consistent with the national party's strategic recommendations for reaching out to women voters. Moreover, I show that the rhetoric used by Republican congresswomen in abortion, health, and foreign policy debates has become increasingly consistent with the policy platform and messaging strategies of the GOP. Finally, as the Republican women elected to Congress have become more ideologically homogenous, they are also more unified in the messages they put forth. In the following chapter, I continue to test the theory of partisan woman-invoked rhetoric by examining if and how the claims made by Republican congresswomen align with the cultural norms of the Republican Party.

CHAPTER 3 – CULTURALLY SPEAKING: MOTHERHOOD RHETORIC AND IDENTITY CLAIMS

American political parties, like most institutions, have developed their own internal cultural norms. Contrary to the notion that the Republican and Democratic parties are mirror images of one another, literature on party culture has shown that they are in fact two different entities with distinct rules and dynamics (Freeman 1986; 1987; Grossman and Hopkins 2015; 2016). Cultural differences between the parties stem from differences in their electoral base: while Republicans garner most of their support from “social majorities or pluralities such as white voters, Protestants, suburbanites, and (heterosexual) married voters,” the Democratic Party is comprised of a coalition of “racial, religious, economic, and sexual minorities” (Grossman and Hopkins 2015, 125-126). As a result, differences exist in the value the parties place on social identities and the way they approach group interests.

As Grossman and Hopkins (2015; 2016) argue, Democratic politicians tend to embrace group identity politics as they work to address the specific policy concerns of various groups of constituents. Republicans, on the other hand, focus on broad, ideological principles – such as limited government, personal responsibility, and family values – while rejecting the premise that members of different social groups have specific policy interests. Still, as Freeman (1986) notes, while the Republican Party “officially ignores group characteristics, ...it is obvious that it does pay attention to them when it feels the need to cater to the interest of the voting public in a particular group” (336). Scholars have noted, for example, that the GOP will showcase women as speakers at their national conventions in order to appeal to women voters (Freeman 1986; 1993; Och

2018; Sanbonmatsu 2004). In Congress, too, Republican women have often been tapped by party leadership to speak on certain topics.

From a messaging standpoint, the tension between the Republican Party's explicit rejection of identity politics and its desire to reach out to women presents a challenge for Republican congresswomen. On the one hand, their gender identity is viewed as an asset to the party, with potential to combat gendered Democratic attacks and help close the gender gap; on the other hand, emphasizing gender identity can be a turn-off to a conservative base that rejects identity politics and values ideological purity (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018; Grossman and Hopkins 2016).

One way Republican women have addressed this tension is by embracing conservative views on gender roles and speaking about themselves as mothers (Wineinger, forthcoming). Perhaps the most recent and well-known example of this is Sarah Palin's use of motherhood rhetoric. Palin, 2008 Republican vice presidential nominee and the face of the Tea Party Movement, frequently referred to herself as a tough "hockey mom" and a "mama grizzly" who would fiercely defend her cubs. In doing so, Palin spoke to voters in a way that centered her own, individual experiences as a mother and presented those mothering experiences as vital to the realm of conservative politics and policymaking. This is also consistent with findings that show some conservative Republican women in Congress approach women's issues from the standpoint of traditional gender roles and religious values (Swers and Larson 2005).

In Chapter 2, I found that, compared to the 1990s, the gendered rhetoric deployed in Republican congresswomen's floor speeches has become more explicitly aligned with both the policy platform and messaging strategies of the Republican Party. I illustrated

how ideological cohesion among Republican women and increasing party competition between Democrats and Republicans has fueled this change in rhetoric. In this chapter, I ask: How, if at all, does the woman-invoked rhetoric used by Republican congresswomen align with the cultural norms of the Republican Party, and how has this changed over time? Given the Republican Party's cultural emphasis on traditional gender roles (Barnes and Cassese 2018), family values (Alphonso 2018; Cooper 2017), and individualism (Freeman 1986; Grossman and Hopkins 2015; 2016), I expect to see Republican women in Congress simultaneously reject group identity politics while increasingly speaking about themselves as women and mothers.

The Politics of Conservative Motherhood

In her now infamous speech at the 2008 Republican National Convention, Alaska Governor Sarah Palin accepted the vice presidential nomination, saying, "I was just your average hockey mom and signed up for the PTA. I love those hockey moms. You know, they say the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull? Lipstick."¹ By the time she and John McCain lost the general election, Palin had become a force in American politics. The Tea Party Movement – a conservative backlash to the election of President Barack Obama – had embraced Palin, and by the 2010 midterms, she had helped to mobilize the activists and candidates that brought a Tea Party wave to Congress.

Central to Palin's politics has always been her identity as a mother. Speaking in 2010 to members of the Susan B. Anthony List, a pro-life women's organization, Palin compared conservative mothers to "the mama grizzly bears that rise up on their hind legs

¹ Transcript. Sept. 3, 2008. "Palin's Speech at the Republican National Convention." The New York Times.

when somebody's coming to attack their cubs.”² “You thought pit bulls were tough?” she said, “You don't want to mess with the mama grizzlies.”³ As Ronnee Schreiber (2016) has observed, Palin's presentation of motherhood has resonated with conservative women activists, who must grapple with their ideological belief in traditional gender roles while simultaneously being politically engaged in the public sphere. Tea Party women activists, many of them housewives who felt called to political action for the first time in their lives, have also deployed “mama grizzly” rhetoric in advocating for limited government and conservative economic policies (Beail and Longworth 2013; Deckman 2016).

Importantly, though, Palin's emphasis on motherhood is not a new phenomenon in conservative politics. Women have long played a significant role on the Right, often driven explicitly by their desire to preserve traditional heterosexual gender roles and white constructions of “family values” (McRae 2018; Nickerson 2012; Rymph 2006). Michelle Nickerson (2012) details the politics of what she calls “housewife populism” – a post-war conservatism that “valorized mothers and wives for virtues imparted by their political marginality, especially selflessness, anonymity, and militancy on behalf of their families” (30). These antecedents of prominent conservative mothers like Phyllis Schlafly, Sarah Palin, and Michele Bachmann laid the groundwork for the current policies and rhetoric emphasized by conservative activists and party elites alike. Indeed, both social and economic conservatives in Republican Party politics have supported policies that underscore “family values” and promote women as caregivers in the home (Barnes and Cassese 2018; Cooper 2017; Schreiber 2012).

² Gardner, Amy. May 14, 2010. “Sarah Palin issue a call to action to ‘mama grizzlies.’” *The Washington Post*.

³ *Ibid.*

As the Republican Party develops strategies to reach out to women voters, it is important to consider the role that Republican congresswomen play in constructing and delivering a pro-woman message. Thus far, I have demonstrated that Republican women in Congress have increasingly engaged in rhetoric that aligns with the gendered messaging goals and policy priorities of the party. Given the historical importance of motherhood in conservative politics and the increase in conservative women elected to Congress, this chapter focuses on shifts in motherhood rhetoric to understand the relationship between woman-invoked rhetoric and Republican Party culture – and more specifically, the cultural norms that emphasize individualism and traditional gender roles.

Data & Methods

I utilize a multi-method approach to understand if and how polarization and competition have affected the rhetoric used by Republican congresswomen. Continuing my analysis from Chapter 2, I use congressional floor speech data as well as elite interviews with women members of Congress, focusing specifically on changes in the way Republican women 1) engage in motherhood rhetoric and 2) utilize their own gendered identity/experiences in their speeches. Interviews conducted by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) also provide additional context and are used to understand how Republican congresswomen are grappling with the cultural tension between rejecting identity politics and embracing gendered narratives.

Content Analysis of Floor Speeches

Using my original dataset of Republican congresswomen's House floor speeches, this chapter analyzes changes in woman-invoked rhetoric from the 103rd/104th Congresses (1993-1996) to the 113th/114th Congresses (2013-2016). As detailed in Chapter 2, woman-invoked rhetoric was only coded as such when a congresswoman 1) claimed to represent women or girls in some way, or 2) invoked her own identity as a woman to make a statement about the issue at hand. The dataset is comprised of a total 694 woman-invoked rhetoric speeches.

For this chapter, I read and coded each woman-invoked rhetoric speech for the use of motherhood rhetoric. Motherhood rhetoric was considered to be used if the member claimed to represent mothers or identified as a mother in her speech. Of the 694 woman-invoked rhetoric speeches, 244 (35%) were coded as motherhood speeches. Additionally, I coded each motherhood speech as containing a representative claim (speaking on behalf of mothers), an identity claim (speaking as a mother), or both. Given the increasing number of conservative women in Congress (Frederick 2009; 2013) and conservative women's emphasis on traditional gender roles (Schreiber 2012; 2016; Swers and Larson 2005), I use this data to test two hypotheses:

H1: Motherhood speeches will comprise a larger portion of the woman-invoked rhetoric speeches given by Republican women in the 113th/114th Congresses compared to those in the 103rd/104th Congresses.

H2: Republican women in the 113th/114th Congresses will be more likely than those in the 103rd/104th Congresses to speak *as* mothers.

Next, because of the rise of the Tea Party in 2010 (Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Deckman 2016), I also coded for the use of "mama grizzly" rhetoric in order to better understand the relationship between ideology and motherhood rhetoric. Melissa Deckman

(2016) outlines four main “mama grizzly” rhetorical frames: 1) *generational theft*: mothers feel an obligation to protect their children from the burden of national debt; 2) *limited government as family protection*: mothers emphasize the detrimental effects they believe big government has had on their families; 3) *kitchen table conservatives*: women claim that, as mothers who are often in charge of their family budgets, they can best discuss the need for fiscal discipline in Washington; 4) *right to bear arms*: women make claims about the use of guns as family protection. Based on these frames, I read each motherhood speech to determine whether or not mama grizzly rhetoric was used. I then coded for the type of frame in each mama grizzly speech. A total of 139 speeches contained mama grizzly rhetoric. Given the prevalence of the Tea Party, my third hypothesis is:

H3: Republican women in the 113th/114th Congresses will be more likely than those in the 103rd/104th Congresses to use mama grizzly rhetoric.

Finally, because Republican Party culture rejects group identity politics (Freeman 1986; Grossman and Hopkins 2016), I examined changes in the way Republican congresswomen claimed to represent women. To do so, I read and coded each woman-invoked rhetoric speech as containing 1) representative claims, 2) identity claims, or 3) both. A “representative claim” is made on *behalf* of women: the congresswoman had to claim to represent women or girls or some way. An “identity claim” is made *as* a woman: the congresswoman had to refer to her own identity as a woman. Speeches that contained both types of claims were coded as such. Overall, 433 (62.4%) of all woman-invoked rhetoric speeches contained only representative claims, 142 (20.5%) contained only identity claims, and 119 (17.1%) contained both. Given the election of more conservative

women and the tendency for conservatives to not want to speak on behalf of identity groups, my fourth hypothesis is:

H4: Republican women in the 113th/114th Congresses will be more likely than Republican women in the 103rd/104th Congresses to use identity claims.

Like in Chapter 2, this quantitative analysis is paired with an in-depth, qualitative reading of speeches and interview transcripts to help uncover more subtle changes in the way Republican congresswomen engage in woman-invoked rhetoric. In general, I expect to see Republican women increasingly using gendered claims in a way that aligns them with the cultural norms of the GOP.

Elite Interviews

To supplement my content analysis of floor speeches, I again draw on elite interviews with women members conducted during the 103rd (1993-1994), 104th (1995-1996), and 114th (2015-2016) Congresses as part of two larger projects at CAWP.⁴ For this chapter, I use interviews with both Democratic and Republican congresswomen to understand the relationship between their experiences as mothers and their role as lawmakers. Interviews with Republican congresswomen, in particular, provided insight into the way Republican congresswomen grapple with the tension of rejecting identity politics while also valuing the legislative contributions women make in Congress.

⁴ See Chapter 1 for a detailed description of each study.

The Significance of Motherhood on Both Sides of the Aisle

While motherhood has played a central role for women in conservative politics, women across the ideological spectrum have argued that motherhood is a significant political identity. In our interviews at CAWP, we asked women members if they believed women made a difference in Congress. Most women responded that they did, and both Democrats and Republicans pointed to their experiences as mothers to demonstrate that women bring necessary perspectives to the legislative process, work in a more bipartisan manner than their male counterparts, and are better able to get things done.

A Mother's Perspective

First, women on both sides of the aisle argued that their distinct experiences as mothers give them important insights into what types of policies should be introduced and prioritized. During the 103rd Congress, Eva Clayton, Democrat of North Carolina, pointed to dealing with the challenges of childcare as a shared experience among mothers: “Being married and with a family, childcare usually falls [more] to the responsibility of the mother than...[to] the father, and I think all of them [mothers] ...know the hassle and the frustration and the anxiety they go through of trying to find a secure place for their children...I think all mothers, rich or poor, identify.”⁵ Lois Frankel (D-FL) of the 114th Congress agreed that motherhood is a distinctly gendered perspective and that this perspective is important to bring to the policymaking arena: “We bring

⁵ Clayton, Eva. (15 September 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

perspectives that men don't have...Just being a mother is a different perspective, and it's a different perspective than being a father.”⁶

Republican women have made similar arguments about the distinct perspective that women bring as a result of their experiences as mothers. For example, Jennifer Dunn (R-WA) said during the 104th Congress that being a single mother has given her expertise from which even men in her own party could learn. She contended, “I've been a single mother for 20 years, since my kids were six and eight. So there are issues I understand and can interpret for my male colleagues. I have become a resource that they turn to on certain votes to say, ‘Is this really something we want to do or something we don't want to do?’”⁷ To Kay Granger (R-TX) of the 114th Congress, being a single mother has also given her an important perspective on economic policies: “When you're talking about financial issues, we're breadwinners, we take care of our parents, we work and make decisions in business. And so to be known that way, to really stand out there, I think it's just extremely important.”⁸ And Vicky Hartzler (R-MO), also in the 114th Congress, argued that being a mother and experiencing pregnancy makes it especially necessary for women to not only work on certain issues, but speak out on those issues. Adamantly pro-life, Hartzler said in her 2016 interview that “women, by nature, many of them are mothers and have dealt with pregnancy, so that's why... it's a natural fit for women to share their perspective on [pro-life issues].”⁹

For many women members, the perspective they bring as mothers is viewed as an asset in the realm of policymaking. Indeed, motherhood has given congresswomen a

⁶ Frankel, Lois. (2 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁷ Dunn, Jennifer. (15 June 1998). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁸ Granger, Kay. (7 January 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁹ Hartzler, Vicky. (1 December 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

specific gender lens through which to understand and analyze legislation. And as Bryant and Hellwege (2019) have found, working mothers in Congress are more likely to introduce legislation pertaining to women and children.

A Common Bond

Beyond legislation, women members have also noted that motherhood is a common bond that many women in Congress share, making it easier to both get along with each other on a personal level and work across party lines on a professional level. Cheri Bustos (D-IL), in the 114th Congress, said, “I’ve got a group of six members. We were all elected at the same time, we are all moms, and we get together at least once every couple weeks for dinner where we talk about everything from our husbands to our kids to our grandkids to legislation.”¹⁰ Indeed, as representatives like Grace Meng (D-NY) and Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) have noted, the shared experience of motherhood gives women a desire to provide each other with moral support – both within and across parties. Meng notes the mentorship she has received from a fellow Democrat, Diana DeGette, saying, “She started in Congress as a mom with two young children, so she always gives me advice.”¹¹ And McMorris Rodgers, chair of the House Republican Conference, told us about the support she received from her Democratic colleagues: “I was single when I was elected to Congress and then I got married and then I had the kids, so I was the fifth woman to ever give birth. And Debbie Wasserman Schultz and Carolyn Maloney hosted a baby shower for me.”¹²

¹⁰ Bustos, Cheri. (3 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

¹¹ Meng, Grace. (21 October 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

¹² McMorris Rodgers, Cathy. (4 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics.

Beyond emotional support, motherhood has also been a common bond that has motivated Democratic and Republican women to work together on various policies. For example, while not exclusive to mothers in Congress, several women members from both sides of the aisle have taken an annual Mother's Day trip to Afghanistan. "Through that," McMorris Rodgers stated, "I've worked with Donna Edwards, [Democrat of Maryland], on an Afghan women's task force in focusing on the importance of mentorship and supporting women in Afghanistan."¹³ Human trafficking is another issue that has garnered bipartisan support in the 114th Congress, especially from women who have argued that this issue is particularly important to them as mothers. When asked in an interview about her work on human trafficking legislation, Krisi Noem (R-SD) said, "Well, I'm a mom... No mom can comprehend that happening to their child. And there's a lot of these kids that don't have anybody fighting for them."¹⁴ While legislators work across the aisle for a variety of reasons, it is clear that motherhood is one place women members can find common ground in Congress.

Working Like a Mother

Finally, both Democratic and Republican women members have claimed that women are more likely than men to focus on solving problems and getting things done in Congress. Some attribute this gendered difference to the fact that this is also how women operate as mothers. When asked if she thought women made a difference in the 114th Congress, Alma Adams (D-NC) responded:

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Noem, Kristi. (17 November 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

I think we bring a perspective that the guys just don't bring. Many of us are mothers and grandmothers and so we reason all the time with our children and our grandchildren and that kind of thing. Men just kind of let you go on. I see it with my grandchildren, even now. They would rather go to get it from Dad because he's not going to deal so much with the reasoning. I watch my daughter, and they would rather go to their Daddy because Mom is going to scrutinize it and look very closely.¹⁵

Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) argued that, compared to the men, the Republican women in the 114th Congress were “the leaders of the Get-‘er-Done Caucus.”¹⁶ She went on:

I have always been a coalition builder. I seek to include people... That is much more a female type leadership. I've got this little term I've always used [that] goes back to when my children were little. They would say, “Why did you tell me to do this?” And I would say, “Because I'm the mommy, that's why.” And then, I started telling [my colleagues] I was the chief-momma-in-charge. And I felt like, you know, maybe we're at a time where the institution kind of needs that: the chief-momma-in-charge type mindset.¹⁷

From interviews with women members, it is clear that motherhood is significant in terms of how women on both sides of the aisle view their roles as legislators. Many members attribute their ability to get along, work together, and accomplish goals to their experiences as mothers. Yet, given what we know about Republican Party culture – its rejection of identity politics and emphasis on individualism and family values – I argue that delving deeper into the way Republican women use and conceptualize motherhood can provide necessary insight into the role that women play as gendered party messengers. In the following section, I analyze changes in Republican congresswomen's deployment of motherhood rhetoric to shine light on the evolving relationship between motherhood and partisan politics.

¹⁵ Adams, Alma. (22 October 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

¹⁶ Blackburn, Marsha. (17 November 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

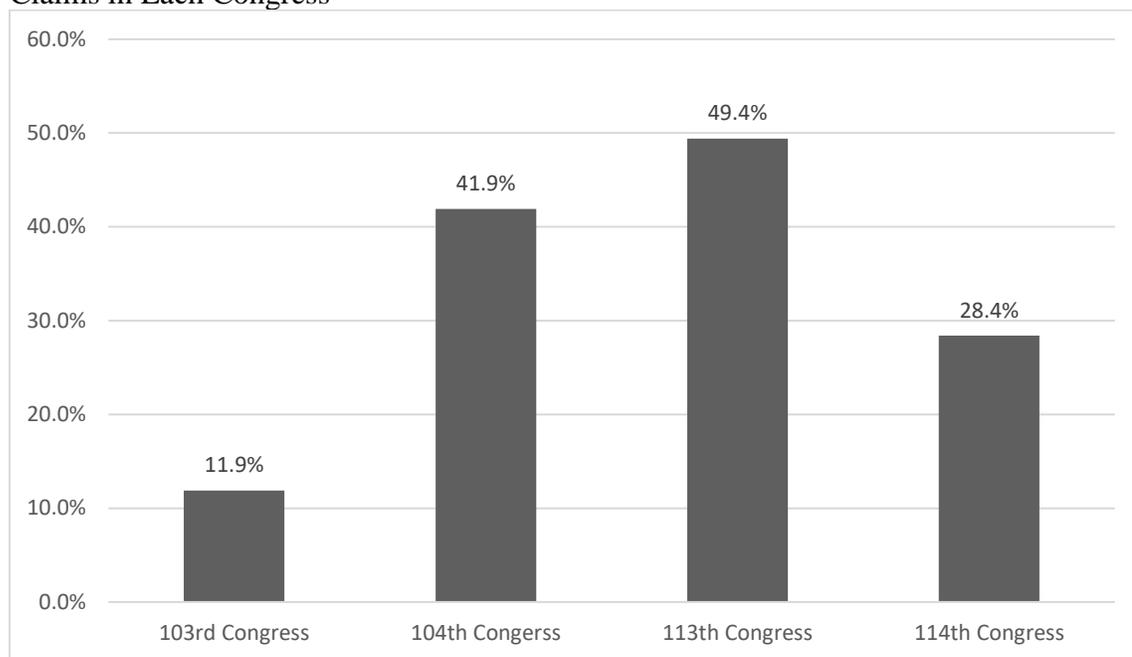
¹⁷ Ibid.

Republican Motherhood Rhetoric on the Floor: Changes Over Time

To understand whether and how the gendered rhetoric used by Republican women in Congress has evolved to align with Republican Party culture, I first turn to an in-depth analysis of motherhood rhetoric. I find that a significant percentage of woman-invoked rhetoric speeches in both congressional eras contained motherhood claims – statements in which congresswomen claimed to represent mothers or referred to their personal identity as a mother. Lending mild support to Hypothesis 1, I find a slight increase in the use of motherhood rhetoric over the past two decades. In the 103rd/104th and 113th/114th Congresses, 31% and 39.9% of all woman-invoked rhetoric speeches contained motherhood rhetoric, respectively.

Importantly, however, the deployment of motherhood rhetoric was not consistent across all Congresses. Figure 1 shows the percentage of woman-invoked rhetoric speeches containing motherhood claims in each Congress. Motherhood speeches comprised only 11.9% of the total woman-invoked rhetoric speeches given by Republican women in the 103rd Congress. That number nearly quadruples to 41.9% in the 104th Congress. In the subsequent section, I take a closer look at these speeches to help explain the dramatic increase in motherhood claims between the 103rd and 104th Congresses.

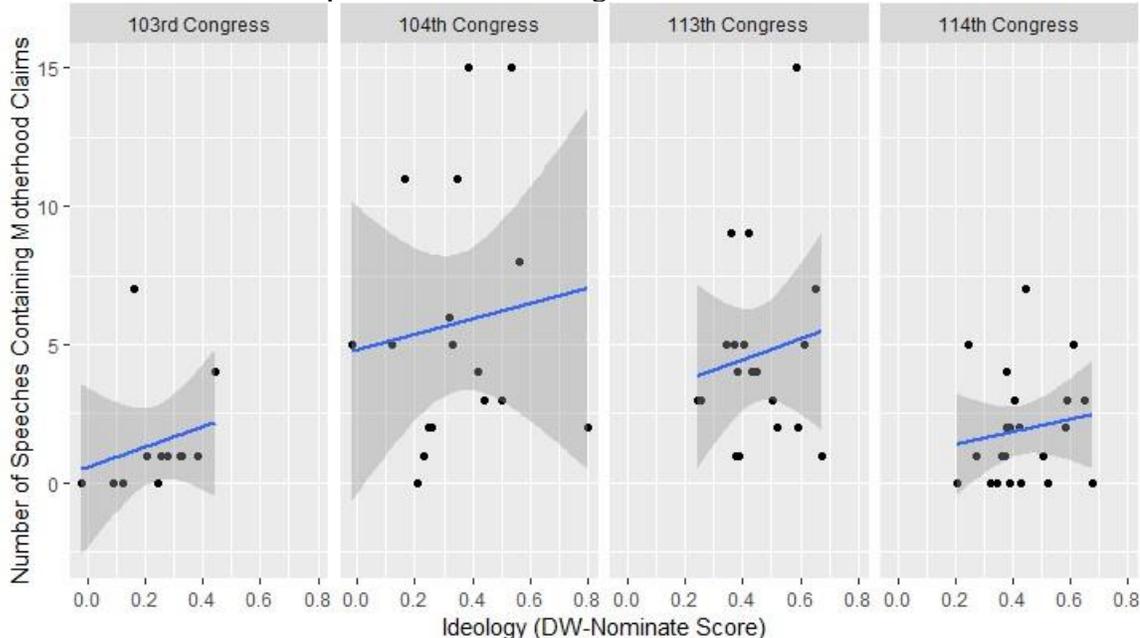
Figure 1: Percentage of Woman-Invoked Rhetoric Speeches Containing Motherhood Claims in Each Congress



N = 16 of 134 in 103rd; 98 of 234 in 104th; 88 of 178 in 113th; 42 of 148 in 114th

Next, to get a better sense of the motivation behind the use of motherhood rhetoric, I examine who was most likely to be making motherhood speeches. Figure 2 shows the correlation between congresswomen's ideology (measured by DW-NOMINATE scores) and number of motherhood speeches for each Congress. I find that there is no statistical or substantive correlation in any of the four Congresses. Indeed, these motherhood speeches were given by Republican congresswomen across the ideological spectrum. In what follows, I turn to an in-depth, qualitative content analysis of these speeches to uncover any changes in the way motherhood is utilized by Republican congresswomen.

Figure 2: Relationship Between Republican Congresswomen’s Ideology and Total Number of Motherhood Speeches in Each Congress



Pearson’s correlation for each Congress:

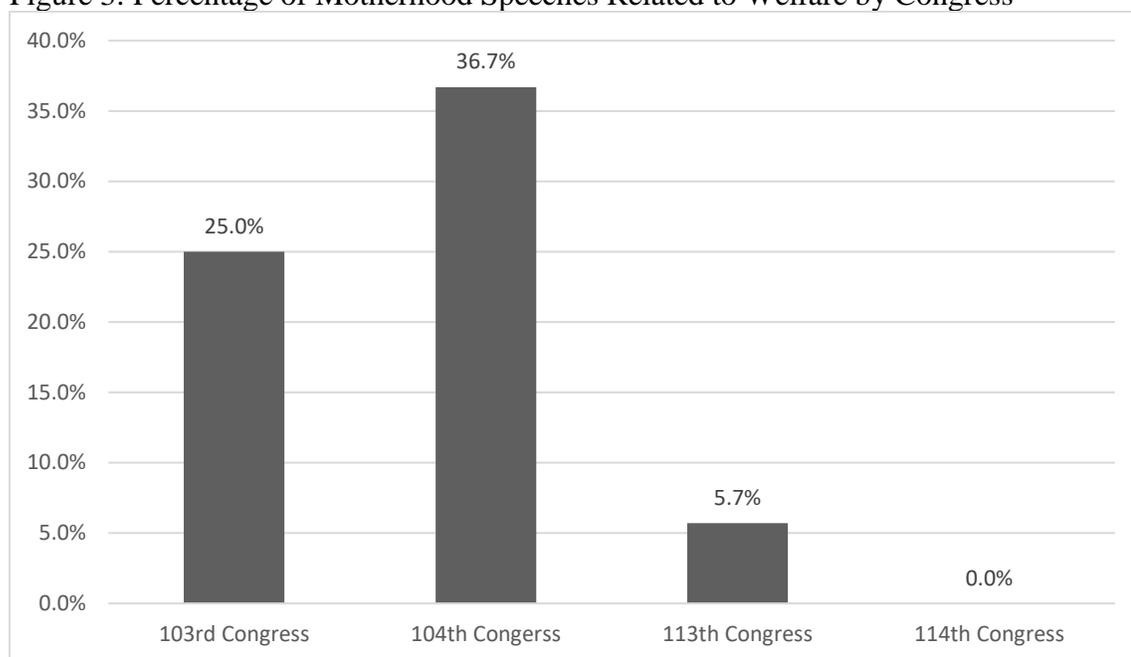
103rd = 0.230, $p=0.47$; 104th = 0.114, $p=0.66$; 113th = 0.137, $p=0.58$; 114th = 0.149, $p=0.51$.

Source for DW-NOMINATE data: Lewis, Jeffrey B., Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, Adam Boche, Aaron Rudkin, and Luke Sonnet (2018). *Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database*.

Representing “Welfare Mothers” in the 1990s

To explain the sharp increase in motherhood rhetoric from the 103rd to the 104th Congress, I first examine the issues that were discussed in these speeches. In both the 103rd and 104th Congresses, welfare was the most frequently discussed topic in motherhood speeches, the focus of 25% and 36.7% of all motherhood speeches, respectively (see Figure 3). Welfare was not a prevalent topic in the later Congresses. Given that welfare reform was at the top of the legislative agenda as the Republican majority took control in the 104th Congress, it makes sense motherhood rhetoric increased with the rise of welfare speeches more generally.

Figure 3: Percentage of Motherhood Speeches Related to Welfare by Congress



N = 4 of 16 in 103rd; 36 of 98 in 104th; 5 of 88 in 113th; 0 of 148 in 114th

This finding is supported by previous research on the gendered aspects of the welfare reform debates of the 1990s. As detailed in Chapter 2, moderate Republican congresswomen, while overwhelmingly supportive of welfare reform, introduced and advocated for provisions that would increase federal childcare subsidies and strengthen child support laws (Carroll and Casey 2001). And indeed, in support of Hypothesis 2, I find that Republican congresswomen during this time spoke most often on *behalf* of women, rather than *as* women. Of the 40 motherhood speeches related to welfare in the 103rd and 104th Congresses, 28 (70%) contained only representative claims.¹⁸

More specifically, Republican congresswomen talked about empowering women by getting them off of welfare. In one floor speech, Jennifer Dunn (R-WA) told a story of

¹⁸ One of the narratives during the welfare reform debate centered on “welfare mothers” or “welfare queens” – women and mothers who took advantage of the welfare system. In my analysis, I only included speeches in which members either 1) claimed to represent women or mothers or 2) identified as women or mothers. I did not include speeches that demonized or blamed women or mothers on welfare.

meeting with mothers in her district, saying, “The welfare mothers whom I met with last weekend in my district at a Head Start meeting told me that the welfare system, or AFDC, is a negative system that pulls people down and robs them of their self-esteem, and too often devalues them and their ability to be productive members of our community.”¹⁹ In a similar fashion, Susan Molinari (R-NY) said in a 1994 floor speech that welfare reform would “enable” mothers to “feel good” about themselves.²⁰ And Barbara Vucanovich, (R-NV) argued that the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 takes “handouts” away from “prisoners and noncitizens who have imposed on our system” and “promotes work and helps mothers on welfare by providing job training and child care they need to achieve this goal.”²¹ This message of government assistance as inherently oppressive to mothers was the philosophical premise on which Republican congresswomen linked gender and welfare reform in the 1990s.

Importantly, discussions of “welfare mothers” by politicians in the 1980s and ‘90s were often explicitly and implicitly racialized (Abramovitz 2006; Gilens 1999; Hancock 2004; Foster 2008; Sparks 2003). Support for welfare reform was largely fueled by narratives “of the raced-gendered welfare queen who promiscuously gives birth to multiple children in order to receive more benefits and avoid working” (Reingold and Smith 2012, 135). Republican Congressman E. Clay Shaw, Jr. of Florida painted a picture of irresponsible teen mothers on welfare, saying they were “children you

¹⁹ Representative Dunn (WA). “Personal Responsibility Act of 1995.” 141: 52. (March 21, 1995). p. H3361.

²⁰ Representative Molinari (NY). “Welfare Reform.” 140. (May 4, 1994). p. H3046.

²¹ Representative Vucanovich (NV). “Welfare and Medicaid Reform Act of 1996.” 142:106. (July 18, 1996). p. H7818.

wouldn't leave your cat with on a weekend.”²² As described by Mary Hawkesworth (2003), “Congresswomen of color perceived the attack on single mothers at the heart of welfare reform proposals as an attack on the black family, an attack that resurrected pathological theories of poverty” (542).

Indeed, while not engaging in explicitly racialized rhetoric, Republican congresswomen did claim to represent mothers by punishing negligent “deadbeat dads.” Marge Roukema (R-NJ) argued in a floor speech, “Mr. Speaker, here is new evidence that we must address: The disgrace of deadbeat dads, and some moms, who can afford to, but do not pay child support is forcing mothers into endless, debasing legal battles just to get the support to which their children are legally and morally entitled.”²³ Similarly, Connie Morella (R-MD) said she had been working on “critical provisions” that would “finally crack down on deadbeat parents by enacting penalties with real teeth and establishing Federal registries to help track deadbeats.”²⁴ While purporting to support mothers on welfare, these policies perpetuated the racial stereotype that low-income fathers – who are disproportionately people of color – are lazy and irresponsible rather than living within a racist system of poverty (Murphy 2005).

In these ways, the gendered claims of Republican congresswomen were in line with the broader racial narratives of the GOP. In other ways, though, Republican congresswomen pushed party leaders on policy, advocating for provisions that would assist mothers on welfare with childcare costs (Casey and Carroll 2001). Tillie Fowler

²² Dorothy Gilliam, *Ugly Ways on the Hill*, Washington Post, March 25, 1995, B1.

²³ Representative Roukema (NJ). “Strict Enforcement of Child Support Orders Vital to Welfare Reform.” 140. (May 19, 1994). p. H3695.

²⁴ Representative Morella (MD). “Welfare and Medicaid Reform Act of 1996.” 142:106. (July 18, 1996). p. H7986.

(R-FL) contended, “There is nothing compassionate about our current welfare system. The bill we are considering today...provides child care for welfare mothers who want to work.”²⁵ And Deborah Pryce (R-OH) said, “It is clear that lack of affordable quality child care is a primary obstacle to employment for many parents, especially single mothers. If we are going to require work, and we should, our Nation's children must not be forgotten.” While punitive measures were still part of their platform, Republican women’s bipartisan effort to increase funding for mothers on welfare diverged from the GOP’s original welfare reform agenda.

These types of representative claims were used throughout motherhood speeches in the 1990s, although a few of the more conservative Republican women elected to the 104th Congress also engaged in identity claims. These women used their own experiences as single mothers to endorse a “pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps” approach to welfare reform, which once again ignored the racial realities of poverty. For example, Sue Kelly (R-NY) and Helen Chenoweth (R-ID), both elected in 1994, argued that they understood first-hand the struggles of making ends meet and the empowering feeling of bringing home a paycheck. Chenoweth said in a floor speech, “Mr. Speaker, as a woman who raised two teenage children... [as] a single parent, ...my income was at the poverty level. But sometimes to get through life it takes a bit of a struggle and sometimes to realize all you can be takes a bit of a struggle.”²⁶ And Kelly noted, “As working women and mothers, who among us does not remember earning their first paycheck, meeting that

²⁵ Representative Fowler (FL). “Welfare and Medicaid Reform Act of 1996.” 142:105. (July 17, 1996). p. H7754.

²⁶ Representative Chenoweth (ID). “War on Poverty.” 141:54. (March 23, 1995). p. H3720.

first payroll, or the pride of seeing our own child bring home their first paycheck? It is this sort of restoration of self-esteem that we must achieve.”²⁷

Overall, the dramatic rise in motherhood speeches from the 103rd to the 104th Congress can be explained, in part, by the fact that welfare reform dominated the Republican legislative agenda in the 104th Congress. While a few newly elected women invoked their identity as mothers, the motherhood rhetoric during this time was most frequently used to represent mothers as a group. Additionally, Republican congresswomen were not putting forth a consistent party message; while some claims aligned with the raced-gendered narrative of party, others diverged from that narrative. This could be seen in particular through the push for more moderate policy proposals that were developed and endorsed by women in the bipartisan Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues.²⁸

Speaking on Behalf of Mothers: Representatives Claims

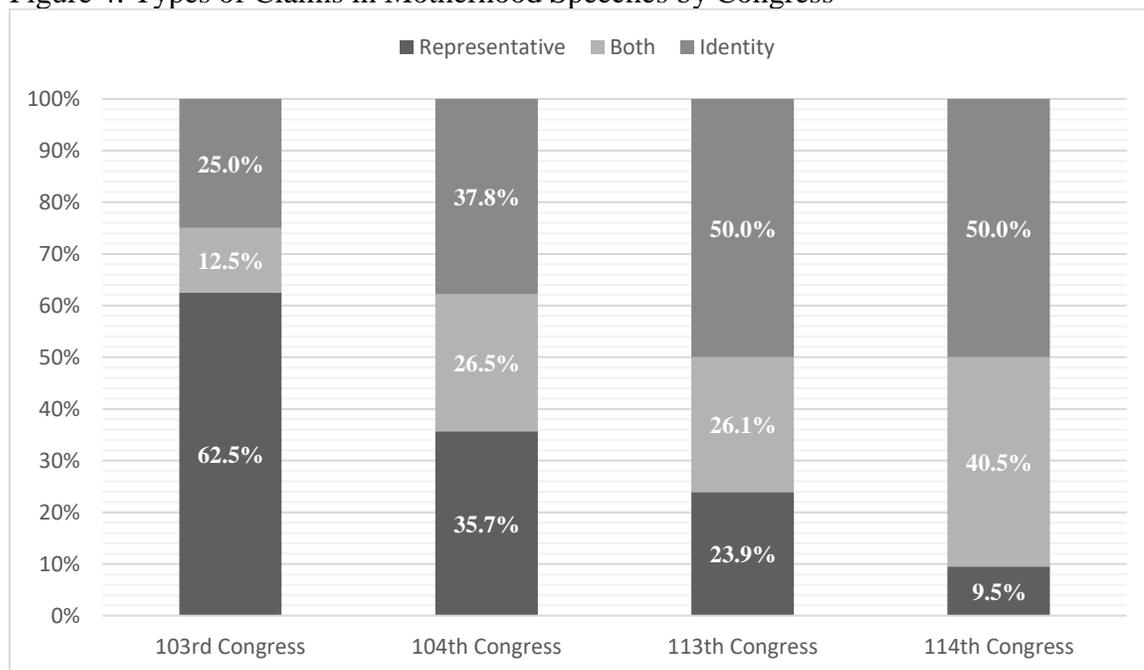
Given that Republican congresswomen in the 1990s claimed to act on behalf of mothers on welfare, I use this section to delve deeper into the types of claims made in motherhood speeches across all four Congresses. Providing further evidence in support of Hypothesis 2, Figure 4 shows the breakdown of motherhood speeches in each Congress by type of claim. I find a decrease in the use of representative claims over time, with only

²⁷ Representative Kelly (NY). “Welfare Reform: Real Change Versus False Hope.” 141: 40. (March 3, 1995). p. H2589.

²⁸ As Carroll and Casey (2001) describe the role moderate Republican women played in tempering the effects of welfare reform. Women like Nancy Johnson (R-CT) and Jennifer Dunn (R-WA) were particularly vocal in their support of childcare provisions. Connie Morella (R-MD) also used her role as co-chair of the Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues to garner bipartisan support for a less conservative alternative welfare reform bill called the Castle-Tanner Bipartisan Welfare Reform Act of 1996 (Carroll and Casey 2001, 125).

9.5% of the 42 motherhood speeches in the 114th Congress containing strictly representative claims (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Types of Claims in Motherhood Speeches by Congress



Note: 103rd Congress: N=16; 104th Congress: N=98; 113th Congress: N=88; 114th Congress: N=42

A qualitative content analysis of these speeches also unveils other changes in the way Republican congresswomen claim to act on behalf of mothers. First, I find that Republican congresswomen have become increasingly partisan in the rhetoric they use to represent mothers. In the earlier Congresses, Republican congresswomen most often supported bipartisan provisions aimed at mothers. Examples include childcare and child support, as previously discussed, but also issues like family leave and postpartum care. For example, Marge Roukema (R-NJ) advocated for family leave while condemning Republicans who opposed it: “In these harsh economic times and with health costs soaring, are you going to tell a pregnant woman or the mother of a child dying of

leukemia to, 'Go find another job, if you can?' Are these family values?"²⁹ Connie Morella (R-MD) also supported a bipartisan provision to ensure that health insurance companies cover postpartum care. She said in a floor speech:

As managed care becomes increasingly prevalent, we are seeing mothers and their newborns in and out of the hospital in as short a time as 12 hours. Many illnesses in newborns are not detectable until the first 48 hours. Those first 2 days are absolutely critical. Guidelines of the American Pediatric Association and ACOG specify that mothers should stay in the hospital for 48 hours for normal delivery and 96 for cesarean delivery. This provision would ensure that this happens.³⁰

Motherhood speeches containing strictly representative claims in the later Congresses were fewer in number, but also more partisan in content. The largest percentage of these speeches (32%) were related to health, likely because the Affordable Care Act was such a prominent issue in these Congresses. As detailed in Chapter 2, speeches related to health in the 113th Congress focused largely on attacking the president's healthcare plan. In a floor speech, Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) emphasized that the individual mandate in the Affordable Care Act would be especially harmful to mothers: "We need to make it easier for businesses to hire full-time employees, not harder, but the ACA's mandate and the administration's repeated delays have only created more uncertainty for businesses and moms throughout this country." Mothers were also discussed in other particularly partisan issues, like immigration. For instance, Michele Bachmann (R-MN) explicitly condemned President Obama in a special order speech, saying:

I believe the next population most hurt is actually the legal Hispanic population in the United States. It's their wages that are suppressed. So if you're thinking of a

²⁹ Representative Roukema (NJ). "Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993." 140. (February 3, 1993). p. H405.

³⁰ Representative Morella (MD). "Appointments of Conferees on H.R. 3666, Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act, 1997." 142: 124. (September 11, 1996). p. H10186.

Hispanic mother who's working as a hotel maid, if we have legalization, she could be competing with seven other people who are vying for her job as well...What we're looking at is hurting the job prospects of those who are the most vulnerable. And that's one thing that we've seen from the President's policies.³¹

Another notable change is that Republican congresswomen in recent Congresses are also more likely to use specific constituent examples, claiming to represent the women – or, in many cases, one particular woman – in their district. For example, Susan Brooks (R-IN) criticized the president's policies, using a specific example from one of her constituents. She said, “Barbara from Indianapolis recently logged on to my Web site to share her ObamaCare story, which is about her choices. She's a single mom trying to give her daughter the gift of a college education in a tough economy. President Obama's holiday gift to her, however, was a \$200 increase in her monthly premium.”³² Candice Miller (R-MI) similarly stated, “I will just give you one example--a vivid example--of many, many that we got, especially women who have contacted my office. This is from a mother named Tracy in Macomb County, Michigan.” Miller went on to tell the story of a mother in her district who has seen her daughter's work hours cut due to provisions in the Affordable Care Act.

The incorporation of these types of constituent examples occurred much more frequently in the 113th and 114th Congresses. Compared to about 6% of the representative motherhood speeches in the 1990s, nearly one-third of these speeches in the later Congresses contained specific examples. This shift in the way Republican congresswomen speak on behalf of mothers seems to signal a greater alignment with Republican Party culture. By using specific examples of mothers in their floor speeches,

³¹ Representative Bachmann (MN). “Immigration.” 159: 96. (July 8, 2013). p. H4205-H4206.

³² Representative Brooks (IN). “ObamaCare and Choices.” 159: 170. (December 3, 2013). p. H7404.

Republican congresswomen are reaching out to women and embracing family values while stopping short of engaging in “identity politics.” In claiming to be responding to specific constituents in their districts, Republican congresswomen avoid lumping all women into a category with group interests.

Speaking as Mothers: Identity Claims

In this section, I continue to test the overarching hypothesis that Republican congresswomen are engaging in woman-invoked rhetoric that aligns more closely with their party culture. As illustrated in Figure 4, Republican women in the later Congresses were much more likely to invoke their own identities as mothers. In the 113th and 114th Congresses, identity claims were used in 76.1% and 95.5% of Republican congresswomen’s motherhood speeches, respectively.

An in-depth look at these speeches shows that Republican congresswomen are using their motherhood experiences to take conservative stances on a broader range of policy areas. In the 103rd and 104th Congresses, for instance, Republican women often used personal experiences of motherhood to discuss issues directly related to motherhood, like adoption and family leave. Deborah Pryce (R-OH) criticized a court ruling related to adoption, arguing, “As an adoptive mother, I can tell you these rulings will have a chilling effect on couples wishing to provide good homes to children through adoption.”³³ And Tillie Fowler (R-FL) advocated for a bill that would provide compensatory time off employees, saying in a floor speech, “As a working mother, I learned the hard way that you can't be in two places at once. Whether it is due to a Little

³³ Representative Pryce (OH). “ICWA Applied Unfairly.” 141: 98. (June 15, 1995). p. H6023.

League game; a case of chicken pox; a visit to the doctor or caring for an elderly parent--sometimes the needs of a family require a flexible working schedule.”³⁴

Most frequently, however, identity claims in the earlier Congresses were used by the most conservative women to talk about economic issues like taxes and the budget. Andrea Seastrand (R-CA), for example, supported a tax credit for parents of adopted children, saying, “I know what that is about because my two children are adopted.”³⁵ Another common way ideologically conservative women invoked their motherhood in the 1990s was through claims that the national debt would have a detrimental impact on their children and grandchildren. Sue Myrick (R-NC) argued in a floor speech, “As a mother of five and grandmother of six, almost seven, I have a moral obligation to balance this budget for them because I want my kids and grandkids to have a better future, to have more opportunity than I have. But, how can that happen if they start out with this great mountain of debt on their backs?”³⁶ Interestingly, this rhetoric is consistent with what scholars of the Tea Party have deemed “mama grizzly” rhetoric. In the following section, I explore if and how mama grizzly rhetoric was utilized in Congress prior to and after the Tea Party Movement.

In the 113th and 114th Congresses, Republican women were more likely to invoke their own motherhood in their floor speeches. Moreover, they did so on issues ranging from education and human trafficking, to gun rights and immigration, to energy and national security. In these later Congresses, a total of 16 issue areas were discussed in

³⁴ Representative Fowler (FL). “Working Families Flexibility Act of 1996.” 142: 114. (July 30, 1996). p. H8782.

³⁵ Representative Seastrand (CA). “Taxes.” 142: 48. (April 16, 1996). p. H3461.

³⁶ Representative Myrick (NC). “The 7-Year Balanced Budget Reconciliation Act of 1995.” 141: 166. (October 25, 1995). p. H10789.

more than one motherhood speech containing identity claims; this is compared to just 8 issue areas in the earlier Congresses.³⁷ Virginia Foxx (R-NC), for example, argued against federal overreach in education: “Mr. Speaker, my background as an educator, school board member, mother, and grandmother reinforces my belief that students are best served when people at the local level are in control of education decisions.”³⁸

Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) used her experience as a mother to talk about the threat of undocumented immigrants, saying, “How are we going to be certain that we are safe in our homes, in our communities? How do I know that my children are going to be safe at school? ... These are questions of concern to so many moms who, like me, worry about their children and their grandchildren.”³⁹ And Kristi Noem (R-SD) spoke in support of gun rights, saying that firearms have always been part of her heritage and that she hoped to have “the opportunity to enjoy it... with my own kids and with by husband, Brian.”⁴⁰

Overall, the growing tendency of Republican women to speak *as* mothers signals a shift to rhetoric that is more closely aligned with the cultural norms of their party. In invoking their own individual experiences and identities as mothers, GOP women are able to speak for women in a way that allows them to relate conservative issues to women voters while upholding the party’s ideological principles of individualism, family values, and traditional gender roles.

³⁷ The 8 issue areas in the 103rd/104th Congresses were: abortion, adoption, budget, family leave, health, national security, taxes, and welfare. The 16 issue areas in the 113th/114th Congresses were: abortion, budget, commemorative, education, energy, guns, health, human trafficking, immigration, national security, promoting women in male-dominated fields, veterans, violence against women, welfare, TSA regulations, and family leave.

³⁸ Representative Foxx (NC). “Providing Consideration of H.R. 5, Student Success Act.” 159: 103. (July 18, 2013). p. H4617.

³⁹ Representative Blackburn (TN). “Clear Law Enforcement for Criminal Alien Removal Act.” 161: 110. (July 15, 2015). p. H5180.

⁴⁰ Representative Noem (SD). “Second Amendment Rights.” 159: 58. (April 25, 2013). p. H2338.

Mama Grizzlies in the House

In this section, I test the hypothesis that Republican women are more likely now than in the earlier Congresses to engage in mama grizzly rhetoric. I find that mama grizzly speeches comprised about 15% of all motherhood speeches. However, contrary to Hypothesis 3, these speeches were more prevalent in the 1990s: in the 103rd/104th Congresses, 14.9% of motherhood speeches contained mama grizzly rhetoric, compared to 13.8% in the 113th/114th Congresses. Deckman (2016) argues that the mama grizzly rhetoric used by members of Congress is a result of Tea Party influence, saying, “The emphasis on motherhood appeals, for example, when calling for Congress to cut its spending and reduce the debt...takes a page out of the rhetorical playbook first used by Tea Party women” (252). Yet despite this perception, my findings reveal that this deployment of motherhood by Republican congresswomen in fact predates the Tea Party Movement. Sue Myrick (R-NC), for instance, invoked her motherhood to argue in favor of balancing the budget:

I want my kids to have the same opportunity to succeed that I have enjoyed in this generation. We are looking today at a national debt of \$4.8 trillion. What this vote on the balanced budget means is very simply that Sarah and my new grandchild, No. 7, who is going to be born in December, will not have to pay \$187,000 just to cover the interest on the debt alone through their lifetimes. We cannot go on literally mortgaging our children and our grandchildren's future, and saddling them with this huge mountain of debt.⁴¹

Nevertheless, a more in-depth, qualitative analysis of these speeches reveals significant cultural shifts. Figure 5 shows the types of mama grizzly frames used in each congressional era. “Generational theft,” a term originally coined by Sarah Palin, is one

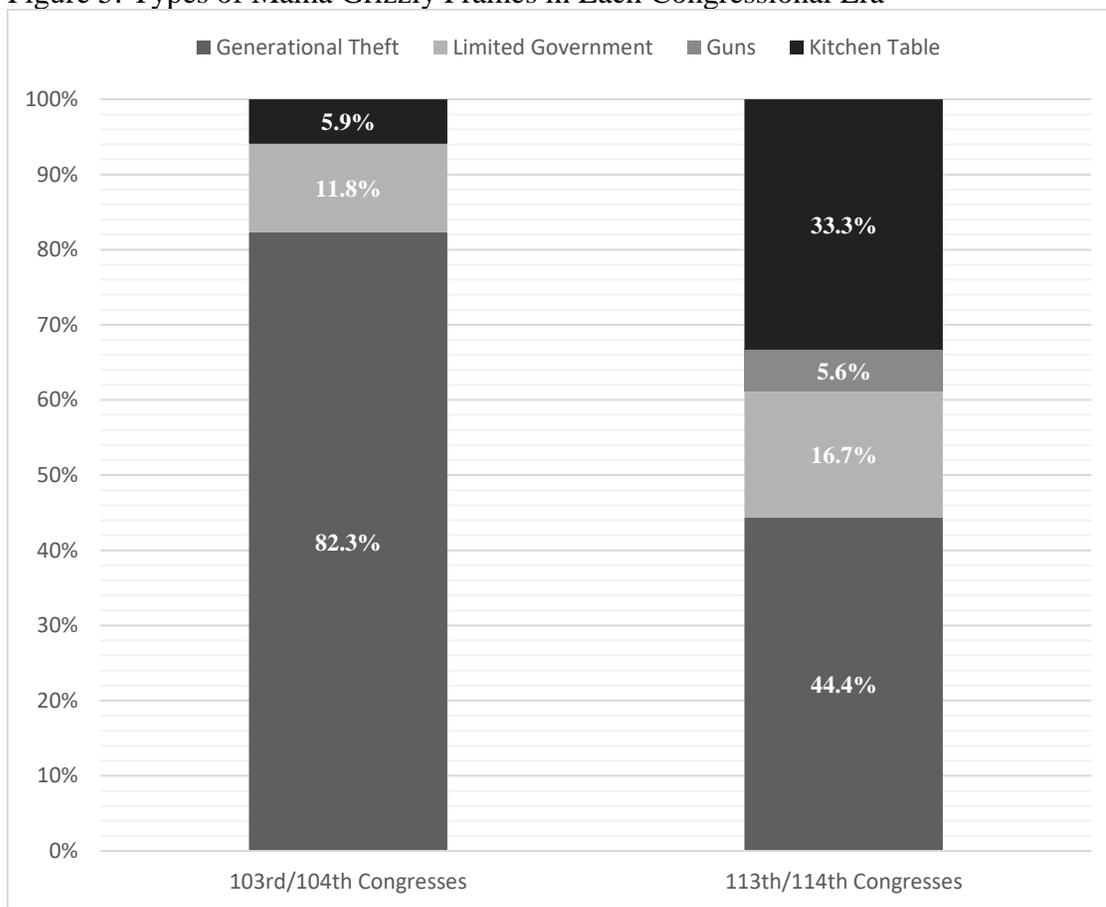
⁴¹ Representative Myrick (SD). “Seven-Year Balanced Budget Reconciliation Act of 1995.” 141: 167. (October 26, 1995). p. H11350.

motherhood frame used by Tea Party women activists and Republican congresswomen alike. As described by Deckman (2016), this frame is rooted in the idea that conservative mothers must “save children from the large debt burden that they face” (121). Indeed, this was the most common frame used by women in the 103rd/104th Congresses, comprising 82.3% of their mama grizzly speeches (see Figure 5). Like Myrick, Andrea Seastrand (R-CA) also called for a balanced budget, saying it “would definitely mean that we would have a future free of debt. We as mothers would bequeath to our children a future of greater opportunity and a government of increased virtue and vitality.”⁴² And Linda Smith (R-WA), like her many of her colleagues, described federal spending as *moral* issue, saying, “As a grandmother of six young children, I only have to think of their future tax rates to realize what will happen if we do not get Federal spending under control. We have no moral right to depend on tax increases in the future to fund the Federal spending today.”⁴³

⁴² Representative Seastrand (CA). “Women’s History Month.” 142: 40. (March 21, 1996). p. H2656.

⁴³ Representative Smith (WA). “Providing for Consideration of House Joint Resolution 159, Constitutional Amendment Relating to Taxes.” 142: 47. (April 15, 1996). p. H3302.

Figure 5: Types of Mama Grizzly Frames in Each Congressional Era



N=17 in 103rd/104th Congresses; N=18 in 113th/114th Congresses

This rhetorical frame is consistent with the “generational theft” frame that Republican congresswomen have invoked more recently. For example, Martha Roby (R-AL), said in a 2013 floor speech, “We are spending well beyond our means – we have \$17 trillion in debt and our 4th year with over \$1 trillion deficit. My kids, Margaret and George, are the reason that I’m here. Why I’m fighting is for that generation that’s going to carry this burden after we’re all gone.”⁴⁴ Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) made a similar claim about her motivation to address the national debt, saying, “Mr. Chairman, it is why it is important for us to have a budget that balances in 10 years. I have to tell you, as a

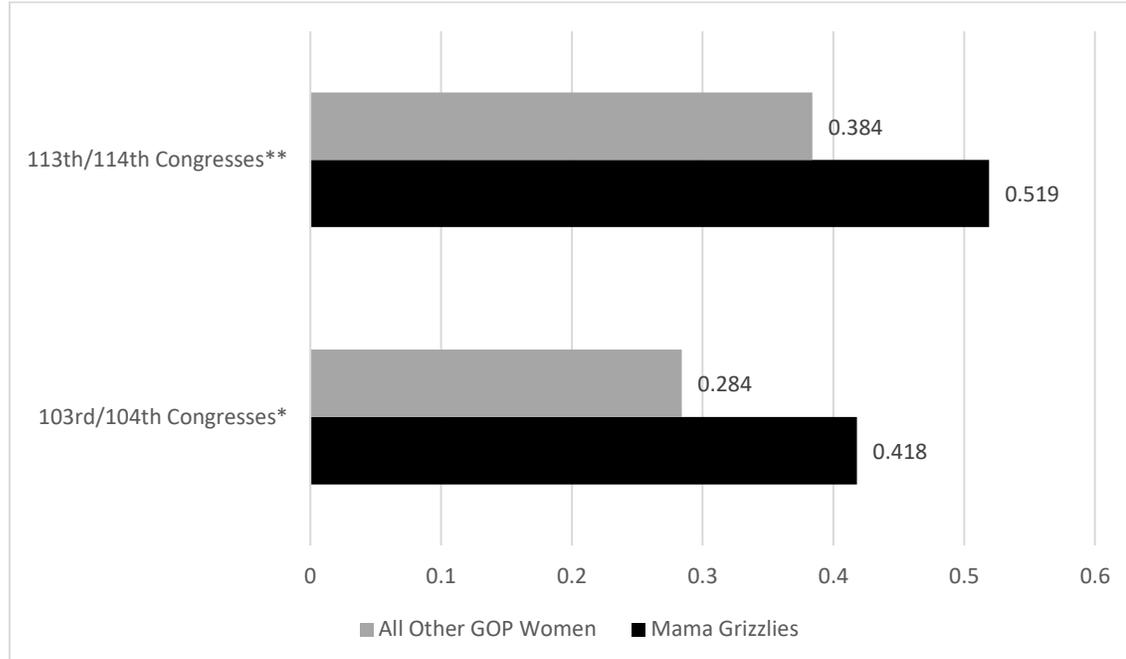
⁴⁴ Representative Roby (AL). “Solutions for Our Country.” 159: 105. (July 22, 2013). p. H4845.

mom and a grandmom, I look a lot at what is happening to our children and our grandchildren”⁴⁵ Still, while mama grizzly rhetoric framed as “generational theft” has been used long before Tea Party women stepped into the political spotlight, there are notable differences in who is using mama grizzly rhetoric and which type of mama grizzly frames are being deployed.

As illustrated in Figure 6, women who engage in mama grizzly rhetoric have been, on average, more conservative than House Republican women as a whole. In both congressional eras, the mean DW-NOMINATE score of women who used mama grizzly rhetoric was statistically greater than the mean DW-NOMINATE score of the Republican women who did not engage in mama grizzly rhetoric. One difference is that, in the later Congresses, these speeches were given by a larger percentage of the women. In the 103rd/104th Congresses, 6 of the 19 (32%) Republican women used mama grizzly rhetoric compared to 12 of the 24 (50%) Republican women in the 113th/114th Congresses. Thus, it seems, as Republican congresswomen become more ideologically cohesive, they become more unified in their rhetoric as well.

⁴⁵ Representative Blackburn (TN). “Concurrent Resolution on the Budget for Fiscal Year 2015.” 160: 58. (April 9, 2014). p. H3076.

Figure 6: Mean DW-NOMINATE Scores of All Republican Congresswomen vs. Mean DW-NOMINATE Scores of Mama Grizzlies



*Statistically significant at $p < 0.10$. **Statistically significant at $p < 0.01$.

Note: P-values were generated from a Welch's t-test.

Source: Lewis, Jeffrey B., Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, Adam Boche, Aaron Rudkin, and Luke Sonnet (2018). *Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database*. <https://voteview.com/>

One shift in rhetoric is the increasing use of the “limited government as family protection” frame, in which mothers emphasize the detrimental effects they believe big government has had on their families (Deckman 2016). While some Republican women deployed this rhetorical frame in the 103rd/104th Congresses, the overwhelming majority of mama grizzly speeches in this era were framed as “generational theft.” In the 113th/114th Congress, the “limited government” frame is used in a larger percentage of speeches (see Figure 5). For instance, Mia Love (R-UT) condemned what she viewed as federal overreach in the education system, saying, “As a mayor and mainly as a mother--I have three children in public schools--I have found that the best solutions are found at the most local level. This amendment puts a larger footprint in the hands of the Federal

Government and gives more power to the Federal Government.”⁴⁶ And Virginia Foxx (R-NC) argued that “as a mother, a woman, and individual of prayer,” she supports measure that would protect her constituents “from a massive Federal overreach being perpetrated by the EPA.”⁴⁷ This critique of government regulation can also be seen in mama grizzly discussion of gun rights (See Figure 5). For example, Vicky Hartzler (R-MO) opposes gun control legislation, citing her daughter’s right to self-protection: “My daughter, we’ve had a lot of fun with her, teaching her how to shoot a gun and going out also in our pasture...But just as importantly as it being enjoyable, I think just being familiar with guns and for the potential of having self-protection is so important, as well.”⁴⁸

Another change in mama grizzly rhetoric since the 1990s is the growing use of the “kitchen table conservatives” frame, in which conservative women argue that mothers, who are often in charge of their family budgets, can best talk about the need for fiscal discipline in Washington. Deckman (2016) turns to Jenny Beth Martin, co-founder of the Tea Party Patriots, as an example of such rhetoric: “We are the ones, oftentimes, in the houses and families, who are balancing the checkbooks and buying the groceries... When it comes to their own personal family checkbook, women are the ones who pay such close attention to it. And we are saying we want the government to do the same thing” (118). As shown in Figure 5, this frame existed in one-third of mama grizzly speeches in the 113th/114th Congresses, compared to only 5.9% in the 103rd/104th Congresses. Virginia Foxx (R-NC) argued in a floor speech that the family budgeting she

⁴⁶ Representative Love (UT). “Student Success Act.” 161: 105. (July 8, 2015). p. H4924.

⁴⁷ Representative Foxx (NC). “Providing Consideration of H.R. 1732, Regulatory Integrity Protection Act of 2015; Providing For Consideration of Conference Report on S. Con. Res. 11, Concurrent Resolution on the Budget.” 161: 64. (April 30, 2015). p. H2673.

⁴⁸ Representative Hartzler (MO). “Second Amendment Rights.” 159: 58. (April 25, 2013). p. H2343.

has had to do in her home should also be mandatory for the federal government: “Mr. Speaker, we have all had hands-on experience balancing a budget, sitting at the kitchen table long after the kids have gone to bed shuffling through bills and pay stubs. We all know the feeling. In my family, balancing our budget isn't just a priority, it is a requirement. We must view America's budget the same way.”⁴⁹ And Diane Black (R-NC) stressed in a 2015 floor speech, “Long before I served on the Budget Committee, I got a crash course on budgeting 101 as a single working mother.”⁵⁰

Changes in mama grizzly rhetoric demonstrate another way in which motherhood rhetoric has shifted to more closely align with Republican Party culture. By explicitly arguing that their expertise in conservative policy is rooted in their individual experiences as mothers in the private sphere, Republican congresswomen are able to speak to and as women while simultaneously upholding Republican principles of individualism and traditional gender roles.

Speaking as Republican Women

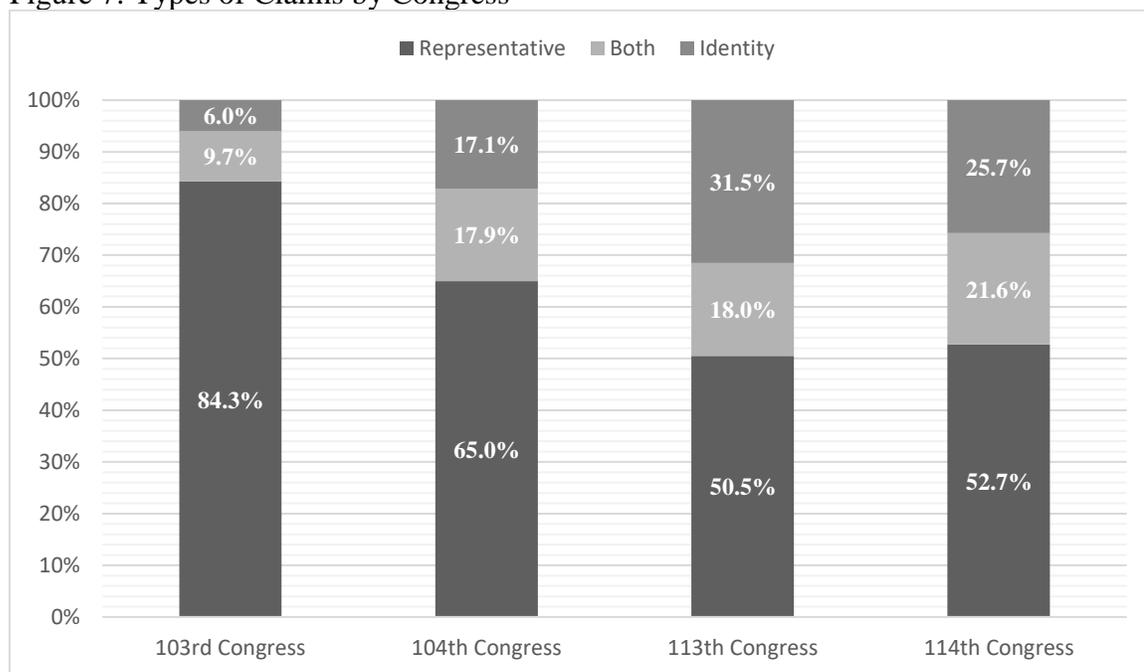
Thus far, the rhetorical changes highlighted in this chapter have focused specifically on motherhood rhetoric due to the historical significance of motherhood in conservative women's politics. In this section, I examine changes in the use of identity claims more broadly, testing the hypothesis that women are more likely now than in the 1990s to speak *as* women rather than on behalf of women.

⁴⁹ Representative Foxx (NC). “An American Budget, A Family Budget.” 161: 48. (March 23, 2015). p. H1834.

⁵⁰ Representative Black (NC). “Concurrent Resolution on the Budget for Fiscal Year 2016.” 161: 50. (March 25, 2015). p. H1942.

Figure 7 shows the percentages of types of claims used in Republican congresswomen's woman-invoked rhetoric speeches by Congress. In support of Hypothesis 4, I find a decrease in the percentage of speeches containing strictly representative claims and an increase in the percentage of speeches containing only identity claims. Indeed, the average percentage of woman-invoked rhetoric speeches in which only identity claims are present more than doubles from 13% in the 103rd/104th Congresses to 29.1% in the 113th/114th Congresses.

Figure 7: Types of Claims by Congress

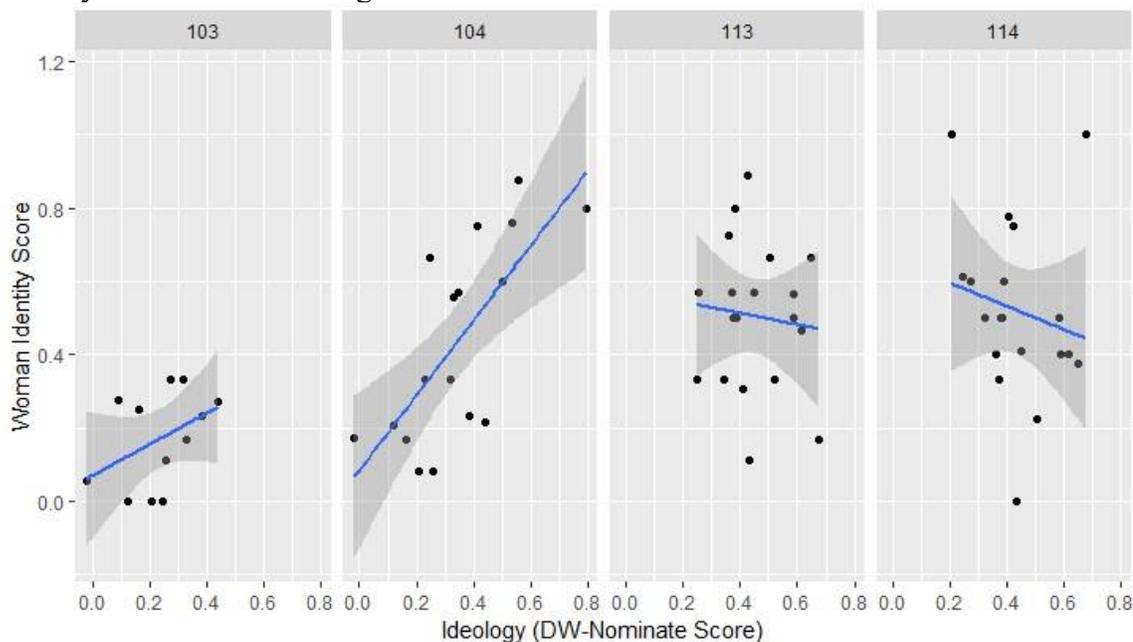


N = 134 in 103rd; 234 in 104th; 178 in 113th; 148 in 114th

To better understand the relationship between ideology and the use of identity claims, I calculated each member's "Woman Identity Score" by dividing the number of speeches in which they only used identity claims by their total number of woman-

invoked rhetoric speeches.⁵¹ Figure 8 shows the correlation between Republican congresswomen’s “Woman Identity Scores” and DW-NOMINATE scores. In the 104th Congress, there is a substantively positive and statistically significant correlation between the use of identity claims and ideology, with conservative members more likely to invoke their womanhood than moderate members. In the later Congresses, no such correlation exists. Thus, as Republican congresswomen have become more conservative and more ideologically cohesive, they have become more likely to use identity claims in their speeches. In the following section, I present results from an in-depth, qualitative reading of these speeches to highlight other changes in the way Republican congresswomen invoke their womanhood.

Figure 8: Relationship Between Republican Congresswomen’s Ideology and “Woman Identity Score” in Each Congress



Pearson’s correlation for each Congress: 103rd = 0.422; 104th = 0.718*; 113th = -0.096; 114th = -0.178

*Statistically significant at $p < .01$

Source for DW-NOMINATE data: Lewis, Jeffrey B., Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, Adam Boche, Aaron Rudkin, and Luke Sonnet (2018). *Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database*.

⁵¹ For example, if a woman gave 13 woman-invoked rhetoric speeches and 4 of them contained only identity claims, her Woman Identity Score would be .308.

The Significance of Being a Woman

The first notable change in identity claims is an increase in members claiming to be the first women to do something and recognizing the significance of that achievement. An example of this from the 103rd/104th Congresses can be seen in Helen Delich Bentley's (R-MD) speech on the death of Richard Nixon. She says, "Mr. Speaker, I was privileged to know him as his first major woman appointee."⁵²

Republican women made these claims much more frequently in the 113th and 114th Congresses. For instance, Michele Bachmann (R-MN) announced in 2014 that she will not seek re-election, saying, "It has been the privilege and the honor of a lifetime for me to serve as a Member of the United States Congress, serving as the first woman ever elected from the State of Minnesota in the capacity of being a Republican."⁵³ Kay Granger (R-TX) recalled her appointment to the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, saying, "As one of the first women ever to serve on the subcommittee, I wasn't sure how I would be treated."⁵⁴ Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) talked about playing in annual Congressional Baseball Game, mentioning that she "actually became the first woman to get on base in this traditional game."⁵⁵ Though few of these claims were substantive in terms of policy, I argue that this shift in rhetoric signals an acknowledgement by Republican women that it is important to recognize the achievements of women, including their own. This can be attributed, perhaps, to a changing political environment

⁵² Representative Bentley (MD). "Richard Milhous Nixon: His Strength and Flaws Were the Stuff of Shakespeare." 140. (April 28, 1994). p. H2848.

⁵³ Representative Bachmann (MD). "America: Land of Liberty." 160: 149. (December 9, 2014). p. H8923.

⁵⁴ Representative Granger (TX). "Remembering the Hon. C.W. Bill Young." 159: 151. (October 23, 2013). p. H6815.

⁵⁵ Representative Ros-Lehtinen (FL). "Honoring Representative Michael Garver 'Mike' Oxley." 162: 25. (February 11, 2016). p. H756.

in which breaking glass ceilings has become something to celebrate publicly – especially for a Republican Party that is working to reach out to female voters and demonstrate its commitment to women’s leadership.

From Congresswomen to Republican Women

Another notable rhetorical change is the shift from invoking an explicitly bipartisan gender identity to invoking an explicitly partisan one. Olympia Snowe (R-ME) chaired the bipartisan Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues (CCWI) in the 103rd Congress. In a 1994 floor speech, she emphasized that role, saying, “The Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, which I cochair with my colleague, [Democratic] Representative Pat Schroeder, has aggressively pursued the issue of applying Federal laws to Congress.”⁵⁶ Connie Morella (R-MD), chair of the CCWI in the 104th Congress, discussed the importance of child support enforcement laws, stressing the bipartisan work she was doing through the CCWI: “Mr. Chairman, as co-chair of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, I have been working with my colleagues--particularly Representatives Johnson, Roukema, Kennelly, Norton, and others--to fashion comprehensive legislation to strengthen our Nation's flimsy child support enforcement laws.”⁵⁷

In the 113th and 114th Congresses, the CCWI was chaired by Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA) and Kristi Noem (R-SD), respectively. Interestingly, neither of them mentioned this role in any of their speeches on the House floor. Meanwhile, several

⁵⁶ Representative Snowe (ME). “Congressional Accountability Act.” 140. (August 10, 1994). p. H7342.

⁵⁷ Representative Morella (MD). “Unfunded Mandate Reform Act of 1995.” 141:17. (January 27, 1995). p. H830.

Republican congresswomen did emphasize their identities as Republican women and, more specifically, their membership in the newly founded Republican Women's Policy Committee (RWPC). Virginia Foxx (R-NC), for example, criticized President Obama and Democratic Senate leadership as a member of the RWPC:

Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, members of the Republican Women's Policy Committee sent an earnest letter to Senator Harry Reid, asking him to please put aside the partisanship for a second and to take the opportunity to enact commonsense legislation to help our kids; take up bipartisan House legislation to restore WIC; to open NIH; and to fund Head Start. Senator Reid has done nothing, though, and President Obama said that it's their way or the highway, to give them everything they want or get lost.⁵⁸

During a special order scheduled by the RWPC, Diane Black (R-NC) said it was “an honor to be here and to be a part of today's Republican Women's Policy Committee on this Special Order on national security,”⁵⁹ and Martha McSally (R-AZ) appreciated the opportunity for “women in our Conference” to “speak about something that is vitally important to our communities.”⁶⁰

As they increasingly invoke a partisan gender identity in their speeches, Republican congresswomen both distinguish themselves from Democratic women and defend themselves against the gender stereotype that Republican women are more liberal than Republican men. In doing so, they credential themselves as true conservatives while emphasizing that women are not a monolith, thus working to avoid the perception of engaging in group identity politics. In Chapter 4, I look more closely at the CCWI and the RWPC to better understand this evolution from “congresswoman” to “party woman.”

⁵⁸ Representative Foxx (NC). “Their Way or the Highway.” 159: 140. (October 9, 2013). p. H6425.

⁵⁹ Representative Black (NC). “Imminent Threats to Our National Security.” 161: 109. (July 14, 2015). p. H5156.

⁶⁰ Representative McSally (AZ). “Imminent Threats to Our National Security.” 161: 109. (July 14, 2015). p. H5158.

Relational Military Expertise

A final important change to note is the use of a rhetorical frame in the 113th/114th Congresses that was not present in the 103rd/104th Congresses: what I call “relational military expertise.” In these speeches, Republican congresswomen use their personal relationship to a veteran or servicemember to demonstrate their expertise on a subject pertaining to the military. An example of this can be seen in Michele Bachmann’s (R-MN) praise of veterans. She said in a 2014 floor speech, “I am the daughter of a veteran, stepdaughter of a veteran, sister of a veteran, and I am so grateful because I recognize we would not be here today if it wasn't for our veterans, and I thank you for your service to our country because you answered the call.”⁶¹ Mimi Walters (R-CA) delivered a similar speech for Memorial Day, saying, “Mr. Speaker, as we approach Memorial Day, I wish to recognize our servicemembers who have so bravely answered the call to defend our great Nation. As the daughter of a U.S. Marine, I am eternally grateful for the service and sacrifice our troops make, all in the name of freedom.”⁶²

Republican congresswomen used these types of identity claims to make more substantive arguments about legislation as well. For example, Diane Black (R-NC) said in a 2015 speech, “Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the Hire More Heroes Act. In my home State of Tennessee, we have over 525,000 veterans who have served our country in both war and peace--veterans, people like my son, Steve, and my husband, Dave.”⁶³ And Ileana Ros-Lehtinen argued in favor of military intervention, saying:

⁶¹ Representative Bachmann (MN). “America: Land of Liberty.” 160: 149. (December 9, 2014). p. H8924.

⁶² Representative Walters (CA). “Honoring the Service of Corporal Fred Whitaker, Sr.” 161: 79. (May 21, 2015). p. H3510.

⁶³ Representative Black (NC). “Hire More Heroes Act of 2015.” 161: 1. (September 9, 2014). p. H31.

My husband Dexter is a Vietnam combat veteran and former Army Ranger who was wounded defending the ideals of freedom and democracy--not just for Americans, but for all those who seek them. As the leading nation of the free world, the United States must stand with the Vietnamese people who are being brutally oppressed by their authoritarian government so that they may all live in a free and democratic country.⁶⁴

Interviews with Republican women provide further insight into the connection between rhetoric and party culture. For instance, I often noticed Republican congresswomen's attempts to grapple with the tension between their belief in the importance of women's leadership and their ideological rejection of group identity politics. When asked which groups outside of her district she felt a commitment to represent, Kristi Noem (R-SD) said, "*I'm a mom* and the majority of voters in the county are women, so I think that I can always bring that perspective to the table."⁶⁵ [emphasis added] She immediately followed this up with, "It's not necessarily that I feel an obligation to always speak on behalf of other groups, but I do know that, that perspective needs to be interjected into every conversation."⁶⁶ Martha Roby (R-AL) told me, "I often get asked about being a woman in Congress, but it wasn't a factor in my decision [to run for office]."⁶⁷ Yet she also emphasized that "for [women] to have a seat at the table and be able to share an experience *as wives and mothers* is important."⁶⁸ [emphasis added]

Indeed, while Republican congresswomen are at times uncomfortable speaking on behalf of women or engaging in "identity politics," they also acknowledge the importance of their gendered experiences as wives and mothers. Similarly, through the

⁶⁴ Representative Ros-Lehtinen (FL). "Vietnam Human Rights Act of 2013." 159: 112. (July 31, 2013). p. H5253.

⁶⁵ Noem, Kristi. (17 November 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Roby, Martha. (12 February 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

deployment of a “relational military expertise” frame, Republican congresswomen appear to be addressing ideological tensions within their party’s culture. They are again using their roles in the private sphere – as wives and mothers – to credential themselves as experts on Republican-owned issues. In doing so, they relate traditionally conservative, “masculine” policies to women while conforming to the cultural norms of their party that emphasize individualism and a commitment to traditional gender roles.

Conclusion

In Chapter 2, I showed that an increase in party competition and ideological cohesion among Republican women has led to an increase in woman-invoked rhetoric that more closely aligns with the policy positions and messaging strategies of the Republican Party. In this chapter, I find that the specific language used by Republican congresswomen to promote “a message demonstrating that [Republican] policies, principles, and vision address the concerns of female voters”⁶⁹ also more closely aligns them with the culture of their party.

First, through an in-depth examination of motherhood rhetoric, I find that Republican congresswomen in recent years are more partisan in the way they represent mothers. Increasingly, Republican congresswomen are directly criticizing Democratic policies while claiming to act on behalf of mothers, thus touting conservative principles of “family values.” Second, they are speaking about women in ways that conform to their party’s ideological rejection of identity politics and emphasis on individualism; this is

⁶⁹ Barbour, Henry, Sally Bradshaw, Ari Fleischer, Zori Fonalledas, Glenn McCall. 2013. “Growth and Opportunity Project.” Republican National Committee. p. 120.

seen both through the increasing/changing use of identity claims and the shift to claiming to act on behalf of specific, individual constituents rather than women or mothers as a whole. Finally, my analysis of both mama grizzly rhetoric and identity claims more generally shows that, while “mama grizzlies” existed in both congressional eras, Republican congresswomen are increasingly using their experiences as wives and mothers to credential themselves when speaking on a wide range of Republican-owned issues like national security and economics. By highlighting the way their experiences in the private sphere are transferrable to the realm of policymaking, Republican congresswomen are speaking for women in ways that adhere to the cultural norms of their party.

Importantly, this dissertation does not compare the rhetoric of Republican and Democratic women. It may indeed be the case that Democratic women are also invoking women in their speeches in similar ways. However, I argue that the partisan context of these claims matters. For Republican women, these changes in motherhood rhetoric and the increasing use of gendered identity claims gives them the ability to speak for women within the confines of their party culture. This shift to engaging in what I call *partisan woman-invoked rhetoric* may provide additional opportunities for women within Republican Party politics. In the following chapters, I analyze the effects of party polarization and competition on the way Republican congresswomen act collectively as women and how female Conference leaders are able to leverage these changes in rhetoric and collective action.

CHAPTER 4 – INSTITUTIONALIZING A PARTISAN GENDER IDENTITY: THE REPUBLICAN WOMEN’S POLICY COMMITTEE

At an awards dinner hosted by the Independent Women’s Forum in October 2012, Representative Mary Bono (R-CA) said, "You would think that I would argue with you about the conservative movement being clueless with talking to women, but I cannot argue with you because I agree with you."¹ Amidst claims of a “Republican war on women,” Bono and her Republican women colleagues argued that their party needed to be more effective in the way it speaks to women across the country. Five months earlier, Bono founded the Republican Women’s Policy Committee (RWPC) – a caucus comprised of all 24 Republican women in the House – to elevate women’s voices within the GOP. It was the first time in congressional history that Republican women organized formally as a group.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I showed that ideological polarization and increased party competition in Congress have contributed to the emergence of partisan woman-invoked rhetoric among Republican congresswomen. That is, Republican women in Congress are speaking for women in an increasingly partisan manner, invoking gendered claims that align with GOP policy positions, messaging strategies, and culture. In this chapter, I focus on Republican women’s desire and ability to organize as women. More specifically, I ask: 1) How do Republican congresswomen navigate tensions between their partisan and gender identities, and how has this changed over time? 2) How has congressional polarization affected the way Republican women organize collectively as women? To answer these questions, I trace the politics of congressional women’s

¹ Bedard, Paul. 4 Oct. 2012. “Mary Bono Mack: GOP Clueless in Talking to Women.” *Washington Examiner*.

caucuses from the creation of the bipartisan Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues (CCWI) to the partisan RWPC.

The first half of this chapter analyzes Republican women's relationship to the CCWI. Focusing on caucus membership and participation, I show how various political and institutional changes have contributed to the recognition of a *partisan gender identity* among Republican women. Increasingly, Republican congresswomen have come to work at the intersection of their partisan and gender identities, distinguishing themselves both from Democratic women and from Republican men.

The second half of the chapter examines the creation and accomplishments of the RWPC. Through this analysis of Republican women's collective action in the House, I show how congressional polarization has contributed to the institutionalization of a partisan gender identity, in which Republican women formally advocate on behalf of their gender and party simultaneously. In doing so, I further demonstrate that the use of partisan woman-invoked rhetoric is not simply a top-down strategy; rather, it is the result of a combination of Republican women's collective action and leadership's embrace of women as party messengers.

Women's Collective Action in Congress

In analyzing the institutionalization of a partisan gender identity through the RWPC, I turn to Anna Mahoney's (2018) definition of an institutionalized group. Mahoney defines *institutionalized* as "a structure that enables the group to function and be recognized by other nonmembers as a group" (9). Within legislatures, members often choose to form institutionalized groups – also known as caucuses – in order to bring

attention to their legislative interests. Caucuses in Congress, called Congressional Member Organizations (CMOs), must have an internal leadership structure and be registered with the House Committee on Administration.

In both Congress and state legislatures, women have created bipartisan caucuses focusing on gendered interests, even despite some ideological disagreements about policy (Gertzog 2004; Mahoney 2018). Mahoney (2018) describes the formation of women's caucuses as "collective action within institutions" (27). Consistent with social movement theory (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Olson 1965; Tarrow 1994), Mahoney finds that a combination of political opportunities, resources, and framing allows entrepreneurs to mobilize women as a group. She further argues that, as a result of varying political environments, women's caucuses can emerge for different reasons and pursue various goals.² For instance, when bipartisan women's caucuses are established in more polarized legislatures, they tend to focus less on policy and more on attaining social support and recognition for women within the institution (Mahoney 2018).

Susan Webb Hammond (1998) distinguishes between six types³ of caucuses in Congress. Among these are *intraparty caucuses* and *national constituency caucuses*. The CCWI is an example of a national constituency caucus, as its membership is bipartisan and bicameral and works on a broad range of issues related to women. Intraparty

² At the state level, Holman and Mahoney (2018) further show that women's caucuses facilitate legislative collaboration – even in polarized environments – within Democratic-controlled legislatures and as the number of women increase.

³ The six types of congressional caucuses identified by Hammond (1998) are: 1) personal-interest caucuses, whose members tend to be bipartisan and focus on one particular issue; 2) regional caucuses, whose members come from a particular region and focus on issues related to that region; 3) state/district caucuses, which focus on the interests of a specific state or district 4) industry caucuses, which focus on issues related to a particular industry, 5) intraparty caucuses, whose members come from the same party and share similar ideologies; and 6) national constituency caucuses, whose members are bipartisan and work on a range of issues pertaining to a specific constituency.

caucuses, like the moderate Blue Dog Democrats or the conservative Republican Study Committee, are comprised of members from the same party who share similar ideologies. Yet as parties in Congress become increasingly polarized, caucuses like the Republican Women's Policy Committee – or, for that matter, the Democratic Women's Caucus⁴ – do not fit neatly into Hammond's typology. This chapter thus seeks to understand how ideological polarization and party competition have encouraged women in Congress to work together at the intersection of their gender and partisan identities.

Beyond that, this analysis focuses on the institutional and political factors that have both enabled and constrained Republican women's collective action in Congress. Working within a party culture that rejects group identity politics (Freeman 1986), prioritizes "masculine" issues like national security (Winter 2010), and advocates anti-feminist stances on conventional women's issues like abortion, Republican women have had to negotiate tensions between their gender and partisan identities in ways that Democratic women have not. By understanding changes in the way Republican congresswomen work collectively as women, I seek to unveil implications of party polarization and competition that have previously been overlooked by congressional scholars.

Data & Methods

To examine the evolution of Republican congresswomen's desire and ability to work together at the intersection of their gender and partisanship, I rely primarily on

⁴ The Democratic Women's Caucus, formerly the Democratic Women's Working Group until March 2019, was created in the 113th Congress. Unlike the RWPC, the Democratic Women's Caucus was created as party of a party leadership initiative and, at the time of this writing, has not yet formally registered as CMO.

interviews conducted with women members of Congress in the 103rd, 104th, and 114th Congresses by the Center for American Women and Politics.⁵ For this chapter, I look specifically at discussions related to the CCWI, the informal and formal gatherings of Republican women, the creation of the RWPC, and the role that the RWPC has played in elevating Republican women's voices within their party (see Appendix B for a sample interview protocol). These interviews provide valuable insight into changes in the way Republican congresswomen view their role in the party, their relationship with male leadership, their motivations to pursue women's collective action, and the challenges and opportunities they have encountered along the way. Interviews were supplemented with primary and secondary sources from the Library of Congress and the National Archives, news articles, and memoirs written by members of Congress and other political actors. These sources offered further insight into the political climate and provided additional context for the claims made by interviewees.

Gender vs. Party: Tensions in a Bipartisan Women's Caucus

Conservative responses to the social movements of the 1960s and '70s presented a challenging environment for feminists involved in party politics. Throughout the 1970s, both Democratic and Republican feminists fought the rise of the New Right, which, among other things, sought to preserve traditional gender roles in its opposition to abortion rights and the Equal Rights Amendment. In response, the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) was created by activists in 1971 as a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to advancing feminist goals in the realm of electoral politics.

⁵ See Chapter 1 for a detailed description of interview data.

Importantly, though they all identified as feminists, Republican and Democratic women in the NWPC still viewed themselves as party women working within specific party cultures. Consistent with Freeman's (1986) analysis of cultural differences between the parties, Republican co-founder of the NWPC, Tanya Melich, wrote: "We had the same goals, but we were all finding our work on interparty problems to be strained and difficult within the NWPC. The Democrats had their way of doing things, and we had ours. We found them more disorganized and raucous; they found us more formal and staid. We tended to be less confrontational and more structured" (Melich 1996, 41). The NWPC thus formed separate partisan task forces as "a necessary recognition that feminists had to fight their own battles within their parties in their own ways" (Melich 1996, 41).

In Congress, too, Democratic and Republican women were simultaneously pursuing gendered policy goals while acknowledging their partisan identities and interests. While women in Congress had varying policy priorities and ideologies, they nevertheless recognized that they brought important gendered perspectives to the institution and were able to organize formally as women. In this section, I trace the politics of the bipartisan congressional women's caucus, focusing specifically on the way Republican congresswomen have negotiated tensions between their gender and partisan identities. From the creation of the women's caucus in the 95th Congress (1977-1978) through the Republican Revolution in the 104th Congress (1995-1996), I analyze how changes in the political environment – including presidential administrations, congressional reforms, party control, and the composition of women in Congress – have affected Republican congresswomen's participation in the caucus. In doing so, I highlight

a shift toward the recognition of a *partisan gender identity* – an intersectional identity distinct from Democratic women and Republican men.

Organizing as Congresswomen: 1977-1992

Throughout the 1970s, both Democratic and Republican women were skeptical of the purpose and function of a caucus dedicated to women, fearing that attention to women's issues could be alienating and divisive. It was not until 1977 that Margaret Heckler (R-MA) and Elizabeth Holtzman (D-NY), two respected and experienced representatives, were able to garner sufficient support for the idea of a bipartisan, pluralistic women's caucus (Gertzog 2004). After several failed attempts, the Congresswomen's Caucus – as the CCWI was formerly called – was officially established in the 95th Congress as a Legislative Service Organization (LSO) and co-chaired by Heckler and Holtzman. Fifteen of the 18 women members of Congress joined the Congresswomen's Caucus that year.

As Irwin Gertzog (2004) explains, a continued acknowledgement that women are not ideologically monolithic was of critical importance for the creation of the caucus. Bipartisanship was a survival strategy that was adopted and promoted by caucus leaders from the outset. As such, no member was forced to support a specific issue, and unanimous consent was required for all policy endorsements and actions. In the same vein, it was established from the beginning that the controversial issue of abortion would remain off the table.

Yet, by the 1980s, partisan tensions had already begun to tear at the bipartisan fabric of the caucus. As the New Right gained steam in the American politics, the 1980

election brought with it a number of consequences for the Congresswomen’s Caucus. Six caucus members lost their races that year. And, while five new Republican women were elected to Congress,⁶ all of them refused to join the caucus. Calling the Equal Rights Amendment “irrelevant,” the newly elected Republican senator from Florida, Paula Hawkins, said, “I don’t believe in a women’s caucus, black caucus or any special interest caucus.”⁷ She went on: “As women, we’re all for equality – or superiority. But there are better ways to attack the problems which have come to be known as women’s issues. Elect more women to the United States Senate. It’s women’s fault for not running for office.”⁸

Even the more moderate Republican women took issue with the high membership dues and the fact that Representative Patricia (Pat) Schroeder of Colorado had replaced Holtzman as Democratic co-chair. Schroeder was an outspoken liberal who was vocal in her support of abortion rights and her criticism of Ronald Reagan. Freshman Republican representative, Lynn Martin of Illinois, made her case for not joining the Congresswomen’s Caucus: “The dues were too high, and I don’t need to pay that for a Pat Schroeder show.”⁹ Indeed, members were required to make an annual contribution of \$2,500, and, in July of 1981, the Executive Committee repealed the unanimity rule, making it easier for the caucus to openly criticize the president’s policies (Gertzog 2004, 22). For several Republican women, the cost of membership outweighed the benefits of

⁶ Amer, Mildred. 23 July 2008. “Women in the United States Congress: 1917-2008.” *Congressional Research Service*.

⁷ Women in Congress, 1917–2017 / prepared under the direction of the Committee on House Administration of the U.S. House of Representatives, Gregg Harper, chairman, Robert A. Brady, ranking minority member, by the Office of the Historian and Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives. 2017. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

joining the caucus, especially with Ronald Reagan as president. By the 98th Congress (1983-1984), membership among House Republican women had fallen to just 33% (3 of the 9 women) (Gertzog 2004, 25).

President Reagan made clear his conservative stances on most issues, including those typically deemed “women’s issues”; he was pro-life and opposed the Equal Rights Amendment. As such, congressional Republicans who had been elected on his coattails were reluctant to join groups and causes that could be seen as challenging the positions of the White House (Gertzog 2004, 21). For the newly-elected Republican women, that included the Congresswomen’s Caucus, which was viewed by conservatives as a bastion for identity politics and liberal policy.

Congressional reforms to LSOs in 1981 also placed the Congresswomen’s Caucus in a difficult situation. No longer able to raise funds from outside interest groups, caucus leaders were forced to find other means to finance the caucus. And so, officially renaming itself the Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues (CCWI) in 1982, the caucus expanded its membership to include men. By the end of the year, 100 congressmen – mostly Democrats – became dues-paying members of the CCWI. Among these congressmen was Democratic Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O’Neill. Widely known as one of the most approachable leaders in the House, the Speaker met regularly with caucus members (Gertzog 2004, 24).

Indeed, establishing rapport with both congressional leadership and presidential administrations was a strategic decision the caucus made in order to best represent women (Gertzog 2004). Yet, from the beginning, President Reagan and his advisers largely ignored the CCWI. While the caucus had maintained a successful working

relation with Democratic leadership and the Carter administration, it struggled to even receive responses to meeting invitations from the Reagan administration (Gertzog 2004).

The active distancing from the CCWI by both the Republican administration and newly-elected Republican women in Congress highlights the complexity of collective action for women in the GOP. Importantly, many moderate Republican women understood the unique perspectives that women could bring to the policymaking process. Three of the four¹⁰ moderate Republican women who won their congressional elections in 1980 did so with the help of women's organizations (Gertzog 2004, 21). And while they may have, at times, disagreed with liberal women on how to achieve gender equality, they nevertheless believed it was a cause worth pursuing. Representative Bobbi Fiedler (R-CA), who did not consider herself a feminist before coming to Washington, said that she felt a "special obligation" to represent women: "I began to realize that most men have very little real knowledge of the problems women face."¹¹ Marge Roukema (R-NJ) spoke of gender differences in economic prosperity, arguing, "There's a growing recognition that the reward for a lifetime of homemaking is can be an old age of poverty."¹²

Despite rarely meeting with members of the women's caucus, Ronald Reagan would publicly claim that policies had gendered implications and would speak about the importance of women in elective office. Importantly, though, Reagan valued women first

¹⁰ Four moderate Republican women were elected to Congress in 1980: Bobbi Fiedler (CA), Lynn Martin (IL), Marge Roukema (NJ), and Claudine Schneider (RI).

¹¹ Steven V. Roberts, "Congress Stages a Preemptive Strike on the Gender Gap," 6 May 1984, *New York Times*: 227.

¹² *Ibid.*

and foremost as party loyalists¹³ who could help the GOP close the gender gap that first emerged in the 1980 election.¹⁴ At a 1984 fundraiser for Republican women candidates, Reagan argued that “big taxing and big spending” had “hit women especially hard”:

The majority of elderly Americans are women, and they found their purchasing power eaten up by inflation. Working women saw taxes eat more of their paychecks. Homemakers found that double-digit inflation made it harder and harder to buy groceries and pay the bills. And the thousands of women who wanted to start their own businesses saw 21-percent prime interest rates slam shut the doors of opportunity.¹⁵

To the women in the room that day, President Reagan said, “All of you are especially important, because you demonstrate the Republican commitment to American women... Republican women ought to increase their numbers at every level of elective office.”¹⁶

Thus, in the early 1980s, it was not a lack of commitment to women that caused newly-elected Republican women to refuse membership into the women’s caucus; it was a political calculation based on the institutional environment and political context. The election of Ronald Reagan as president, Pat Schroeder as Democratic co-chair of caucus, and the caucus’s decision in 1981 to remove the unanimity rule and actively oppose White House policies all contributed to these decisions.

Even still, interest in the CCWI among Republican members gradually increased throughout the 1980s. While President George H. W. Bush was largely indifferent to the women’s caucus, advisers in his administration did take time to meet with members,

¹³ As described by authors like Jo Freeman (2000) and Catherine Rymph (2006), the Republican Party, even more than the Democratic Party, values women as party loyalists. Republican women’s organizations, in fact, are often auxiliary groups working to advance the party’s policies rather than attempting to challenge or reform them.

¹⁴ See Carroll 2014 for a historical analysis of the gender gap and why it matters in American politics.

¹⁵ Remarks at a Fundraiser for Republican Women Candidates on the Occasion of Susan B. Anthony’s Birthday. February 15, 1984. The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

<<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/speeches/1984/21584c.htm>>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

particularly on health-related issues (Gertzog 2004, 32). Aside from working on issues of importance to them, a major incentive to join the CCWI for Republican members, who were in the minority party, included the ability to “learn from Democratic women members what majority party leaders were contemplating” (Gertzog 2004, 84). Between the 98th (1983-1984) and 102nd (1991-1992) Congresses, female Republican membership increased from 33% to 67% (6 of 9 Republican women), and male Republican membership increased from 5% to 8% (Gertzog 2004, 25).

The legislative success of the CCWI in the early 1990s is difficult to dispute. Republican and Democratic women worked together on issues related to women’s health, violence against women, and childcare. When asked if Republican women were just as involved as Democratic women on issues of women’s health, Susan Molinari (R-NY) told CAWP:

Mm-hmm. And frankly, once you get to women's health, once you bring the issue up, men are too. Because while it may not be the first thing that triggers when you talk about breast cancer, every one of those guys has lost a wife, a sister, a cousin, to breast cancer, and is fearful that their daughter is going to be the one. So, once you bring those issues up, they are fairly bipartisan in their acceptance of it.¹⁷

As a legislative vehicle, the CCWI also played an important role in getting the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) signed into law. Moderate Republican Representative Connie Morella, who chaired the CCWI’s Task Force on Violence Against Women, had this to say about the function of the caucus:

We had strategy sessions. We also used women’s groups. They were a great network for telling us what was happening on the Senate side, and maybe, ‘We understand that so-and-so feels this way,’ and, ‘This is the way to get through to so-and-so.’ And then we asked all the members of the Caucus (and particularly

¹⁷ Molinari, Susan. (27 June 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

those on the Task Force) to make sure that they spoke to them... And I think it helped, I really do.¹⁸

Both Democratic and Republican women, through the CCWI, worked on gender-specific issues that could garner bipartisan support among their male colleagues. Yet, despite clear moments of legislative success, the caucus continued to face partisan rifts into the 1990s and beyond. In what follows, I detail these dilemmas at the beginning of the Clinton administration and in the aftermath of the Republican takeover of the House, focusing on the perspectives and experiences of Republican congresswomen.

Clinton, Abortion, and Increasing Partisan Tensions: 103rd Congress

The initial decision by caucus leaders to keep the issue of abortion off the table was due both to the controversial nature of the topic and to the fact that women on both sides of the aisle had varying policy stances. Indeed, in 1977, six¹⁹ of the 18 women in the House – three Republicans and three Democrats – voted in favor of the Hyde Amendment, which would prohibit the use of federal funds to finance abortion.²⁰ By 1993, though, abortion was becoming an increasingly partisan issue, with most Democratic women supporting abortion rights.²¹ And while several moderate Republican women were also outspoken supporters of abortion rights, others were pro-life or preferred the issue to be kept off the congressional agenda altogether (see Chapter 2).

¹⁸ Morella, Connie. (22 June 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

¹⁹ The six women supporting the Hyde Amendment were: Lindy Boggs (D-LA), Mary Rose Oakar (D-OH), Marilyn Lloyd (D-TN), Marjorie Holt (R-MD), Margaret Heckler (R-MA), and Virginia Smith (R-NE).

²⁰ Tolchin, Martin. 18 June 1977. "House Bars Medicaid Abortions and Funds for Enforcing Quotas." *The New York Times*.

²¹ See Freeman 2008 for an in-depth historical analysis of this partisan transformation and the politics behind the explicit adoption of abortion language in the parties' national platforms.

The 1992 election is commonly referred to as “The Year of the Woman.” Leading into the 103rd Congress (1993-1995), women gained a total of 18 seats in the House and 4 seats in the Senate, bringing the total number of women to 48²² and 6, respectively.²³ Notably, most of these gains were made by Democratic women: Republican women gained only three seats in the House, bringing their number to 12, or one-quarter of the total number of women in the House.²⁴ This partisan discrepancy among women in Congress, the election of President Bill Clinton, and a unified Democratic government encouraged CCWI leadership to reconsider their neutral stance on the issue of abortion (Gertzog 2004). At the first caucus meeting in 1993, following over a decade of Republican control of the White House and the appointment of conservative Justice Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, members voted to make the CCWI a pro-choice organization (Gertzog 204, 51).

With abortion back on the table, pro-life Republican women distanced themselves from the CCWI. In an interview, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) said she refused to join the women’s caucus because it “was really a pro-abortion group.”²⁵ She argued that, by taking this stance, the CCWI “really limited itself, although [its members] would not agree. But everything was in terms of bashing the Republicans and advancing the abortion lobbyists’ agenda. So it was really uncomfortable for me to participate.”²⁶ Representative Barbara Vucanovich (R-NV) expressed similar sentiments in her

²² This number includes Eleanor Holmes Norton, a non-voting delegate representing Washington, D.C.

²³ “Year of the Woman, 1992.” History, Arts, and Archives. United States House of Representatives. < <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Essays/Assembling-Amplifying-Ascending/Women-Decade/>>.

²⁴ “History of Women in the U.S. Congress.” *The Center for American Women and Politics at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University*. < <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/history-women-us-congress>>.

²⁵ Ros-Lehtinen, Ileana. (09 October 1997). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

²⁶ Ibid.

interview with CAWP: “I have not specifically worked with the Congresswomen’s Caucus... They are pro-choice, and it is part of their by-laws that if you are a member of the Congresswomen's Caucus you have to agree to that, and I don't.”²⁷

The issue of abortion was salient throughout the 103rd Congress. Among the specific legislation debated was the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) bill, the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA), and a reauthorization of the Hyde Amendment. Both the CCWI and individual pro-choice women opposed the Hyde Amendment and actively fought against it. While Representative Tillie Fowler (R-FL) was ultimately instrumental in working with Congressman Henry Hyde (R-IL) to include a rape and incest exception (Dodson et. al. 1995), she felt the CCWI’s opposition to the amendment illustrated the fact that the caucus was not welcoming to all women. “I felt that the caucus, which started out with the purpose [of being] a network for women members, became very politicized during the 103rd Congress,” she said, “And I thought that was a minus for the caucus, really. And a lot of us quit going because of that. Some women viewed it as something they could use to speak for all women in the Congress, which was not the way it was to have been, and not the way I think it should be used.”²⁸

Indeed, even Republican women who identified as pro-choice were critical of the CCWI and its decision to support abortion rights. In her interview with CAWP, Representative Jennifer Dunn (R-WA) described how she arrived at her decision not to join the women’s caucus:

I was going to join because I thought it would be a good resource for me... And I found out they had taken a position on abortion. So I'm not going to join that group because I think it should be an inclusive group, and it should be for our use

²⁷ Vucanovich, Babara. (20 July 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

²⁸ Fowler, Tillie. (03 August 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

and that we shouldn't get into endorsing particular political points of view on some of these problems where our approaches are diverse. That keeps out people who are friends of mine, like Ileana Ros-Lehtinen - I want her to be able to join a group like that - or Helen Bentley, or Barbara Vucanovich. I want us to be able to all join that group.²⁹

That Jennifer Dunn was concerned not about her own policy stances, but about the professional and political advancement of fellow Republican women, highlights the tension between partisan and gender identity for many Republican women in Congress – not only the most conservative ones. Republican women in the 103rd Congress were gender-conscious actors who wanted to work on “women’s issues” and understood the benefits of joining a women’s caucus. Yet, both ideological disagreements and partisan comradery kept some women from joining, despite those benefits. By the end of the 103rd Congress, CCWI membership had dropped to about 58% (7 of 12) among Republican congresswomen.

Party Loyalty in the Republican Revolution: 104th Congress

The results of the 1994 midterm elections gave Republicans a majority in the House for the first time in four decades and ushered in a large freshman class of Republicans: the GOP gained 54 seats in the House and 8 in the Senate. Notably, eleven women were elected to the House that year – seven Republicans and four Democrats – bringing the total number of Republican women in the House to 18.³⁰ On the heels of the historic 1992 election, the 1994 midterm marked what political scientist Richard Fox (1996) called the “Year of the *Republican Woman*” (15).

²⁹ Dunn, Jennifer. (15 June 1998). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

³⁰ “History of Women in the U.S. Congress.” *The Center for American Women and Politics at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University*. < <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/history-women-us-congress>>.

While some Republicans prior to the midterms were content with their status in the “permanent minority” (Connelly and Pitney 1994), others had been planning the “Republican Revolution.” Tom DeLay (R-TX), majority whip in the 104th Congress, highlighted intraparty tensions in 1993 prior to the GOP’s takeover: “We’re having a struggle right now within the Republican Party... [between] those who think they’re here to govern and those who think they’re here to take over a majority. I am not among those here to govern. I am here to take over a majority from the Democrats” (Connelly and Pitney 1994, 62). Part of this winning strategy was to aggressively attack the Democratic President while proposing conservative policy alternatives. Six weeks before the midterm election, on September 27, 1994, over 300 congressional candidates stood on the steps of the Capitol to sign the Contract with America, a pledge to enact ten conservative bills that emphasized limited government, fiscal responsibility, and social welfare reform.

One consequence of the election results was that, rightly or wrongly, congressional Republicans in the 104th Congress believed they had a mandate from the American people to enact the Contract with America within their first 100 days in office (Fenno 1997). For newly-elected Republican congresswomen, most of whom were more ideologically conservative than their senior counterparts, joining the CCWI was not on their list of priorities. On the contrary, in fact, many of them were actively opposed to such a caucus and were determined to distinguish themselves from what conservative radio talk show host, Rush Limbaugh, called the “feminazis” (Gertzog 2004, 87). Of the seven freshmen Republican women, only one – Sue Kelly of New York – officially joined the caucus.

Beyond ideological differences, institutional changes increased tensions for other Republican women between their gender and partisan identities. In the House, the majority party has the power to set the rules of the game (Cox and McCubbins 1993). In 1995, the Republicans of the 104th Congress elected Newt Gingrich (R-GA) Speaker of the House. Notoriously partisan in his approach to politics, Gingrich worked to restructure the House in a way that increased the power of party leaders and benefited Republicans. Among these reforms was the elimination of LSOs. As a result, the CCWI, along with other caucuses like the Congressional Black Caucus and the Democratic Study Group, no longer had office space or funding for staff. Pat Schroeder argued that the new Republican leadership was effectively establishing "a new gag rule for American women by seeking to silence the members of Congress who work in their behalf."³¹ The ineffectiveness of the caucus, which reorganized itself as a Congressional Member Organization (CMO), had caused women on both sides of the aisle to work on issues outside of the CCWI. Nancy Johnson, Republican of Connecticut, noted: "My impression was that in the 104th Congress, the caucus was generally a small group of Democratic women meeting and maybe Connie Morella."³²

By restructuring the House and centralizing power in party leadership, Gingrich also incentivized party loyalty over gendered activism among Republican women. As Irwin Gertzog (2004) describes, "The increased distance Republican women placed between themselves and the caucus dovetailed with the designs of Newt Gingrich. The new Speaker sought actively to weaken the bonds GOP women had established with

³¹ Ross, Michael. 7 Dec. 1994. "GOP Plans to Cut Funds for Black Caucus, Others." *The Los Angeles Times*.

³² Johnson, Nancy. (03 December 1997). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

women Democrats, and to integrate them more fully into the Republican Party” (84). As Speaker, Gingrich imposed six-year term limits on committee chairmanships and weakened the seniority system, creating the House Steering Committee and essentially giving GOP leaders power over committee appointments. “Under the new system,” Gertzog writes, “a total of thirty-one votes would be distributed among Steering Committee members, with the Speaker’s vote valued at six, and nine other GOP leaders casting ten more – a majority of the total votes. This meant that no Republican could be appointed to a committee without the approval of at least some party leaders” (Gertzog 2004, 60). Despite lacking seniority, Republican congresswomen were appointed to powerful committees and offered party leadership positions as a way to encourage party loyalty. In her interview with CAWP, Jan Meyers (R-KS), chair of the Small Business Committee in the 104th Congress, discussed how these appointments affected the relationship between Democratic and Republican women:

We end up talking about the same issues, and in that way we are working together, [but] we don't get together and plan things particularly... Republican women [are] getting their feet on the ground in terms of leadership. I've got a chairmanship, Nancy [Johnson] has got a chairmanship, we've got a couple of people on Appropriations and a couple on Ways & Means. It's just kind of getting your feet on the ground in terms of legislative policy. And maybe the role of Republican women has changed just a little bit... the Republican women are a lot busier and a lot more involved with policy.³³

In addition to formal leadership positions, Gingrich strengthened party loyalty by holding regularly scheduled meetings with Republican women. Tillie Fowler (R-FL) said in an interview with CAWP, “We [the Republican women] meet with Newt about every other week... And really it was his suggestion. He said he wanted to find out what we

³³ Meyers, Jan. (18 November 1997). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

were thinking, what our concerns were. No staff, just us and you, off-the-record meetings. And it has been great."³⁴ Indeed, Gingrich understood the importance of closing the gender gap and establishing rapport among Republican women (in Chapter 5, I talk more about the significance of Gingrich's support in Jennifer Dunn's pathway to Conference leadership). Access to the Democratic majority leadership had been a major incentive for Republican women to join the CCWI prior to the 104th Congress; by giving Republican congresswomen direct access to the Speaker, Gingrich effectively disincentivized membership in the CCWI and deepened the divide between Democratic and Republican women in the House (Gertzog 2004, 84). When asked in a CAWP interview whether there was any advantage to being a member of the women's caucus in the 104th Congress, Marge Roukema, moderate Republican of New Jersey, responded simply: "No."³⁵

This strengthening of party loyalty can also be seen through the informal gatherings of Republican women. In the 104th and 105th Congresses, Republican women would get together for informal dinners, often at Nancy Johnson's house. Jennifer Dunn (R-WA) told CAWP in a 1997 interview, "There is a dinner that we [the Republican women] can attend every Wednesday night... It is really a good support group. And we're going different directions... We all have our own interests... but we do have a lot in common, and we understand that and we work together on things."³⁶ Indeed, working together at the intersection of their gender and partisan identities was not always easy. Republican women in the 1990s were not nearly as ideologically homogenous as they are

³⁴ Fowler, Tillie. (03 August 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

³⁵ Roukema, Marge. (22 September 1997). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

³⁶ Dunn, Jennifer. (15 June 1997). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

today, and they often disagreed with each other in terms of policy. As Barbara Vucanovich noted in her interview, “You had very strong differences of opinions... Our Republican women had a very informal group where we would have dinner together, have a glass of wine, visit and so forth, and invariably we would get into some of those differences - I mean, in our party! And I don't respect them less, but you know, I would finally go home.”³⁷ Still, institutional changes – including majority party status, the elimination of resources for the CCWI, and access to formal policymaking power – created incentives for beginning to identify and collaborate as party women.

Susan Molinari (R-NY) would later write in her memoir, “The tragedy of women’s politics within the House was how frequently we were divided not by ideology, but by pure partisanship, by the pressures and politics from within our own caucuses” (Molinari 1998, 95). As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, women in the 104th House were eventually able to accomplish some bipartisan policy goals through the CCWI, including the adoption of childcare and child support provisions within the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. But the institutional changes ushered in during the 104th Congress resulted in increased party loyalty among Republican women and a shift toward the recognition of a partisan gender identity. In the following section, I examine how increasing polarization and changes in the political environment have given Republican women the opportunity and resources to organize formally at the intersection of their gender and partisan identities in way that has not previously been seen.

³⁷ Vucanovich, Barbara. (18 November 1997). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

A Caucus of Their Own: Republican Women's Collective Action in the House

Navigating the tension between their gender and partisan identities, Republican congresswomen have at times chosen to work across party lines as women, and, at other times, have chosen party loyalty over their gendered interests. Yet since the 104th Congress (1995-1996), incentives to identify and work as Republican women – at the *intersection* of their partisan and gender identities – have become increasingly present. In what follows, I continue to trace the development of a partisan gender identity along with the creation of the first and only Republican women's caucus: the Republican Women's Policy Committee (RWPC). I show that, while approval of party leadership plays a significant role, the formation of the RWPC was not merely a top-down decision made by party leaders; rather, Republican women view the attainment of institutional power as mutually beneficial for themselves and their party, and they have both taken advantage of opportunities and faced challenges in creating and maintaining their own caucus.

Anna Mahoney (2018) argues that women face unique collective action costs within legislative institutions. Along with typical organizational challenges like acquiring necessary time and resources (Olson 1965), women legislators must also navigate other formal and informal norms. For instance, party leaders can present obstacles for legislative collective action, especially if they perceive that action to contradict the norms and interests of the party (Mahoney 2018, 34). For Republican women, in particular, simply organizing around a group identity challenges the cultural norms of the party (Freeman 1986; Mahoney 2018, 32). The institutional marginalization of women – exclusion from important leadership roles and gender biases, for example – also presents unique organizational obstacles for female legislators (Mahoney 2018, 32).

Nevertheless, these challenges can be overcome through various means. First, taking advantage of political opportunities when they arise is critically important. Through this analysis, I show how increased intraparty cohesion and interparty competition, within the context of a broader gendered political environment, has created opportunities for Republican congresswomen's mobilization. Women's acknowledgement of their own marginalization can also serve as motivation for collective action. Indeed, despite a general rejection of identity politics among Republicans, I find that many Republican congresswomen recognize that they are uniquely disadvantaged in Congress and their party, and that this has been a motivating factor for the formation of the RWPC. Second, organizing successfully requires congresswomen to view a caucus as worthy of their time and resources. An effective caucus entrepreneur can help to recruit potential members by framing caucus participation as worthwhile. Finally, in the context of partisan politics, caucus members must also be able to frame their collective action in a way that does not alienate party leadership. This analysis reveals both how Republican congresswomen were successful in organizing around their partisan gender identity and the continuing influence and power of Republican party leaders.

Party Polarization and the Republican War on Women

The 1990s marked the beginning of an explicitly partisan use of the term “war on women.”³⁸ Following the Republican takeover of Congress and the party's

³⁸ Wineinger, Catherine. 2018. “War against Women.” *Women in the American Political System: An Encyclopedia of Women as Voters, Candidates, and Office Holders*. Eds. Dianne Bystrom and Barbara Burrell. Volume 2: ABC-Clio.

implementation of conservative policies, feminists increasingly claimed that the GOP was detrimental to women's rights. Tanya Melich, feminist activist and former Republican Party insider, titled her 1996 book *The Republican War Against Women*. In it, she detailed the New Right's takeover of the Republican Party and demonstrated that the GOP's new electoral strategy involved a direct repudiation of the feminist and civil rights movements. Claims of a "Republican war on women" intensified during the George W. Bush administration, with feminists arguing that the administration's policies harmed women in the United States and abroad (Finlay 2006).

At the same time, the 2002 midterm elections brought even more ideologically conservative women into Congress. Unlike most midterms, in which the president's party typically loses congressional seats, Republicans gained seats in both chambers in the year following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Five freshmen Republican women entered the House in 2003, increasing the total number of House Republican women from 18 to 21.³⁹ The 108th Congress (2003-2004) was also the first time that Republican congresswomen were no longer more moderate than their Republican male counterparts; statistically, male and female Republicans in the House were "ideologically indistinguishable" (Frederick 2009).

When Democrats finally regained control of the House following the 2006 midterms, Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) was elected Speaker – the first woman in history to hold the gavel. And in 2008, Hillary Clinton ran a competitive race for the Democratic presidential nomination. This pro-woman image of the Democratic Party, paired with

³⁹ "History of Women in the U.S. Congress." *The Center for American Women and Politics at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University*. < <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/history-women-us-congress>>.

gendered critiques of the GOP, created a political environment in which Republicans felt they had to work to convince voters that they were not the anti-woman party they were accused of being. In what some saw as an attempt to attract women voters that had supported Clinton in the primary, 2008 Republican presidential nominee, John McCain, chose Alaska Governor Sarah Palin as his running mate. Republican women were quick to rally around Palin, defending her against what they claimed to be sexist attacks and pointing to her as evidence that Republicans were supportive of women in leadership positions. At a press conference in 2008, women party leaders accused the media of unfairly attacking Palin and other conservative women. Representative Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) said, “The media continues to attack conservative women to seek a way to diminish their record and demonize their actions.”⁴⁰

Uniting around their partisan gender identity, Republican women increasingly spoke as and on behalf of conservative women. With a unified government in 2009, Democrats worked to push the Affordable Care Act (ACA) through Congress. While ultimately unsuccessful, the Republican women in Congress adamantly opposed the bill, once again making claims as and on behalf of women. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, newly-elected vice chair of the House Republican Conference, organized press conferences with fellow female Republican colleagues, criticizing Democratic economic and healthcare policies. At one such conference, Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) invoked her experience as a mother to argue that Republican women are uniquely positioned to understand the harmful consequences of the ACA:

As mothers...we have that trained ear. So in the middle of the night, when you think your child's in distress, you put your ear to your child's chest...A mother's

⁴⁰ TMP TV. September 3, 2008. “Republican Women Defend Sarah Palin.” *YouTube*.

ear is very keen when we discover that we think one of our children's health is in danger....And I think we, as the women in the Republican Conference, have our ears listening to the distress of those concerned about Medicare, those who are concerned about access, those in the rural communities where I'm from, who are worried that their choices are going to be curtailed.⁴¹

At the same press conference, Michele Bachmann (R-MN) argued that women are concerned about the economic insecurity that would result from the ACA: "The number one concern of Americans, and particularly of women, is the idea of jobs.... Women are very security-conscious about economics in their families; they feel it first before anyone."⁴² These types of press conferences led by Republican women have continued throughout recent years.

Democratic claims of a "Republican war on women" skyrocketed after the 2010 midterm election, in which a conservative Tea Party wave once again gave Republicans control of the House; Democratic National Committee (DNC) chairwoman, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, began consistently using the term in 2011.⁴³ Controversial claims about women, rape, and abortion made by male Republican candidates like Todd Akin and Richard Mourdock further contributed to this environment,⁴⁴ and Republican women and party leaders worked to combat the image of an anti-woman GOP. Speaking for the women in her party, Marsha Blackburn said at a 2011 press conference:

⁴¹ House Republicans. November 3, 2009. "House Republican Women Speak on the Pelosi Health Care Bill." *YouTube*.

⁴² *Ibid*.

⁴³ Weigel, David. 12 April 2012. "The War on Women is Over." *Slate Magazine*.

⁴⁴ In the months leading up to the 2012 election, two male Republican Senate candidates made controversial claims while defending their anti-abortion policy stances. Missouri Senate candidate Todd Akin, argued against rape exceptions for anti-abortion laws, saying, "If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down" (see Eligon, John and Michael Schwirtz. 19 Aug 2012. "Senate Candidate Provokes Ire with 'Legitimate Rape' Comment." *The New York Times*.). Two months later, Indiana Senate candidate, Richard Mourdock, made a similar comment: "Even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape, that is something that God intended to happen" (see Weisman, Jonathan, 23 Oct 2012. "Indiana Senate Candidate Draws Fire for Rape Comments." *The New York Times*.).

As you can see, we have a terrific group of women in our Republican Conference...And I will remind you today that there have been no more fierce defenders of liberty and freedom in our nation's history than women... We're going to continue this fight... We are in a fight to protect America's families from higher taxes and wasteful spending that has gone on for decades. And we are in a fight to protect our children's future.⁴⁵

And during a 2012 press conference, the Republican women of the House attacked President Obama's contraceptive mandate, arguing that the violation of religious freedom was their main concern as conservative women.

This is the political environment in which Republican congresswomen would eventually create their own caucus, separate from the bipartisan women's caucus. In the next section, I analyze interview data to better understand how this political environment has created an awareness among Republican congresswomen of the political opportunities and obstacles they face specifically as women in their party. Moreover, I show how they have acquired the resources and developed the strategy necessary to form the Republican Women's Policy Committee. I argue that this was not simply a top-down decision made by party leaders, but rather, that Republican congresswomen have collectively organized to further their own interests in addition to the interests of their party.

Institutionalizing a Partisan Gender Identity: Creating the RWPC

In 2012, the 24 House Republican women of the 112th Congress formed the Republican Women's Policy Committee (RWPC), an official CMO registered with the

⁴⁵ House Republicans. April 8, 2011. "4/18/11 Republican Women's Press Conference on the Budget and Keeping the Government Open." *YouTube*.

Committee on House Administration.⁴⁶ Almost immediately, Democrats attacked the group as a partisan show orchestrated by Republican leaders. Said Jennifer Crider, communications director for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC): “It tells you everything you need to know about this political stunt, that House Republicans are forming a caucus in 2012 to give women a vote.”⁴⁷

In a political era of increasing ideological polarization and party competition, Republican women have defended their party against claims of a “Republican war on women.” Speaking explicitly as Republican women, they have used their gender identities to support conservative policy positions and legitimize the actions of their party (see Chapter 3 for examples of this occurring on the House floor as well). But their collective action in the House also demonstrates that Republican women are not simply defensive party loyalists. Working at the intersection of their gender and partisan identities, Republican congresswomen recognize their unique experiences and thus distinguish themselves not only from Democratic women, but from Republican men as well.

In talking with Republican congresswomen about their decision to form the RWPC, I find a belief that Republican women are often treated unfairly both within and outside of their own party. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), for instance, believes Republican women’s work has been downplayed by the media. In her CAWP interview, she reminded us that the first woman elected to Congress was a Republican and said, “Our

⁴⁶ “113th Congress Congressional Member Organizations (CMOs).” Updated 10/10/2014. Committee on House Administration. <
https://cha.house.gov/sites/democrats.cha.house.gov/files/documents/cmo_cso_docs/113th%20Congress%20Congressional%20Member%20Organizations%20Updated%2010-10-14.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Smith, Jada F. May 22, 2012. “Forming a Caucus, Republican Women Send a Message.” *The New York Times*.

involvement has been negated again by the media...And that's truly unfortunate because it's not that women have never...been an important part of the party. It's the perception of the public set up by the media."⁴⁸ Echoing that statement, Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) told us that the media "has an incredible bias, it seems, against conservative women."⁴⁹ She went on: "I find it really quite interesting that conservative women can be accomplished [and] polished, and they are...not celebrated in the manner that liberal women are."⁵⁰ Arguing that they often face greater scrutiny than their Democratic female colleagues, Republican congresswomen have distinguished themselves from other women on the basis of ideology and partisanship.

At the same time, though, some Republican congresswomen have also pointed out the challenges they face as women within their party. For example, Blackburn also talked about the fact that women in the GOP are not treated as equals by some of their male colleagues. She told us in her interview, "I think it should be noted that some conservative men do not view women as full and equal partners in the workplace. And I know for some men that is never going to change."⁵¹ And when asked about the motivation for creating the RWPC, Cynthia Lummis (R-WY) pointed to Republican women's challenges in acquiring more legislative power within the institution: "I think that Republican women recognize that if we don't assert ourselves it isn't going to happen...One of the significant reasons for the committee is how few Republican women were being appointed to conference committees...That was a major motivation and something that just didn't seem to be occurring to the Republican leadership who were

⁴⁸ Foxx, Virginia. (18 March 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁴⁹ Blackburn, Marsha. (17 November 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

men."⁵² Republican congresswomen in recent Congresses have argued that they face unique challenges at the intersection of their partisan and gender identities – that they are held to higher standards than both Democratic women and Republican men. It is partly the recognition of this partisan gender identity that has motivated Republican women to organize collectively in the House.

Of course, while an awareness of unfair treatment and unequal opportunity has been a motivating factor for some, not all Republican women believe that they face obstacles as women in their party. We asked Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), who has served as a member of Congress since 1989, whether she thinks women must overcome unique challenges within the GOP. “No,” she said, “I’d say that would probably be true a while back. I just don’t see it. I don’t see it, I don’t feel it, I don’t sense it. Things have changed a lot...I mean, nobody says, ‘Oh, you can’t be on [the Committee on] Energy and Commerce because you’re a woman.’ That would be absurd. Of course they wouldn’t say it, but would they think it? No, they wouldn’t even think it.”⁵³ Kay Granger (R-TX) also sees little evidence of active discrimination, though she did note the small number of women in the GOP compared to women in the Democratic Party. When asked if she saw any unique challenges for Republican women, she said, “I don’t see it that way. There are more Democrat women than Republican women. I think that’s it.”⁵⁴ While Republican women vary in their views of discrimination, they nevertheless organized around a specific partisan gender identity. One reason this was possible was

⁵² Lummis, Cynthia. (29 February 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁵³ Ros-Lehtinen. (1 March 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁵⁴ Granger, Kay. (7 January 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

the presence of an effective caucus entrepreneur: Representative Mary Bono of California.

Compared to collective action outside of Congress, forming a CMO in the House requires relatively few resources. The purpose of creating a CMO (rather than simply forming an informal, unregistered group) is to give members an opportunity to bring attention their specific cause by assigning personal staff to work on issues related to the CMO and discussing their CMO membership on their websites and in official House communications. As Virginia Fox said when asked about the creation of the RWPC, “People form groups in order to get some recognition they think is not going to come any other way.”⁵⁵ Registering a CMO requires a member to submit a letter to the Committee on House Administration explaining the purpose of the caucus and listing the names of its officers.⁵⁶ Because members cannot directly use their Members’ Representational Allowance (MRA) on CMO activities or accept funds/services from external organizations,⁵⁷ the costs of joining a CMO are primarily limited to time and perceptions of legitimacy. That is, potential caucus members must view membership, first, as worthy of their time, and second, as a legitimate endeavor that does not alienate them from party leadership.

The RWPC was formed in May of 2012, but Mary Bono (R-CA) had been discussing the idea with her colleagues for over a year. “It took a while to make sure that

⁵⁵ Foxx, Virginia. (18 March 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁵⁶ “CMO/CSO Registration Form.” Committee on House Administration. <<https://cha.house.gov/member-services/congressional-memberstaff-organizations/cmocso-registration-form#cmo>>

⁵⁷ For more information about Congressional Member Organizations, see: <<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40683.pdf>>.

people were serious about this,” Bono said, “to make sure it was really a good idea.”⁵⁸

Though more ideologically moderate than many of her colleagues, Mary Bono was well respected in Congress. And while Bono was the chair and founder of the RWPC, a more conservative Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) was also working to bring Republican women on board. In an interview, Kristi Noem (R-SD) told us, “Mary Bono Mack and Marsha Blackburn were the two who really first brought it to the table and asked all the women if they would be interested in doing it.”⁵⁹

Through effective framing strategies (Mahoney 2018), Bono and Blackburn were eventually able to garner broad support for the RWPC: all 24 Republican women in the House officially joined the caucus, and party leaders, including Speaker John Boehner, were supportive of the effort. When asked about the motivation for creating the RWPC, Blackburn said in her interview, “This was an outgrowth of conversations we would have about there needing to be a female perspective... Our goal is to make certain that our colleagues realize there is a female perspective to these issues and they need to be mindful of that before they begin to talk about it.”⁶⁰ Bono was even more critical of the GOP, telling a reporter that the caucus was born out of a “frustration” over Republican policies as well as some of the internal workings of the party, though she did not specify what those were.⁶¹ Making a similar claim, Renee Ellmers (R-NC), chair of the RWPC in the 114th Congress (2014-2015) told us in an interview, “Some of the women members who had been here for a while, they had seen the way things worked and they really

⁵⁸ Madison, Lucy. 22 May 2012. “Republicans push ‘new perspective’ on women.” CBS News. <<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/republicans-push-new-perspective-on-women/>>.

⁵⁹ Noem, Kristi. (17 November 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁶⁰ Blackburn, Marsha. (17 November 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁶¹ Madison, Lucy. 22 May 2012. “Republicans push ‘new perspective’ on women.” CBS News. <<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/republicans-push-new-perspective-on-women/>>.

wanted...women in the conference to have more of a voice.”⁶² While reasons for joining the RWPC undoubtedly varied among Republican congresswomen, caucus entrepreneurs found ways to convince both women members and male party leaders that the RWPC was important.

At first, Republican Party leaders responded to Bono’s idea of a caucus with what she said was “a sort of glazed look in their eyes.”⁶³ But as “war on women” rhetoric ramped up during the 2012 election and discussions of the gender gap became more prevalent, Bono said, “the leadership became a lot more interested in understanding the importance of what we’re trying to do.”⁶⁴ Indeed, by framing Republican women’s collective action as a way to achieve the party’s electoral goals, rather than as a criticism of the party, caucus entrepreneurs gained the support of both party leaders and of women who might have been hesitant to join the group out of fear of not being viewed as loyal to the party.

The Republican women we spoke with about the RWPC pointed to their gender identity as being inherently beneficial for the party. In particular, they emphasized the important perspectives that women bring in reaching out to female voters and communicating the party’s policies. Said Diane Black of North Carolina: “I believe that women look at issues differently than men do, and that’s just the way we are. We come at things in a different way, and since 52% of the population is female, it behooves us to make sure that we have a woman’s voice in the discussions.”⁶⁵ Ann Wagner (R-MO) emphasized women’s ability to frame issues in a way that resonates with families:

⁶² Ellmers, Renee. 2 December 2015. Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Black, Diane. (28 October 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

I believe that [Republicans] have to personalize our message, make our message much more Main Street... [Women] do it much better, especially in [the Committee on] Financial Services where so many of my male colleagues will talk in charts and graphs and numbers and swaps and derivatives and things. I want to talk about a family that is trying to save for their retirement and what it means to them, and [how] the policy we're passing...impacts that family and their future.⁶⁶

Elise Stefanik (R-NY) further argued that Republican women “understand the importance of reaching out to women voters very effectively.”⁶⁷

This frame – that organizing as Republican women is beneficial to the party – has been effective in an era of heightened party competition. That Republican congresswomen are increasingly ideologically similar to each other and to their Republican male colleagues has also made it easier to organize around shared interests. Whereas Republican congresswomen in the early 1990s identified and often had informal dinners as partisan women, their ideological differences at times caused tensions and resulted in intraparty disputes.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the existence of a partisan gender identity – the recognition of a category “Republican women” that is different from Democratic women and Republican men – was beginning to emerge. As I have shown through an analysis of the creation of the RWPC, increasing party polarization/competition, in the context of a gendered political environment, has created political opportunities for the institutionalization of this partisan gender identity. In the following sections, I discuss the

⁶⁶ Wagner, Ann. (28 April 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁶⁷ Stefanik, Elise. (20 October 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁶⁸ Republican congresswomen are much more ideologically aligned with one another and with their party's policy positions. Some former Republican congresswomen have spoken out against the increasing conservatism of the GOP and of women in the party. Speaking specifically about the RWPC, Former Republican Representative Claudine Schneider, who served in the House from 1981-1991, said she would not feel welcome in the caucus, arguing that today's Republican congresswomen do not adequately address issues of women's health and safety “because they are afraid of losing in the primaries. They have drunk the Kool-Aid that makes them think it is more important to win, than to do what is right by ending discrimination” (Israel, Josh. May 25, 2012. “Former GOP Congresswoman Blasts New GOP Women's Caucus: ‘They're Not Voting In Best Interest Of All Women.’” *Think Progress*.).

effectiveness of the RWPC as well as the continuing role of male party leaders as gatekeepers.

Elevating Women's Voices in the Party

Republican congresswomen joined the RWPC for various reasons. From interviews with Republican women in the 114th Congress (2015-2016), I have identified four main goals of the RWPC. Through the RWPC, Republican women hoped elevate their voices by working to 1) create a network of mentorship and support, 2) shape the messaging strategies of the party, 3) have a greater say in the development of GOP policies and legislation, and 4) acquire greater institutional power through committee chairmanships, positions on conference committees, etc. Overall, the RWPC has been an effective vehicle for most of these endeavors, though gaining substantive institutional power remains a challenge for Republican congresswomen.

Mary Bono originally viewed the purpose of the RWPC as a mechanism for Republican women to pursue opportunities within their conference and in Congress more generally. "What I then heard the most," Bono told a reporter in 2018, "was women just wanted some moral support for the job."⁶⁹ And indeed, the caucus became that source of support for many women. Renee Ellmers, then chair of the RWPC, told us in a 2015 interview with CAWP, "We are there to support each other [through the] good and bad, whether it's a personal issue or whether it's a legislative issue. We want to help each other."⁷⁰ One way the RWPC supports the legislative efforts of Republican women is

⁶⁹ Fox, Lauren. 24 April 2018. "Republican women wonder when they'll get a female speaker of the House." *CNN*. <<https://www.wsls.com/news/politics/republican-women-wonder-when-theyll-get-a-female-speaker>>.

⁷⁰ Ellmers, Renee. (2 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

through the circulation of information, which gives them a chance to hear about – and ultimately support and amplify – the work of their female colleagues. As Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA), said in her interview, “The Republican Women’s Policy Committee has been a clearinghouse for identifying the legislation that we are working on; circulating it among the women; building support; highlighting press, media clips, [and] different interviews that the women may be doing; and just making sure that we are supporting them in those efforts.”⁷¹

Another priority of the RWPC has been to shape the communications strategy of the GOP – including making sure that women are visible and speaking out on a wide range of issues in a way that relates to women and families. In Chapters 2 and 3, I show an increasing presence of partisan woman-invoked rhetoric in the floor speeches of Republican congresswomen. In this chapter, I find that this use of partisan woman-invoked rhetoric is not simply a top-down effort by party leaders; through the collective action of Republican congresswomen, gendered communications strategies are taken to the House floor. Members of the RWPC, for instance, have held meetings and conference calls to discuss upcoming legislation. “So if there’s a bill that is coming to the floor,” Kristi Noem (R-SD) said in an interview, “...we will weigh in on it. If we do think it’s a good idea, then we will make sure that some of the women are speaking on it. [The RWPC] gives us a forum to say, ‘Hey, we need some more women to weigh in on this. Who wants to do that?’ And we make sure we have all the bases covered.”⁷² According to Cathy McMorris Rodgers, “[RWPC chairwoman, Renee Ellmers,] will organize

⁷¹ Rodgers, Cathy McMorris. (4 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁷² Noem, Kristi. (17 November 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

special orders on the House floor where we can go down and talk about a particular issue.”⁷³ The institutionalization of a partisan gender identity has thus contributed to the collective use of a partisan woman-invoked rhetoric on the House floor, in which Republican congresswomen speak as and on behalf of women from a partisan perspective.

A third goal of the RWPC has been to have a greater say in the actual development of Republican policies and legislation. Many of the Republican congresswomen we spoke with at CAWP believe they have better access to party leaders as a result of the RWPC. Kristi Noem said that the caucus has “given us a little more of an opportunity to weigh in with leadership as a more unified group rather than [having] to all go forward and make decisions on our own.”⁷⁴ Diane Black (R-TN) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) both agreed with this, emphasizing that the RWPC has helped in elevating the voices of Republican congresswomen within their conference. Black said, “I see a difference between when I came here five years ago and now, and my colleagues actually reaching out to us rather than us inserting ourselves. I have colleagues who actually reach out to me and say, ‘What do you think about this?’”⁷⁵ Ros-Lehtinen discussed seeing a similar outcome, saying, “We have the ear of the leadership and that has been a big change. Before, when it was more ad hoc and not a real structure, we would have to knock on the door and...get an appointment, and by the time that happens the issue might have passed by the wayside. Now [that] we have a structured group, we

⁷³ Rodgers, Cathy McMorris. (4 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁷⁴ Noem, Kristi. (17 November 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁷⁵ Black, Diane. (28 October 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

have the ear of the leadership. [Speaker] Paul Ryan meets with us and that makes a big difference."⁷⁶

As a result, there have been times when Republican congresswomen have been able to substantively alter Republican legislation. One case that garnered considerable media attention was the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, which would ban abortion after 20 weeks. In January of 2015, House Republican leaders pulled the bill from consideration amidst pushback from both moderates and Republican congresswomen. Republican women were particularly critical of the way the rape exception clause was written in the bill, as it only exempted women if they had reported their rape to authorities. In an interview, Renee Ellmers made it clear that the pushback from Republican congresswomen was not in regards to the overall legislation, but to the particular language used in bill:

The Republican women were the ones who went forward to our leadership and said...we love this bill, we want this bill, we believe in the 20 week Pain-Capable abortion bill. But the language basically says that if the woman is a victim of rape, she would have had to have filed a police report, [and] we know over 60% of rapes or sexual assaults are not reported. So we said...this will be harmful to what we are trying to achieve, which is changing this label and narrative that we're creating a "war on women." This is just going to play right into that...And it was one of those things where it was very difficult because we knew if we voted on the bill as it was, it was going to open up this Pandora's Box of ugly myths about the Republican Party and where we are with women.⁷⁷

Indeed, Cynthia Lummis (R-WY) views this as one accomplishment of the RWPC that "stands out big time," saying that even the most pro-life women pushed back on the language in the bill: "We closed ranks. There are very pro-life Republican women, who came here because of the importance of social issues, and women who came here because

⁷⁶ Ros-Lehtinen. (1 March 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁷⁷ Ellmers, Renee. (2 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

they really wanted to emphasize fiscal issues, like me. But when it came to that issue, man, talk about closing ranks.”⁷⁸ Convinced that the language in the bill was not in the best interest of the party, leaders eventually pulled the bill and replaced it with a revised version that passed in the House.

Overall, Republican congresswomen formed the RWPC as a way to gain support and recognition within their party. In many ways, they have been successful in their endeavors. Through their collective action, Republican congresswomen have created a network of social and legislative support, have worked to gender their party’s messaging strategies in various ways, and have voiced their opinions on Republican legislation. Still, as I highlight in the following section, male party leaders continue to play a significant role as gatekeepers. While the RWPC has given Republican women more access to party leaders, women’s collective action has also been met with challenges. In particular, I find that efforts by party leaders to place women in positions of legislative power are rooted, first and foremost, in a desire to enhance the image of the party.

Party Leaders as Gatekeepers

While Republican Party leadership, according to Mary Bono, was originally dismissive of the idea of a Republican women’s caucus, the political environment created incentives to eventually embrace the RWPC. Following the announcement of the caucus in May of 2012, both Speaker John Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor praised the group and its officers. Notably, both emphasized that the RWPC would benefit the party as a whole. Speaker Boehner said the caucus will “be an important voice for the

⁷⁸ Lummis, Cynthia. (29 February 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

Republican Conference,” and Majority Leader Cantor said that Mary Bono’s “commitment to highlight the leadership and expertise of the women in the House Republican Conference will serve as a tremendous benefit to our party...”⁷⁹ This vision of the RWPC as an asset to electoral goals of the party helps to explain the relationship between Republican Party leaders and women in the conference.

As mentioned, one impetus for organizing collectively as Republican women was to increase their ranks within the party through formal leadership positions. Yet while the RWPC drew attention to this issue, it proved to be a challenging one to address. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, was the only Republican woman to hold a committee chairmanship in the 112th House of Representatives (2011-2012). In the congressional sessions immediately following the creation of the RWPC, not much changed in terms of numbers. In both the 113th (2013-2014) and 114th (2015-2016) Congresses, Candice Miller (R-MI), chair of the House Administration Committee, was the only woman to chair a committee in the House.

Some Republican congresswomen chalked this up simply to the fact that women lack seniority in the conference. When asked about the small number of female committee chairs, Virginia Foxx (R-NC) told a reporter in 2014, "I have not seen any discrimination in our conference. Most everything around here is done on seniority. Part of the problem we have is that we have to catch up in seniority."⁸⁰ Indeed, overcoming

⁷⁹ “Republicans Launch Women’s Policy Committee in House; New Caucus Gives Voice to Key Group on Important Issues.” Republican Main Street Partnership. <<https://republicanmainstreet.org/republicans-launch-womens-policy-committee-in-house-new-caucus-gives-voice-to-key-group-on-important-issues/>>.

⁸⁰ Newhauser, Daniel, Sarah Mimms, and National Journal. 6 Oct. 2014. “In a Republican Congress, Few Gavels for Women.” *The Atlantic*.

issues of seniority remains a challenge for Republican congresswomen.⁸¹ However, while party leadership on the House Steering Committee considers seniority as one of its criteria for recommending committee candidates to the conference, other factors – like party loyalty, relationships with other conference members, and fundraising ability – are also considered. Since 1995, House leadership in the Republican Party – and especially the Speaker, who currently has five votes on the Steering Committee – has had more control over committee chair assignments than in the Democratic Party, where seniority does play a larger role.

Other members of the RWPC have been more outspoken about pressuring leadership to commit to electing women to more prominent leadership positions. After a particularly competitive vote for chair of the Committee on Homeland Security in 2012,⁸² the Steering Committee eventually voted to nominate Michael McCaul (R-TX) over Mike Rogers (R-AL) and Candice Miller (R-MI). With only two committee chairmanships (House Administration and Ethics) left to fill before the first session of the 113th Congress, Republican women lobbied Speaker Boehner to appoint women to these positions. Unlike other standing committees, the chairs of the House Administration and Ethics committees, which deal with internal congressional matters, are appointed by the

⁸¹ At the time of this writing, the most senior Republican women in the 116th House of Representatives (2019-2020) are Kay Granger who entered Congress in 1997, followed by Virginia Foxx and Cathy McMorris Rodgers, whose first term began in 2005. The remaining ten House Republican women entered Congress in 2011 or later. By contrast, the five most senior Republican men entered Congress in 1973, 1979, 1981, and 1987, respectively.

⁸² The 2012 Steering Committee vote to nominate the chair of the Committee on Homeland Security was especially close. The first three rounds of votes resulted in a three-way tie between McCaul, Rogers, and Miller. Miller was eliminated in the fourth round, but it took another five rounds to break the tie between McCaul and Rogers. “I’ve been here 22 years, and I’ve never seen anything like this before,” said Speaker Boehner. (Newhauser, Daniel. 28 Nov 2012. “Vote for Homeland Gavel Was Closest in Memory for Some Lawmakers.” *Roll Call*.)

Speaker rather than left up to a vote by the conference. Boehner named Mike Conway of Texas to the Ethics Committee, and Candice Miller would come to chair House Administration. In the days that followed, House Republicans received media criticism for failing to elect women committee chairs; the fact that Miller chaired House Administration, which deals primarily with “housekeeping” responsibilities, also contributed to gendered critiques of the party.⁸³

Speaker Boehner was well aware of the perception that the Republican Party undervalued women, and he was committed both to combatting that perception and closing the gender voting gap (in Chapter 5, I talk more about this and his role in encouraging Cathy McMorris Rodgers to run for Conference chair). Still, in October of 2013, the all-male Republican members of a bipartisan, bicameral budget conference committee posed for a photo-op amidst a government shutdown. The result of this photo-op was, once again, a critique that the Republican Party was not concerned with women’s interests. At a meeting following this event, Renee Ellmers, chair of the RWPC, told CQ Roll Call that she confronted Boehner about not having women on the conference committee. Ellmers called it a “teachable moment,” saying, “[Boehner] literally got up and said, ‘You know what, Renee, that was a mistake.’ And I believe that it was just a very innocent mistake, and I don’t think they realized how that looked. I believe it is not a

⁸³ One anonymous Democratic official told a Talking Points Memo reporter, “I’m not sure which was worse: House Republicans refusing to have any women chair a legislative committee or only appointing a woman to chair the Congressional Housekeeping Committee” (McMorris-Santoro, Evan. 30 Nov 2012. “Dems, Progressives Snicker as House GOP Finally Appoints Female Committee Chair.” *Talking Points Memo*). Several news headlines highlighted the lack of Republican women as committee chairs (e.g. Bendery, Jennifer. 27 Nov 2012. “House GOP Committee Chairs Will All Be White Men in Next Congress.” *HuffPost Politics*; Bennett, Dashiell. 28 Nov 2012. “House Republicans Pick Only White Men to Be Committee Chairmen.” *The Atlantic*; Whitaker, Morgan. 28 Nov 2012. “House Republicans Choose All-White, All-Male Committee Chairs.” MSNBC.).

mistake that will be made again."⁸⁴ Soon after, Boehner asked Diane Black (R-TN), then a member of the Budget Committee, to serve on the conference committee.

While Republican women held only one standing committee chairmanship in the 113th and 114th Congresses, they also held a majority of the positions in Republican Conference leadership: Cathy McMorris Rodgers as chair; Lynn Jenkins as vice chair; Virginia Foxx as secretary; and Ann Wagner and Martha McSally as freshman representatives in the 113th and 114th Congresses, respectively. Republican Conference leadership is tasked with creating and disseminating the party's message. That Republican congresswomen are consistently overrepresented in Conference leadership and underrepresented in committee leadership suggests that Republican women are valued primarily as loyal party messengers who will work to depict the GOP as a pro-woman party.

A commitment to enhancing party loyalty and unity can also be seen in Paul Ryan's approach to leadership. In September of 2015, facing threats from the most conservative factions of the Republican Party, John Boehner resigned as Speaker. That October, the RWPC joined other caucuses, like the moderate Tuesday Group and the conservative Freedom Caucus, in officially supporting Paul Ryan (R-WI) for Speaker. Ryan, former chair of the Budget Committee and 2012 vice-presidential nominee, was at first reluctant to run. Nevertheless, he eventually committed himself to dealing with intraparty tensions as Speaker. Ryan held private meetings with representatives from various party caucuses, including the RWPC, to discuss where common ground could be reached and, most importantly, to avoid public displays of infighting among

⁸⁴ Dumain, Emma. 22 Oct. 2013. "Boehner Finds the Woman for the Job." *CQ Roll Call*.

congressional Republicans. Overall, while party leadership has been open to the RWPC's suggestions of putting more women in positions of power, the motivation to do so has largely stemmed from a desire to prevent an anti-woman image of the GOP, rather than any substantive belief in women's distinct interests and perspectives as policymakers.⁸⁵

This has proven to be difficult terrain for the maintenance of the RWPC, which has worked to highlight the significance of a partisan gender identity in the realms of messaging *and* policy. While Republican congresswomen did increase their positional power on committees in the 115th Congress,⁸⁶ at least a few women were also acutely aware that party leadership did not appreciate pushback from a collective group. One former Republican congresswoman, who wished to remain anonymous, told a reporter in 2018 that she had planned to lobby leadership to include more women in discussions of healthcare policy. But getting other women on board with this was difficult, as one of her female colleagues noted that “one person in leadership...[doesn't] like it when the women say these things.”⁸⁷

Despite a challenging 2016 election season during which the GOP continued to face claims of sexism, Republicans won the presidency and a majority in both chambers of Congress. On top of that, RWPC chair, Renee Ellmers, was targeted by conservative

⁸⁵ Paul Ryan, in particular, has been vocal in his denunciation of “identity politics,” calling it his “biggest concern of politics these days.” Following the announcement of his retirement, Ryan said in 2018, “If you can deny the oxygen of identity politics, the best way to do that is to have a faster-growing economy, more upward mobility, higher wages, getting people from poverty into the workforce.” (Golshan, Tara. 4 Dec. 2018. “The Reason Republican Women are on the Decline in the House.” *Vox*.)

⁸⁶ In the 115th House of Representatives, Diane Black chaired the Budget Committee, Virginia Foxx chaired the Committee on Education and the Workforce, and Susan Brooks chaired the Ethics Committee. Diane Black announced her resignation of the chairmanship in December 2017 to run for governor of Tennessee.

⁸⁷ Fox, Lauren. 24 April 2018. “Republican women wonder when they'll get a female speaker of the House.” *CNN*. <<https://www.wsls.com/news/politics/republican-women-wonder-when-theyll-get-a-female-speaker>>.

interest groups and lost her 2016 primary election to conservative Republican George Holding. With a unified Republican Party, no immediate need to cater to women voters, and no clear caucus leader heading into the 115th Congress, the RWPC disbanded after only three congressional terms. In a phone call, a Republican staffer told me, simply, “The new Speaker[, Paul Ryan,] doesn’t support it.”⁸⁸ And so, while Republican congresswomen have been able to collectively organize around their partisan gender identities, I find that the effectiveness of that collective action is largely dependent on political opportunity structures, and in particular, perceptions by party leadership about whether or not the group will enhance the image and messaging strategies of the GOP.

Conclusion

This chapter traces the politics of the bipartisan Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues (CCWI) and the formation of the partisan Republican Women’s Policy Committee (RWPC) to understand how Republican congresswomen have navigated tensions between their partisan and gender identities over time. Through this analysis, I reveal the recognition and eventual institutionalization of a *partisan gender identity* among Republican women in the House. More specifically, I show how increased party polarization and competition have resulted in incentives and political opportunities to organize formally as Republican women.

The first half of the chapter examined the evolution of CCWI membership, focusing on Republican women. I show how ideological differences, party loyalty, and institutional changes have affected Republican congresswomen’s decisions to work

⁸⁸ Phone call with a Republican staffer in 2017.

within the bipartisan women's caucus. While Republican women have always had to negotiate tensions between their partisan and gender identities, the 104th Congress (1995-1996) marked a period of transition. The Republican Revolution brought with it the election of more conservative women, a strong Speaker of the House, and institutional changes that incentivized Republican women to begin to work explicitly as Republican women – at the intersection of their gender and partisan identities.

As I demonstrate in the second half of the chapter, this *partisan gender identity* would gradually become formally institutionalized as the RWPC. Through an analysis of the formation of the RWPC, I show how congressional polarization and changes in the political environment have resulted in opportunities for women to organize collectively within the GOP. Importantly, while the RWPC was not a top-down product of party leadership, my analysis of its accomplishments and challenges reveals that male party leaders do continue to play a gatekeeping role for the caucus. In particular, I find that party leaders are supportive of Republican women working to enhance the electoral prospects of the GOP, and that they are particularly embraced as party messengers. This can also be seen through the overrepresentation of Republican women in Conference leadership roles. In the following chapter, I delve deeper into an analysis of Republican women as party messengers by conducting case studies of the top female Republican Conference leaders during these time periods: Susan Molinari (vice chair, 104th Congress), Jennifer Dunn (vice chair, 105th Congress), and Cathy McMorris Rodgers (chair, 113th, 114th Congresses).

CHAPTER 5 – AMPLIFYING A COLLECTIVE VOICE: WOMEN CONFERENCE LEADERS AS CRITICAL ACTORS

My analysis of the gendered effects of party polarization and competition in Congress has thus far revealed that Republican congresswomen are increasingly working collectively as Republican women – at the intersection of their gender and partisan identities. Chapter 4 details how Republican women have come to recognize a distinct *partisan gender identity* and how that identity became institutionalized through the creation of the Republican Women’s Policy Committee (RWPC). Importantly, while the RWPC was not a top-down initiative by party leaders, I find that the success of the caucus was largely dependent on leadership’s perception that promoting GOP women could enhance the image of the party and combat claims of a “Republican war on women.”

This form of “tokenism” (Kanter 1977b), in which minority group members are made disproportionately visible in comparison to dominant group members, also extends to Conference leadership positions. Indeed, a House Republican woman is four times more likely than a House Democratic woman to be elected to a Conference/Caucus leadership role (Kanthak and Krause 2012, 27). Republican women also make up a larger proportion of their Conference leadership than do Democratic women. As the messaging vehicle of the party, Conference leadership roles allow Republican women to be highly visible without the threat of more substantive proposals that can challenge male party leaders.

Yet, given changes in the way Republican congresswomen work together and organize collectively, I argue that it is important to take a closer look at the experiences of female Conference leaders. While Republican women are few in numbers, I would

expect that recent Conference leaders nevertheless play important roles as critical actors (Childs and Krook 2009) by elevating women's voices within the party. In this chapter, I ask: In what ways, if any, has the representational role of women House Republican Conference leaders changed over time?

To answer this question, I conduct case studies of three top female Conference leaders: Susan Molinari (R-NY), Jennifer Dunn (R-WA), and Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA). Susan Molinari and Jennifer Dunn were Conference vice-chairs in the 104th and 105th Congresses, respectively. Cathy McMorris Rodgers was chair of the Conference in the 113th and 114th Congresses.¹ I compare each woman's pathway to leadership and experiences in carrying out gendered goals/priorities. Overall, I find that Cathy McMorris Rodgers is able to both perpetuate and leverage the existence of a *partisan gender identity* among Republican women in order to more easily amplify a collective, gendered party message.

Republican Congresswomen as Critical Actors

The link between women's descriptive and substantive representation in Congress has frequently been used as an argument for increasing the number of women in elective office. However, these discussions are often framed in terms of critical mass (Kanter 1977a), or the theory that increasing the number of women to a certain proportion – typically 30% -- of a legislative body will thereby increase the substantive representation of women. Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977a) first discussed the theory of critical mass in

¹ McMorris Rodgers was also chair of the House Republican Conference in the 115th Congress, before being succeeded by Liz Cheney (R-WY) in the 116th Congress.

her study of minority groups within corporations. Kanter argues that increasing the numerical composition of minority group members helps to transform them from “tokens” to “dominant members” (Kanter 1977). Thus, as the numerical composition of women and minorities changes, so do the dynamics within the corporation.

Building off of Kanter’s study, Drude Dahlerup (1988) extends the concept of critical mass to women in the political arena, arguing that numbers matter in legislative institutions as well. Still, the impact of critical mass has at times been oversimplified;² the idea that merely increasing the presence of women in legislatures to an arbitrary percentage will bring about substantive changes ignores the *process* of institutional transformation (Childs and Krook 2006; 2008; 2009). Indeed, even Dahlerup pointed out that “it is not possible to conclude that these changes follow from any mixed number of women, e.g. 30 percent” (Dahlerup 1988, 287). She goes on to emphasize that there are examples of women in top positions who are able to shift perceptions about women in politics, and that “it is not the numbers that count, but the performance of a few outstanding women as role models” (Dahlerup 1988, 287).

Childs and Krook (2008; 2009) call for a shift away from analyses of critical mass to ones of critical actors. They argue that the emphasis on numerical composition overlooks the role that powerful individual actors play in shaping political institutions. These “critical actors,” as described by Childs and Krook, may have the ability to shift political gender dynamics and impact the representation of women more broadly. Critical actors are defined as “legislators who initiate policy proposals on their own and/or

² For a more in-depth discussion of the concept and utility of critical mass in gender politics scholarship, see: “Do Women Represent Women? Rethinking the ‘Critical Mass’ Debate.” 2006. *Critical Perspectives on Gender and Politics. Politics & Gender. 2(4): 491-530.*

embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women, regardless of the numbers of female representatives” (Childs and Krook 2009, 138). Focusing on action rather than numbers allows us to shine light on the institutional processes that make women’s representation possible.

This concept is particularly important for expanding our knowledge of Republican women’s congressional representation. Examining representation through a framework of critical actors rather than critical mass presumes that the small number of Republican women in Congress does not automatically limit their impact on the institution. Indeed, as Kanthak and Krause (2012) show, the small number of Republican congresswomen has not prevented them from attaining leadership roles; on the contrary, it has given them direct *opportunities* for Conference leadership. Analyzing changes in the way Republican women use these roles to enhance women’s representation within the party can provide further insight into the evolution of Republican women’s representation.

Data and Methods

As discussed in Chapter 1, party polarization and competition in Congress have resulted in increased public relations efforts by both congressional parties (Lee 2016; Malecha and Reagan 2012; Sellers 2010). To distinguish themselves from the opposing party (Harris 2013), leaders work to develop and disseminate cohesive messages. This process has become increasingly structured in recent years (Meinke 2016), with both parties creating their own “communications enterprises’ to help them plan, coordinate, and manage their public relations efforts” (Malecha and Reagan 2012, 73).

Within the Republican Party's communications enterprise is the Republican Policy Committee, which works with party leaders to develop statements related to specific policies. Along the same lines, the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) is "devoted to increasing the number of Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives" by recruiting/funding competitive candidates and creating effective campaign messaging tactics.³ Above all else, though, "the party's Conference is the core of the House Republicans' communications enterprise" (Malecha and Reagan 2012, 74). Conference leadership⁴ works with the other communications arms of the party and provides staff to the Republican Theme Team⁵ in order construct unified party messages and help rank-and-file members amplify those messages.

Given the significance of the House Republican Conference and the fact that women are more likely to be elected to Conference leadership roles, I conduct case studies of the three highest-ranking female Conference leaders during the time periods on which this dissertation focuses: Susan Molinari, vice chair in the 104th Congress; Jennifer Dunn, vice chair in the 105th Congress; and Cathy McMorris Rodgers, chair in the 113th and 114th Congresses. I include Jennifer Dunn in this study because, first, there were no female Conference leaders in the 103rd Congress, and second, Dunn's ideological and

³ "About." National Republican Congressional Committee. <<https://www.nrcc.org/about/>>.

⁴ Conference leadership's main function was not always party communications. The Republican Party was the first to focus on external communications in the 1980s, as it attempted to increase efforts to win the majority in the House. One of the first "vigorous public counteroffensive[s]" was led by Rep. Richard Armey (R-TX) as Conference Chair in 1992 in legislative opposition President Clinton (Malecha and Reagan 2012, 74).

⁵ The Republican Theme Team is group of 50-90 Republican House members that helps to organize non-legislative debate speeches (one-minutes and special orders) in order to deliver a collective party message on the House floor. On the other side of the aisle, the Democratic Message Board (DMB) provides the same function (Harris 2005; Malecha and Reagan 2012).

personal similarities to McMorris Rodgers help to pinpoint the effects of polarization and other institutional factors.

I once again use the elite interviews conducted by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) during the 103rd, 104th, and 114th Congresses. For this chapter, I focus primarily on interviews with Republican women in Conference leadership. These include not only Molinari, Dunn, and McMorris Rodgers but also Barbara Vucanovich (R-NV), Tillie Fowler (R-FL), and Virginia Foxx (R-NC), who served as Conference secretary in the 104th, 105th, and 113th/114th Congresses, respectively.⁶ Interviews with lower-ranking female party leaders were also valuable in helping to understand the institutional dynamics at play. For instance, Sue Myrick (R-NC) was elected freshman class representative in the 104th Congress and re-elected sophomore class representative in the 105th Congress. Ann Wagner (R-MO) was also elected as her class representative in both the 113th and 114th Congresses (see Figure 1 for a list of female House Republican leaders in each Congress).⁷ Notably, while the earlier interviews pertained primarily to discussions about the 103rd and 104th Congresses, some interviews were conducted during the 105th Congress, between October 1997 and July

⁶ Interviews were not conducted with Lynn Jenkins (R-KS), vice chair of the Conference in the 113th and 114th Congresses; nor Mimi Walters (R-CA), freshman representative in the 114th Congress.

⁷ Eight Republican leadership positions in the House are elected directly by conference members: (1) the Speaker; (2) the Republican Leader; (3) the Republican Whip; (4) the Chair of the Republican Conference; (5) the Chair of the National Republican Congressional Committee; (6) the Chair of the Committee on Policy; (7) the Vice-Chair of the Republican Conference; and, (8) the Secretary of the Republican Conference. There are also six designated leadership positions, which are recommended to the conference by the Republican Steering Committee: (1) the Chair of the House Committee on Rules; (2) the Chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means; (3) the Chair of the House Committee on Appropriations; (4) the Chair of the House Committee on the Budget; (5) the Chair of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce; (6) the Chief Deputy Whip. The final two designated leadership positions are elected directly by the sophomore and freshman classes, respectively: (7) the sophomore representative; and (8) the freshman representative.

1998.⁸ Thus, while Dunn, Fowler, and Myrick recalled their time in the 104th Congress, they also spoke about their experiences in leadership during the 105th Congress.

Figure 1: List of Female House Republican Leaders From Highest to Lowest Rank: 104th, 105th, 113th, and 114th Congresses

104 th Congress	105 th Congress	113 th Congress	114 th Congress
Susan Molinari (Conference Vice Chair)	Jennifer Dunn (Conference Vice Chair)	Cathy McMorris Rodgers (Conference Chair)	Cathy McMorris Rodgers (Conference Chair)
Barbara Vucanovich (Conference Secretary)	Tillie Fowler (Conference Secretary)	Lynn Jenkins (Conference Vice Chair)	Lynn Jenkins (Conference Vice Chair)
Sue Myrick (Freshman Representative)	Sue Myrick (Sophomore Representative)	Virginia Foxx (Conference Secretary)	Virginia Foxx (Conference Secretary)
		Ann Wagner (Freshman Representative)	Ann Wagner (Sophomore Representative)
			Mimi Walters (Freshman Representative)

I use these interviews to compare the experiences of female Conference leaders, to shine light on any institutional differences, and to better understand the relationships between Conference leaders, other women in the party, and male party leaders. This interview data was again supplemented with primary and secondary sources from the Library of Congress, the National Archives, C-SPAN oral history interviews, news stories, and memoirs written by members of Congress. These sources offered further insight into the political climate and provided additional context for the claims made by interviewees.

⁸ See Chapter 1 for complete description of interview data.

Susan Molinari

Susan Molinari was elected to the House of Representatives in a special election in March 1990 following the resignation of her father, Guy Molinari.⁹ Prior to her congressional career, Molinari worked as a finance assistant for the Republican Governor's Association and was elected to the city council of New York, where she served as the only Republican member.¹⁰ Originally assigned to work on the Small Business and Public Works and Transportation Committees, she served on the Budget Committee in the 104th Congress (1995-1997) and was elected vice chair of the Conference following the 1994 midterms.¹¹

Molinari was a moderate Republican and explicitly feminist in her many of her policy stances. She was pro-choice, was eager to join the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues (CCWI) (Gertzog 2004), and "believed more women's issues should [have been] included [in the Contract with America]" (Molinari 1998, 179). During her tenure as vice chair of the Republican Conference, however, Molinari consistently toed the party line and even campaigned for pro-life Republican men. The gender gap was very much on the minds of Republican leaders at this time, and Molinari did see herself as role model for women and young girls. Nevertheless, she did not develop any specific outreach campaigns for women and viewed her leadership role as a way to bring the party together.

⁹ Guy Molinari (R-NY) served in the House from 1981 to 1990, when he resigned to become Borough President of Staten Island.

¹⁰ "Molinari, Susan." History, Art, & Archives. United States House of Representatives. <<https://history.house.gov/People/Detail/18389>>.

¹¹ Ibid.

Pathway to Leadership: Paved with IOUs

In response to Democratic success in the 1992 “Year of the Woman”, Republican Party leaders made efforts to mobilize women voters and elect women candidates. Representative Newt Gingrich (R-GA), who had openly discussed his efforts to close the gender gap, “created a ‘buddy system’” prior to the 1994 election, “linking female Republican members of Congress and female congressional candidates around the country.”¹² As discussed in Chapter 4, after being elected Speaker of the House in 1994, Gingrich worked to bring House Republican women together by scheduling biweekly meetings and appointing women to leadership positions.

Yet while women’s visibility in the party was important to many party leaders,¹³ Molinari said that she was not explicitly recruited to run for Conference vice chair. She claimed there were colleagues who told her, “I think you should do this. We need a woman, someone who is comfortable speaking [and] disagreeing.”¹⁴ But her decision to run was a result of her “own personal ambition” and a “feeling that there needed to be a woman in leadership.”¹⁵ As a moderate Republican deeply concerned with women’s issues, Molinari viewed herself as an important dissenting voice in party leadership who could share her opinions with Speaker Gingrich and John Boehner, then-chair of the

¹² Burkett, Elinor. September 1996. “In the Land of Conservative Women.” *The Atlantic*.

¹³ Another example of this comes from Helen Bentley’s (R-MD) experience on the Appropriations Committee’s Labor, Health, and Human Services Subcommittee. She said in a 1995 CAWP interview: “I was the only [woman] on the Republican side, and Joe McDade[, vice chairman of the Appropriations Committee,] wanted me on there, particularly because there were four Democratic women on the other side. He said, ‘We’ve got to have at least one woman.’” “Otherwise it looks bad?” the CAWP interviewer asked. “Yeah,” Bentley replied. (Bentley, Helen. 02 August 1995. Center for American Women and Politics Interview).

¹⁴ “The Honorable Susan Molinari Oral History Interview,” Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, May 25, 2012.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Republican Conference. “I think it’s good for the party,” she said, “It’s great to have additional voices and dissent.”¹⁶

Indeed, in her 2012 interview with the Office of the Historian, Molinari suggests this is one of the reasons she was elected vice chair: “I think one of the reasons that I did win was that there was a recognition that they needed women in leadership and a moderate. So, I did enter this institution at a time when diversity was not present but was recognized as a necessity and a good political thing to have, and I benefited from that as opposed to being hampered by it.”¹⁷ Of course, this is not to say that Molinari did not face challenges. She spoke specifically about the gendered challenges she faced while running for vice chair, arguing that she had to work harder to build personal relationships with men in the party:

I was running against a great guy from Florida named Cliff Stearns, and I had people who would come up to me and say... “I’d love to vote for you, but Cliff and I...have become such good friends at the gym.” Hm, the gym I’m not allowed into? Back in the day, we had our separate gyms...I don’t necessarily need to work out with a bunch of sweaty men, but that was another one of those occasions where you interacted not as Members of Congress...I wasn’t allowed to be in the House Gym, and I had to overcome that from a relationship standpoint.¹⁸

One way Molinari was able to overcome this obstacle was to support and campaign for her Republican colleagues. “The road to victory,” she wrote in her memoir, “was paved with the IOUs I could collect by helping Republican candidates all over the country” (Molinari 1998, 160). Molinari also did this with the help of her husband, fellow Republican member of the House and chair of the NRCC, Representative Bill Paxon (R-

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

NY). She notes that her husband was “very helpful” in helping her gain support from her colleagues: “I surround myself with strong political people. One happened to be my father; one happened to be my husband.”¹⁹ She and Paxon campaigned for Republican candidates across the country – in 84 House districts and 36 states²⁰ – and across the ideological spectrum (Gertzog 2004, 42). Eventually, Molinari defeated Stearns, becoming the highest-ranking Republican woman, the second woman ever elected to Conference leadership, and the first CCWI member to be elected to party leadership (Gertzog 2004, 42).

Priorities and Strategies: A Big Tent Party

Molinari, “a gum-snapping feminist” and the first woman ever to wear pants on the House floor,²¹ believed her position in leadership could help her promote some of the more feminist policies discussed in the CCWI (Gertzog 2004). She viewed her role as one in which she could disagree with party leadership and work to bring moderate and conservative Republicans together. She told CAWP in an interview, “In terms of getting [women] to the points of power and influence, the 104th [Congress], from a Republican perspective anyway, has seen 180-degree change. So we are able to affect the policies that we care about maybe a little bit easier.”²²

But as vice chair of the Conference, Molinari was first and foremost a messenger for the Republican Party – and a good one at that. A spokesman for Majority Leader Dick Armey told a reporter in 1995, “We instantly recognized that while Susan Molinari may

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Blumenfeld, Laura. 13 Aug 1996. “The Life of the Party.” *The Washington Post*.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Molinari, Susan. (27 June 1995). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

not agree with the majority of [the conference], she's very politically astute... She's also good with media, she has a sense of what matters in the Northeast, and better than anyone at the table she understands women voters."²³ Her husband and chair of the NRCC, Bill Paxon, made a similar statement: "Susan is very knowledgeable in communications strategy, which is an area quite frankly not many in our leadership have a strong hand in."²⁴ Indeed, even Molinari understood that she was meant to be a supportive voice for the party – particularly for the Contract with America – and she viewed it as an opportunity for many women: “[Party leadership] wanted you out there espousing and speaking and doing talk shows and getting on [TV], particularly CNN, and doing whatever you needed to do to get the message out there, to be a messenger for the Republican Party. Women did a lot of that.”²⁵

Molinari was an effective communicator who often refrained from speaking about her more moderate positions in order to contribute to the perception of a unified Republican Party. In 1996, GOP presidential nominee, Bob Dole, asked Molinari to be a keynote speaker at the Republican National Convention. The decision was immediately reported as an effort to reach out to women voters and help close the gender gap.²⁶ While Molinari was inherently a different messenger, her messages did not deviate from the party’s messages and, notably, were not specific to her gender. Unlike Jennifer Dunn and Cathy McMorris Rodgers, as I will show in the following sections, Molinari did not have

²³ Baum, Geraldine. 6 Mar 1995. “A Rising Voice in the Revolution: Politics: As she ascends the Republican ranks, outspoken moderate Rep. Susan Molinari may be just what the GOP needs to stay in the majority.” *Los Angeles Times*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ “The Honorable Susan Molinari Oral History Interview,” Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, May 25, 2012.

²⁶ For example, see: Ingraham, Laura. 4 Aug 1996. “Convention Preview: How the Gender Gap is Driving the Dole Girl Crazy.” *The Washington Post*.

explicitly gendered messaging goals. She publicly echoed the conservative policy stances with which she agreed, and she attempted to work behind-the-scenes to push congressional leaders on those which she did not.

Overall, though, Molinari was largely unsuccessful in her attempts at moderating her party's policies. She would later write in her memoir:

I'd become Vice Chair of the Republican Conference... but that was as far as a moderate female from the northeast could go in the Republican conference. While my input was accepted and sometimes even acted upon, I could never feel like a real player. I was a member of the leadership, but I was not, for example, a member of Newt's inner circle, the Speaker's advisory group, which is where ninety-nine percent of the decisions that are supposed to be made in leadership meetings are actually formulated. (Molinari 1998, 260)

Indeed, one Democratic congressman told a reporter, "The Republicans don't become any more pro-choice by having her in the room... She's the apotheosis of style over substance. She doesn't change a thing."²⁷ Her persistent and public support of the Contract with America also earned her the "femi-Newtie" label – what Pat Schroeder (D-CO) called Republican women who did not openly challenge their party's conservative stances (Molinari 1998, 186).

At the same time, Barbara Vucanovich, as Conference secretary, was passionate about another gendered issue: getting more Republican women elected to office. While they had become friends during their time in Congress, Vucanovich was pro-choice and significantly more conservative than Molinari.²⁸ In her interview with CAWP, Vucanovich complained about the Speaker's frequent meetings with Republican women,

²⁷ Baum, Geraldine. 6 Mar 1995. "A Rising Voice in the Revolution: Politics: As she ascends the Republican ranks, outspoken moderate Rep. Susan Molinari may be just what the GOP needs to stay in the majority." *Los Angeles Times*.

²⁸ Susan Molinari and Barbara Vucanovich have DW-NOMINATE scores of .256 and .441, respectively.

finding them to be somewhat unproductive.²⁹ Nevertheless, she said the Speaker was open to having Republican women work on their own projects. In May of 1996, Vucanovich partnered with political consultants and the Republican Network to Elect Women (RENEW), a Washington-based Republican women's organization, to host the first and only Women's Leadership Summit. Vucanovich wrote in her memoir, "I felt at the time, and still do, that Republicans were not getting their message out to women in America that there was room in the Republican Party for women from all walks of life and with varying philosophies. The summit was an opportunity to showcase Republican women and our ideals." (Vucanovich and Cafferata 2005, 197).

The two women in Conference leadership positions in the 104th Congress, Susan Molinari and Barbara Vucanovich, both viewed their gender as an important part of their identity. However, due in part to ideological differences, there was little concerted effort between them to promote a unified, gendered party message. In the following sections, I show how Jennifer Dunn's communications efforts as vice chair were more explicitly gendered, and how Cathy McMorris Rodgers has been more easily able to amplify a collective voice.

²⁹ As a member of the leadership team, Vucanovich had vowed not to let the issue of abortion divide Republicans. When asked in a CAWP interview if she thought she had succeeded in this goal, she said, "No...I don't think you change anyone's minds by what you get up and say. People feel the way they feel." She went on to say that the Speaker's biweekly meetings with Republican women were largely ineffective: time after time before we knew it we were into the abortion issue again. You know, Republicans don't agree on that issue! We would sit in Newt's office, and finally I would just think, 'Oh, the hell with this, I've been here before. Just let me go home'" (Vucanovich, Barbara. (18 November 1997). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.)

Jennifer Dunn

Jennifer Dunn, born Jennifer Jill Blackburn, was one of the three Republican women newly elected to the House of Representatives during the “Year of the Woman” in 1992. Prior to running for Congress, she was chair of the Washington State Republican Party from 1981-1992 and a delegate to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 1984 and 1990.³⁰ Though she lacked prior legislative experience, Dunn was elected secretary and then vice chair of the House Republican Conference in her second term with the help of Speaker Newt Gingrich.

Succeeding Molinari as Conference vice chair, Dunn focused primarily on narrowing the gender gap and reaching out to women. In many ways, Dunn was the perfect spokesperson for the role. Her life experiences – the fact that she had been, at different points in her life, a wife, a stay-at-home mom, and a working single mother – allowed her to connect with women from various walks of life. She was also attractive – something that did not go unnoticed. Hanna Rosin, in a 1997 *New York Magazine* article, wrote:

In the U.S. House of Representatives’ popularity contest, this year’s Northwestern Glamour Girl is Jennifer Dunn, the fetching blonde congresswoman from the Nordstrom suburbs of Seattle...With her lemon-meringue suits and curled hair, Dunn offers everything the rest of her party does not: poignancy, poise, smoothness, a lush bit of femininity. ‘If you watch her for ten minutes, it becomes apparent why she is a rising star,’ says one proud Republican consultant. ‘You have Newt Gingrich with his bulging waistline and Dick Armey with his bulging neckline, and then you have Jennifer Dunn – smart, beautiful, cleans up well. The total package.’³¹

³⁰ “Dunn, Jennifer Blackburn.” History, Art, & Archives. United States House of Representatives. <[³¹ Rosin, Hanna. 1997, April 28. “Pretty on the Outside.” *New York Magazine*. 20-23.](https://history.house.gov/People/Listing/D/DUNN,-Jennifer-Blackburn-(D000549)/>”.></p>
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Despite being deemed a “Glamour Girl” – or perhaps because of it – Jennifer Dunn was a trailblazer in Congress, becoming the highest-ranking Republican woman the 105th Congress and the first woman of either party to run for House majority leader. With the help of male party leaders, Dunn quickly navigated her way onto the powerful Ways and Means Committee and into Conference leadership. In her time as vice chair of the House Republican Conference, she worked primarily to change the messaging strategy of the party. Her work undoubtedly inspired future Republican women leaders, including Conference Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers.

Pathway to Leadership: Gingrich Protégé

Following the 1994 Republican Revolution, Jennifer Dunn “became a protégé of Newt Gingrich,” working closely with him to implement the Contract with America (Heffernan 2012, 45). While pro-choice on abortion, Dunn was more ideologically conservative than Susan Molinari, and, according to her brother, “100 percent a Reagan Republican” (Heffernan 2012, 17).³² As a second-term member and with the help of the newly-elected Speaker of the House, Dunn became the fifth woman to land a seat on the powerful Ways and Means committee. In the following Congress, she decided to run for secretary of the Conference. Dunn knew she wanted to be in leadership since the moment she entered Congress. But while she had “laid the groundwork” from the beginning, she said in a C-SPAN interview:

³² Indeed, Dunn admired Ronald Reagan so much that she name her second-born son after him. Reagan Dunn, notably, was named not after President Reagan but after *Governor* Reagan – “nearly 10 years ahead of the Reagan Revolution” (Heffernan 2012, 18). “Now, as fate will have it,” Reagan Dunn said, “he turned out to be a pretty darn good president...He wasn’t, you know, Nixon. If my name were Nixon Dunn, it would be different. Maybe there is a little luck” (Heffernan 2012, 19).

I decided that I'd wait for a while because there were so many top-level people in the Republican side of the House that it wasn't the right thing for me to do at the beginning. But later on I thought, 'I could do this.' And now that we're in the majority it would be great fun because we were making history... When you have confidence that you're going to work hard, that you're going to be open and fair and have integrity and represent the people you're leading, then that's a good time to move into leadership. I did that after I'd been here for four years.³³

Running unopposed, Dunn won her seat as secretary, joining Conference Chair John Boehner and Conference Vice Chair Susan Molinari, who had won her re-election.

In May of 1997, Molinari unexpectedly announced her resignation from Congress to pursue a career in television. Dunn gave up her seat as secretary to run in the special election for vice chair. This time, she would run against a colleague from the Ways and Means Committee, Representative Jim Nussle of Iowa. "With a strong endorsement from Gingrich" (Heffernan 2012, 47), Dunn "won big," defeating Nussle by a two-to-one margin.³⁴ At the same time, Tillie Fowler (R-FL) also won the race for Conference Secretary. Dunn viewed their victories as an important step forward for the image of the party, saying that it "shows a real validation of the fact Republicans want women to be not just in the ranks but in the highest levels of leadership" (Heffernan 2012, 48).

Priorities and Strategies: Toward a Softer Conservative Message

President Bill Clinton won his 1996 re-election with the largest voting gender gap in history³⁵ at 11 points.³⁶ Jennifer Dunn was dedicated to closing this gap, telling CAWP researchers that it "should be a political motivating and energizing impetus" and that "it's

³³ "Life and Career of Jennifer Dunn." December 18, 1997. American Profile Interview. C-SPAN.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ An 11-point gender gap also existed in the 2016 election.

³⁶ "The Gender Gap: Voting Choices in Presidential Elections." Fact Sheet. Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. <<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/ggpresvote.pdf>>

obviously very important” to her.³⁷ As Conference vice chair, Dunn worked specifically to create what she called “a softer edge to the conservative message” (Heffernan 2012, 49) by speaking on conservative issues – “on tax, on welfare, on crime, on education, on health care, on anything you want to talk about”³⁸ – in a way that resonated with women. In her CAWP interview, she elaborated: “I think we can make a difference if we begin to focus our message and interpret and translate the policies that we are behind and help generate.” Conference Chair John Boehner agreed with Dunn’s assessment, saying, “Clearly, our message hasn’t been articulated as well to women in America as it could be” (Heffernan 2012, 48).

In 1998, Dunn founded The Permanent Majority Project, which focused on reaching out to women voters and inspiring women’s interest in the party. With women on board, she argued, Republicans could retain a permanent majority in Congress. That same year, Dunn also led the Republican Women Leaders Forum, a three-day conference meant to energize women in the party. Her strategy involved giving “women a much greater responsibility in being a messenger of the Republican message”³⁹ and educating male members on how best to speak about Republican policies. She placed particular emphasis on what she called “finishing the sentence.” “Don’t just say a big blend of things,” Dunn said of her Republican colleagues, “Finish the sentence. Tell them we want tax relief, but why. That can be money in your pocket that you can choose to spend on child care, and that sort of thing.”⁴⁰ Doing this, Dunn maintained, could help women understand how conservative policies impact their lives and the lives of their families.

³⁷ Dunn, Jennifer. (1998). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Despite conducting research “to identify what women expect from their federal leaders” (Heffernan 2012, 49), Dunn worked more often to bring a palatable Republican message to women rather than bringing women’s policy concerns to Republican leaders. In fact, at times, Dunn was so focused on messaging over actual policy details that it could be frustrating to her colleagues. In an interview with *New York Magazine*, one Republican staffer recalled a meeting of Republican women in which Representative Nancy Johnson (R-CT) attempted to discuss specific amendments to a bill that she believed the women should consider supporting. The staffer noted that, much to the dismay of Susan Molinari, Dunn (then secretary of the Conference) repeatedly cut Johnson off, emphasizing the importance of messaging strategy rather than the minutia of legislation.⁴¹

Of course, this is not to say Jennifer Dunn did not care about policy. It is clear from interviews with Dunn that she believed the perspectives of Republican women can help to advance the interests of the party. Dunn used her platform as vice chair to speak about a variety of issues and the way those issues – from education to taxes – affected the lives of women. Moreover, her gendered life experiences often informed her policy positions in addition to her messaging strategy. In a 1997 C-SPAN interview, for example, Dunn said:

I like to involve a lot of stories in my speeches. I like to personalize things a lot. For example, I’m talking to a group on welfare reform. I like to tell them why the Republicans put together the package the way that we did... And I use my own experiences. Why child care is so important to finance as we move welfare parents off welfare into the workforce because I remember what it was like when I was having to work and get good child care for my children. I was always concerned about it.⁴²

⁴¹ Rosin, Hanna. 1997, April 28. “Pretty on the Outside.” *New York Magazine*. 20-23.

⁴² “Life and Career of Jennifer Dunn.” December 18, 1997. American Profile Interview. C-SPAN.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, welfare reform, or the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), included an amendment that increased funding for child care. According to Dunn, “it was the Republican women who put that amendment together.”⁴³

Indeed, while Dunn’s primary strategy as vice chair was to reframe the conservative message, she also viewed the role of Republican women Conference leaders as important for shaping legislation in the first place. Dunn spoke about herself and Tillie Fowler (R-FL), who was Conference secretary at the time, as policy resources for men in the party:

Out of the seven members of leadership who were elected, two of us are women and we're very practical. We're both women who have juggled many, many life experiences, and I've been a single mother for 20 years, since my kids were six and eight. So there are issues I understand and can interpret for my male colleagues. I have become a resource that they turn to on certain votes to say, “Is this really something we want to do or something we don't want to do?” Now that we control the majority, that kind of thinking starts much earlier because we generate the legislation now. So I think when we're in the room, and with the general training that we've begun to do with our male colleagues, I think we've begun to have quite an impact.⁴⁴

Indeed, it was not an easy feat to be at the leadership table attempting to convince male Republican leaders that women’s perspectives matter. In one particularly heated moment, “Dunn interrupted a tax-cutting diatribe by Majority Leader Richard Armey, urging him to consider the impact of tax cuts on the programs many women were finding indispensable” (Gertzog 2004, 140).

⁴³ Dunn, Jennifer. (1998). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Still, one challenge that Dunn faced as vice chair was that she was “unable to establish a thoroughly trustful working relationship with Conference chair John Boehner” (Gertzog 2004, 140). While Boehner agreed with Dunn’s general approach to messaging, he was reluctant to hand over too much power to the women in the Conference. Indeed, when Dunn asked to be given more control over the Conference’s communications strategies and finances, Boehner said he was unsure “whether he had the authority to delegate more power” to her (Gertzog 2004, 140). Deborah Pryce (R-OH) had a similarly difficult relationship with Boehner when she was vice chair in the 107th Congress (Gertzog 2004, 140).

Another challenge was that the Republican women in the 104th and 105th Congresses were far less ideologically cohesive than they are today (see Chapters 1 and 4). As Barbara Vucanovich (R-NV) describes, even when Republican women gathered together for informal dinners, there were heated conversations among them regarding policy. “Marge Roukema and Nancy Johnson... would get into almost knock-down, drag-out battles!” Vucanovich said, “Whoa! And I couldn't believe how strongly they felt on certain issues... Nobody saw it exactly the same way, and they were all Republican women!”⁴⁵ Even on welfare reform, where Republican women were perceived to work together, “It was not monolithic,” Vucanovich said, “And I think that a lot of people just plunk every woman together. They're all pro-life or...they all think the same way. Well, they don't.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Vucanovich, Barbara. (18 November 1997). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Despite these challenges, Speaker Gingrich remained supportive of Republican women's outreach efforts. As Tillie Fowler saw it, Gingrich worked hard to listen to the concerns of everyone in the party: "His mantra is 'Listen, Learn, and Lead.' He is very good...about...finding out where the problems are and...work[ing] them out."⁴⁷ Dunn agreed with that sentiment, saying that the speaker was open to letting women in the party take the reins on the gender gap issue:

When I'm [meeting with Speaker Gingrich about] my gender gap project...I say, 'This is what we want to do. Are you with me on this? I'm going to bring this to the leadership table.'... And he'll say, 'Yes, yes.' He'll come and speak when we have our gender gap sessions...and he'll come to my vice chairman's advisory board of all the women lobbyists...because they know the issue, and know what we've done to take credit for, and what we haven't done that we need to write into legislation. It's just a different form of his supporting what we're trying to do.⁴⁸

Barbara Vucanovich further noted that meetings with the Speaker, while challenging because there were many ideological disagreements among the women, also gave women an opportunity to pursue gendered initiatives. She said in her CAWP interview, "[Speaker Gingrich] did allow us all to go off and do these various things. And I think Deborah Pryce is still meeting with women lobbyists and different groups."⁴⁹

Indeed, Deborah Pryce (R-OH), who would go on to be elected the first female Conference chair in 2002, helped to launch a political action committee in 1997. Value in Electing Women PAC (VIEW PAC) is dedicated to electing Republican women to Congress. Pryce told a reporter in 1997, "If American women voters see more women Members and realize that [the Republican Party is] not an all-white-male party, they will look more closely at us and give us their ear more readily."⁵⁰ While incumbent members

⁴⁷ Fowler, Tillie. (06 November 1997). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁴⁸ Dunn, Jennifer. (1998). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁴⁹ Vucanovich, Barbara. (18 November 1997). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁵⁰ Carney, Eliza Newlin. 18 Oct 1997. "And There's the House's Gender Gap, *The National Journal*."

of Congress “have no official operational role,” they do often “attend VIEW PAC events” and can serve as honorary board members – which Cathy McMorris Rodgers would later go on to do.⁵¹

Overall, Jennifer Dunn’s priority as Conference vice chair was to narrow the gender gap by creating and disseminating a party message that would appeal to women voters. While ultimately unsuccessful in closing the gender gap (a 10-point gender gap favoring Democrats existed in the 2000 presidential election⁵²), Dunn did develop explicitly gendered frames for her messages in a way that Molinari did not. In her 1999 State of the Union Response, for instance, Dunn used her experience as a single mother to discuss conservative economic policies:

I’ve been a single mother since my boys were little – six and eight. My life in those days was taken up trying to make ends meet...I know how that knot in the pit of your stomach feels. I’ve been there. I’m still a practical person. You heard the president make a lot of promises to a lot of people tonight, but I’d like to talk to you about two very practical Republican priorities: tax relief and Social Security reform. (Heffernan 2012)

Dunn also had the help of other women in the party like Deborah Pryce and Tillie Fowler, who were particularly interested in creating opportunities for women to run as Republican candidates.

Still, Dunn faced institutional and ideological challenges that made it difficult to promote a more unified message. First, ideological disagreements among Republican women during this era prevented them from speaking collectively from a gendered perspective. While Republican women were placed in public messaging roles on

⁵¹ “About.” Value in Electing Women Political Action Committee. <<https://viewpac.org/about/>>

⁵² “The Gender Gap: Voting Choices in Presidential Elections.” Fact Sheet. Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. <<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/ggpresvote.pdf>>

television and in the Conference, my analysis of partisan woman-invoked rhetoric in Chapters 2 and 3 suggest that there was comparatively little concerted effort among women in the party to engage in explicitly gendered messaging tactics. Second, as vice chair, Dunn did not have the authority that John Boehner had as Conference chair. While it is unclear if Boehner's reluctance to give Dunn more control over Conference finances and messaging strategies had any tangible effect, it was nevertheless one barrier that Dunn faced during her time in leadership. In the following section, I show that Cathy McMorris Rodgers and Jennifer Dunn had similar gendered priorities and messaging strategies; their leadership experiences differed only in that McMorris Rodgers was able to leverage institutional and political opportunities not available to Dunn.

Cathy McMorris Rodgers

The impact that Jennifer Dunn had on her colleagues and on future Republican women leaders is clear. Speaking about Dunn, Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA), chair of the House Republican Conference from 2013-2019, remarked, "Wow. What a foundation that she laid. Today it is common for us to refer back to the work that Jennifer Dunn did. We certainly recognize that we're standing on her shoulders" (Heffernan 2012, 51). McMorris Rodgers was no stranger to politics or leadership when she was elected to the House in 2004. She became a member of the Washington State House at age twenty-four where she served for ten years, two of which were spent as minority leader.

Like Susan Molinari and Jennifer Dunn, McMorris Rodgers entered Conference leadership at a time when her party recognized the necessity of attracting women voters.

Barack Obama won the 2008 presidential election with a 7-point gender gap,⁵³ and that November, McMorris Rodgers was elected vice chair of the House Republican Conference. Following President Obama's reelection and another large, 10-point gender gap in 2012,⁵⁴ McMorris Rodgers was elected Conference chair with the backing of Speaker John Boehner (R-OH).

The influence of Jennifer Dunn is evident in the gendered communications strategies of McMorris Rodgers. "I find myself today saying many of the things that I heard Jennifer say when I heard her from afar," says McMorris Rodgers, "I do think conservative women bring an important voice to the debate and the Republican Party" (Heffernan 2012, 51). As Conference chair, McMorris Rodgers used her position to advance the interests of the Republican Party and to amplify the voices of women within the party. In many ways, her pathway to leadership and her messaging strategies are similar to Dunn's, though in important ways they are also unique. In what follows, I illustrate how McMorris Rodgers took advantage of changes in the institutional and political environments in an effort to give Republican women a louder and more unified voice in Republican Party politics.

Pathway to Leadership: Encouragement from Boehner

While Cathy McMorris Rodgers had leadership experience during her time in the state legislature, she did not come to Congress with the intention of becoming a party leader. She said in her interview with CAWP:

⁵³ "The Gender Gap: Voting Choices in Presidential Elections." Fact Sheet. Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. <<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/ggpresvote.pdf>>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

For me, it is never about a title or a position. It's really about wanting to be effective. John Boehner encouraged me to run for leadership, which is interesting to note. I didn't get to Congress and say, "This is what I want to do." It was John Boehner who called me up and encouraged me to seek a leadership position.⁵⁵

Following the 2008 presidential election, then-Minority Leader Boehner tapped McMorris Rodgers for the position of Conference vice chair. Boehner's spokesman, Michael Steele, said, "She impressed him as being energetic, sincere, hardworking, a team player, and someone people kind of relate to very well."⁵⁶ McMorris Rodgers ran unopposed, becoming the highest-ranking woman in Republican leadership.

In 2011, she called Boehner, who had recently been elected Speaker of the House, and told him that she intended to run for Conference chair the following year. McMorris Rodgers ran against Representative Tom Price of Georgia, who at the time chaired the Republican Policy Committee. Price received the endorsements of more conservative members – including 2012 vice presidential nominee, Paul Ryan (R-WI), and then-chair of the Conference, Jeb Hensarling (R-TX). Nevertheless, with Speaker Boehner's endorsement, McMorris Rodgers won her race, becoming the fourth highest-ranking Republican in the House and only the second woman⁵⁷ in history to hold the position.

Boehner's endorsement of McMorris Rodgers and her subsequent victory were criticized by some as an empty symbolic gesture. Many believed her gender – and her ability to speak as a woman against "war on women" rhetoric – was the primary reason behind her rise to Conference chair.⁵⁸ McMorris Rodgers rejected that sentiment. "I think it's an easy shot for people to make, to say that it's just because I was a woman," she said,

⁵⁵ McMorris Rodgers, Cathy. (04 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁵⁶ Mimms, Sarah. 2011 September 19. "Is Cathy McMorris Rodgers More Than a Token?" *The Atlantic*.

⁵⁷ Deborah Pryce (R-OH) was the first woman to chair the House Republican conference. She was elected in the 108th Congress and served two terms as chair.

⁵⁸ Mimms, Sarah. 2011 September 19. "Is Cathy McMorris Rodgers More Than a Token?" *The Atlantic*.

“There was a lot taken into consideration, and it was the leadership that I had shown in the past.”⁵⁹ Yet while the tokenism of McMorris Rodgers is debatable, her emphasis on women’s mobilization, recruitment, and promotion is not.

Priorities and Strategies: Amplifying a Collective Voice

As a Conference leader, Cathy McMorris Rodgers has emphasized that she is “responsible for communications” and works to find ways for her party to effectively communicate issues not only as individual members, “but also as a body.”⁶⁰ Following the 2008 election, Cathy McMorris Rodgers worked to modernize the Republican Party and improve the online influence of GOP members. As Conference vice chair, she initiated campaigns that incentivized the creative use of social media, and she enhanced the online presence of party leaders through blogs and videos.⁶¹ This boom in social media and online engagement coincided with her efforts to promote a more woman-friendly image of the Republican Party.

Like Dunn, McMorris Rodgers used her Conference leadership positions to soften the message of the GOP, attempting to make it more appealing to women and families. In 2014, while serving as Conference chair, McMorris Rodgers became the fifth woman⁶² to deliver the Republican Response to the State of the Union address. In line with Jennifer Dunn’s messaging style, McMorris Rodgers took time to speak about her

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ McMorris Rodgers, Cathy. (04 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁶¹ “Vice Chair Accomplishments.” March 3, 2011. Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers. <https://mcmorris.house.gov/vice_chair_accomplishments/>.

⁶² Four women gave the Republican Response to the State of the Union address prior to Cathy McMorris Rodgers: Charlotte Reid in 1968, Christine Todd Whitman in 1995, Jennifer Dunn in 1999, and Susan Collins in 2000. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen delivered a Republican Response in Spanish in 2014 following McMorris Rodgers’ response. Joni Ernst delivered the response in 2015, and Nikki Haley did so in 2016.

personal experiences as a mother and how those experiences align with the principles and policies of the Republican Party:

I was single when I was elected – but it wasn't long before I met Brian, a retired Navy commander, and now we have three beautiful children, one who was born just eight weeks ago. Like all parents, we have high hopes and dreams for our children, but we also know what it's like to face challenges. Three days after we gave birth to our son, Cole, we got news no parent expects. Cole was diagnosed with Down syndrome. The doctors told us he could have endless complications, heart defects, even early Alzheimer's. They told us all the problems. But when we looked at our son, we saw only possibilities. We saw a gift from God...The President talks a lot about income inequality. But the real gap we face today is one of opportunity inequality. And with this Administration's policies, that gap has become far too wide...Republicans have plans to close the gap. Plans that focus on jobs first without more spending, government bailouts, and red tape. Every day, we're working to expand our economy, one manufacturing job, nursing degree and small business at a time. We have plans to improve our education and training systems so you have the choice to determine where your kids go to school, so college is affordable, and skills training is modernized. And yes, it's time to honor our history of legal immigration.⁶³

McMorris Rodgers believed that she could build support for conservative policies by discussing her individual experiences of motherhood, thereby connecting with voters on more personal level. But perhaps more than that, McMorris Rodgers focused on giving women a visible platform in the party. To her, the messenger was just as important as the message itself. She told CAWP, "People are going to listen to what [women] have to say in a different way than perhaps they've heard from their male counterparts."⁶⁴ Changing the messenger, McMorris Rodgers believed, would be an effective tool for reaching a broader audience.

⁶³ "State of the Union GOP Response: Cathy McMorris Rodgers." 2014 January 28. Transcript. *Politico*.

⁶⁴ McMorris Rodgers, Cathy. (04 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

To accomplish this, Cathy McMorris Rodgers took advantage of various political and institutional opportunities that were not available to Jennifer Dunn. First, as described in Chapter 4, the broader political environment encouraged national and state party leaders to prioritize women’s outreach and candidate recruitment. Following a loss in the 2012 election during which claims of a “Republican war on women” were used to discredit GOP candidates, the Republican National Committee (RNC) released an “autopsy report” in 2013 that described recommendations for reaching out to women and minority voters.⁶⁵ That same year in the House, the National Republican Campaign Committee (NRCC) launched Project Growing Republican Opportunities for Women (Project GROW), an initiative dedicated to recruiting and electing more Republican women candidates for Congress.⁶⁶ And later that month, women from six Republican committees – the RNC, NRCC, National Republican Senatorial Committee, Republican Governors Association, Republican State Leadership Committee, and College Republican National Committee – announced the launch of “Women on the Right UNITE,” which focused “on various sectors including recruitment, messaging, polling, training for candidates, localized field events, fundraising, strong digital presence and harnessing the power of data to increase female voter participation” (Burrell 2018, 106). That Republicans were already united in these gendered efforts created a welcoming environment for McMorris Rodgers’s priorities as Conference chair.

⁶⁵ Barbour, Henry, Sally Bradshaw, Ari Fleischer, Zori Fonalledas, Glenn McCall. 2013. “Growth and Opportunity Project.” Republican National Committee.

⁶⁶ “NRCC Announces New Women’s Initiative: Project GROW.” June 28, 2013. National Republican Congressional Committee. <<https://www.nrcc.org/2013/06/28/nrcc-announces-new-womens-initiative-project-grow/>>.

A second advantage was McMorris Rodgers's leadership rank as well as the gender composition of Conference leadership. While Jennifer Dunn was often at the whim of John Boehner's decisions, McMorris Rodgers, as chair, had more control over the Conference's finances and messaging strategies. In addition, two other women, Lynn Jenkins of Kansas and Virginia Foxx of North Carolina, were Conference vice chair and secretary, respectively. At the leadership table more broadly were Ann Wagner as and Mimi Walters, who were their respective class representatives.

These women were both sympathetic to McMorris Rodgers's communications efforts, and, in the case of Wagner and Foxx, were in other valuable institutional positions. Ann Wagner, for instance, was very involved with the NRCC in helping to recruit women candidates. She told me in her interview with CAWP, "Probably the [biggest] role that I have played specifically for women within our conference is... across the street at the NRCC. I have worked on, very aggressively, along with Congresswoman Diane Black and others that are supportive, women's recruitment."⁶⁷ As a member of the Rules Committee and someone who had a good working relationship with Speaker Boehner,⁶⁸ Virginia Foxx also worked to encourage women to be messengers on a broad range of issues. In her CAWP interview, McMorris Rodgers pointed to this specifically, saying, "Virginia Foxx, as the secretary of the Conference, has really worked to get women involved in the debate. She's also on the Rules Committee, so she's on the floor a lot, no matter what the legislation may be. [She] wants to have women engaged in the debate no matter what the issue."⁶⁹ An institutional environment in which

⁶⁷ Wagner, Ann. (28 April 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁶⁸ In her interview with CAWP, Foxx told us that she has a strong working relationship with Speaker John Boehner "as a result of having served on his committee" (the House Education Committee).

⁶⁹ McMorris Rodgers, Cathy. (04 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

congresswomen were not only passionate about Republican women's representation, but were also in relative positions of power, provided McMorris Rodgers with a messaging network that was not available to previous female Conference leaders.

Third, the institutionalization of a *partisan gender identity* gave House Republican women the ability to meet and discuss issues collectively. When asked in her interview with CAWP if the election of more conservative women to Congress has strengthened the comradery among Republican women, Virginia Foxx replied, "I do think we have good comradery... When we need to, we get together as a women's group."⁷⁰ That comradery, as described in Chapter 4, manifested in 2012 as the Republican Women's Policy Committee (RWPC), the first Republican women's caucus in Congress. While serving as chair of the RWPC, Renee Ellmers told a reporter, "I think the culture that has existed within our own party has been led by men, by and large. Women have not necessarily been putting themselves out there for recognition. ... Now we have a group of women empowering each other, whereas in the past women were more independent agents."⁷¹

Indeed, this collective empowerment also gave Republican women the opportunity to promote more unified, gendered party messages. In her interview with CAWP, Cathy McMorris Rodgers told us that the RWPC "absolutely" makes women's leadership more visible and that "[RWPC Chair Renee Ellmers] will organize special orders on the House floor where we can go down and talk about a particular issue."⁷² According to McMorris Rodgers, getting women to be messengers on every issue was

⁷⁰ Foxx, Virginia. (18 September 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁷¹ Dumain, Emma. 2013 June 21. "GOP Women Seek Broader Influence with Committee." *Roll Call*.

⁷² McMorris Rodgers, Cathy. (04 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

important, and “the Republican Women’s Policy Committee [was]...kind of the gathering of all that.”⁷³

Finally, aside from the more substantive benefits of women in leadership roles, entering Congress with women in party leadership and an established caucus for Republican women seemed to give newer Republican congresswomen a stronger sense of partisan gender identity. Making a direct comparison to Democratic women, Elise Stefanik (R-NY), who was elected in 2014, told CAWP, “Half of our [elected Republican] leadership is women. And that is a higher percentage than on the Democratic side.”⁷⁴ Elected to the 113th Congress in 2012, Susan Brooks (R-IN) pointed to the women in leadership as a sign of the opportunities available for Republican women:

Ann Wagner was chosen to be the representative of our class, ...[and] she’s still there... at the leadership table. Interestingly, this class of the 114th Congress...chose a woman also, Mimi Walters, so she’s at the leadership table. And then when I got here, all of our Conference positions, Cathy McMorris Rogers, Virginia Fox, and Lynn Jenkins were elected and defeated men for their spots in the Conference leadership. So I’ve been really pleased at the opportunities presented to the women and there just aren’t enough of us.⁷⁵

Indeed, Ann Wagner, also first elected to the 113th Congress, was immediately motivated to sit at the leadership table and to work her way onto important committees:

When I won my election in November the very first time, we celebrated that night and then I told everybody, “Alright, 9:00 a.m., back at the campaign office. You can wear your fuzzy slippers, but we have another campaign to run.” And that was to sit at the leadership table. I wanted to be elected by my classmates that were entering Congress...because I wanted to have a female voice there and be a part of shaping the agenda and messaging and communicating that agenda.⁷⁶

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Stefanik, Elise. (20 October 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁷⁵ Brooks, Susan. (27 October 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁷⁶ Wagner, Ann. (28 April 2016). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

Wagner went on, referencing the importance of women’s descriptive representation at the leadership table: “My goodness, between Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Virginia Foxx, Lynn Jenkins, myself, Mimi Walters...there are at least five women that sit at that leadership table in the Republican [conference]. And...that’s why I also thought it was important to...[get] on a top committee...”⁷⁷ Wagner was elected class representative, earned positions on the Financial Services Committee and Foreign Affairs Committee, and in the 116th House is currently vice ranking member on each.

Much of this motivation among newer Republican congresswomen to seek leadership and actively mentor other Republican women can be attributed to the leadership style of Cathy McMorris Rodgers. Several women members talked about McMorris Rodgers as someone who would take them under her wing – both as candidates and as newly-elected representatives. Elise Stefanik, at the time the youngest woman ever elected to Congress, has been outspoken about the mentoring she received from McMorris Rodgers.⁷⁸ Mimi Walters and Susan Brooks have discussed the importance of mentoring women candidates as a result of the support they received from McMorris Rodgers. Walters, elected to the 114th Congress, said, “As a Member of Congress, I feel it is my duty to help mentor younger women. When I was running, Cathy was wonderful to us.”⁷⁹ Susan Brooks, in her CAWP interview, also noted that collective mentoring efforts for female candidates really began in the 113th Congress. Brooks, who was first elected in 2012, said:

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ At a breakfast I attended honoring Cathy McMorris Rodgers on December 4, 2015, hosted by the American Dream Project, Elise Stefanik told the audience that McMorris Rodgers took her under her wing and mentored her as a freshman congresswoman.

⁷⁹ “Every Issue Affects Women.” 13 Oct 2015. The Ripon Society. <<https://www.riponsociety.org/2015/10/every-issue-affects-women/>>.

We [Republican congresswomen] are very much about mentoring women who are thinking about running and it has happened since I've been here. It didn't happen for me to get here, really, except for Cathy McMorris Rogers, [who] did mentor me a bit. But nobody else really did, and then...a number of us...said, hey, this has to be more formalized for women who are running.⁸⁰

Indeed, as honorary chair of VIEW PAC, McMorris Rodgers was passionate about recruiting and mentoring Republican women candidates – even at the primary level.⁸¹

Brooks went on to say that Republican women in the 114th Congress were “making sure that we are helping new members and that we are really supporting each other as our female members are trying to strive to get more leadership positions.”⁸²

As Conference chair, Cathy McMorris Rodgers sought to amplify a unified, explicitly gendered party message. While both Dunn and McMorris Rodgers were committed to communicating a softer conservative message, McMorris Rodgers's experiences differed due to various institutional and political factors that allowed her to more easily work with an ideologically cohesive group of female colleagues. Notably, McMorris Rodgers worked to simultaneously leverage and strengthen a partisan gender identity among House Republican women, elevating Republican women as party messengers and emphasizing the importance of mentorship and comradery. One result of this can be seen in the increasing use of partisan woman-invoked rhetoric on the House floor (see Chapters 2 and 3). But while female Conference leaders have the ability to function as critical actors for Republican women's representation, the gatekeeping role of male party leaders and the continued valuation of women as tokens may present challenges for reaching higher levels of leadership within the party.

⁸⁰ Brooks, Susan. (27 October 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁸¹ McMorris Rodgers, Cathy. (04 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁸² Brooks, Susan. (27 October 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

Climbing the Ladder: Beyond Conference Leadership?

While women in recent years have consistently been overrepresented in Republican Conference leadership, they have yet to rise beyond that. At the time of this writing, Conference chair is the highest position a Republican woman has ever held in the House of Representatives. In this section, I delve deeper into the experiences of Jennifer Dunn and Cathy McMorris Rodgers. Both Dunn's historic run for House majority leader and McMorris Rodger's decision not to seek the majority leader post highlight that the perception of Republican women as mere tokens may prevent women from climbing higher up the ladder of congressional leadership.

As described in previous sections, both Jennifer Dunn and Cathy McMorris Rodgers were actively supported by the Speaker of House in their races for Conference leadership. In both cases, this support, while helpful in their races for Conference leadership, also created subsequent challenges. After serving one term as Conference vice chair, Dunn made history in 1998 as the first woman to run for House majority leader. Challenging incumbent House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-TX), Dunn was in a three-way race that also included conservative Steve Largent of Oklahoma.

Jennifer Dunn had the support of many in her party – especially those who believed in the importance of messaging and creating a diverse image of the GOP. One Republican colleague, Rick White of Washington, said Dunn was “very persuasive and very captivating...She speaks in ways people can understand more intuitively. She persuades you logically but also, you know, tugs at their heartstrings a little bit.”⁸³ White

⁸³ Copeland, Libby Ingrid. 16 Nov 1998. “Dunn, GOP's Smooth Referee, Aims for the No. 2 Spot.” *The Washington Post*.

added that Dunn “functions particularly well in a male environment.”⁸⁴ In describing the reason for her support of Dunn, Tillie Fowler (R-FL), who had served as secretary of the Conference, said, "I'm looking for diversity. When you look at the whole leadership, you've got to have better diversity. We've got a great opportunity right now."⁸⁵

Still, Dunn faced some challenges in her race for majority leader. Compared to those of her conservative opponents, Dunn’s more moderate policy stances – in particular, her views on abortion – were problematic for some of her Republican colleagues. While Armev and Largent were both adamantly anti-abortion, Dunn leaned libertarian and believed “each individual should be under as little regulation as possible, and should therefore have the right to make that decision herself” (Heffernan 2012, 28). Dunn ran her leadership campaign with an understanding both that her identity as a woman was important and that her position on abortion was controversial. Abortion “will never be my key issue,” she said, "I don't think there's any 'women's issues' anymore. By the year 2000, women will be running over 50 percent of the world's businesses... Women care about issues in the marketplace.”⁸⁶

Aside from some ideological tensions between her partisan and gender identities, Dunn’s connection to Gingrich and her rapid rise in party politics did not sit well with all members. One colleague, critical of Dunn and skeptical of her ability to lead, told *The Washington Post*: “She's good in managed settings but not when she's going to get off the [cue] cards...She moved up the line in the House because she was the speaker's person and she was a symbol.”⁸⁷ The perception that Dunn was handpicked by Gingrich simply

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

as a symbolic token for the party was a distinctly gendered challenge that she had to overcome. Indeed, Dunn ended up losing her race for majority leader, coming in third behind Armev and Largent, respectively. Dunn's brother, John Blackburn, said in an interview, "When she ran for a top House position, she was beaten out by a person who had less ability but was a 'good ole boy' from Texas" (Heffernan 2012, 52). Following her loss, Dunn said her historic run would make it possible for future women to earn a position at the highest levels of Republican leadership: "I'm not really disappointed. I was cracking that glass ceiling. No woman has ever run for a leadership position like this. I felt it was worth it just for that."⁸⁸

That glass ceiling in the House has yet to be shattered by a Republican woman. Much like the connection Dunn had to Speaker Gingrich, the relationship McMorris Rodgers had with Speaker Boehner was both a benefit and an obstacle on her pathway to congressional leadership. On September 25, 2015, Boehner announced that he would resign from the speakership. His term was wrought with battles with conservative Republicans who expected the Speaker to take hardline positions on legislation. Shortly after his announcement, it was rumored that this may open the door for Republican women's leadership. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, who was the highest-ranking Republican woman at the time, was expected to run either for speaker or majority leader. "I had looked at the majority leader position as a position where I could even be more effective in helping lead the party's vision and agenda as well as communications effort," she told us in a CAWP interview, "And so there was a time, when John Boehner had first

⁸⁸ Thomas, Ralph. 6 Sep 2007. "Jennifer Dunn, who inspired face of today's state GOP, dies at 66." The Seattle Times.

announced his retirement, where I spent some days talking to some other members about the possibility of seeking the majority leader's position."⁸⁹ Ultimately, though, she decided against running.

When asked about this decision, McMorris Rodgers noted her similarities with Jennifer Dunn. "I found myself wanting to talk to Jennifer Dunn," she told CAWP, "I was thinking, oh, Jennifer, [I would] really like to be able to talk to you about this question."⁹⁰ After speaking with her colleagues about a potential run for majority leader, McMorris Rodgers said she needed some time to distinguish herself from the former speaker:

At the end of several days of talking to the members, I concluded that at this time it was smarter and more effective for me to stay in my current position. And part of it was for people to be able to see me separate from John Boehner. You know, he invited me on the leadership team... And although I'm very proud of the work that I have done, and was excited about the vision, and I'd put together a whole strategic plan for being majority leader, I found that...people need to see me separate from John Boehner, at least my colleagues do for a while.⁹¹

Often viewed as a token,⁹² McMorris Rodgers has had to work to overcome both her connection to an unpopular speaker and the idea that she was pushed into leadership simply as an effort to showcase diversity.

Indeed, the challenges for House Republican women are clear. While they are often valued by male party leaders for Conference leadership and messaging roles, that valuation fails to extend to the highest levels of leadership. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL),

⁸⁹ McMorris Rodgers, Cathy. (04 December 2015). Center for American Women and Politics Interview.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² "When she was selected to respond to President Obama's State of the Union address earlier this year, McMorris Rodgers was seen as a diversity pick, not the best person for the job. Some Republicans and pundits hinted at tokenism, but Democrats came right out and said it, with Rep. Steny Hoyer calling her selection nothing more than a 'transparent' ploy by the GOP to appeal to female voters" (Mimms, Sarah. 2011 September 19. "Is Cathy McMorris Rodgers More Than a Token?" *The Atlantic*.).

who was a member of Congress for thirty years before retiring in 2019, told a reporter, “You think it would be helpful to be a female, but it’s sort of a detraction. I can’t believe I would say that, but it shows. Some of these guys, they just see themselves in those [top leadership] positions and they want it for themselves. And they think if it goes to a woman they will never be able to grab it again.”⁹³ In a similar vein, a top Republican staffer said, “You won’t see a woman in a leadership spot besides Conference chair for many years. The House GOP isn’t built for it...I don’t think there is a concerted effort to keep women out of leadership, but given a choice, this conference will always go the other way.”⁹⁴

Conclusion

Martha McSally (R-AZ), first elected to the 114th Congress, talked to CAWP about the importance of attaining a critical mass of Republican women in Congress:

We certainly need more [Republican women]. From my experiences in the military, generally speaking, you are treated as an exception and a token sociologically until you have about 25%, right? I mean that’s when it’s a game-changer and you actually become...part of what defines the organization and is helping to lead the organization. So on the Republican side we’ve got a long way to go to get to that 25%.

Indeed, at their peak, House Republican women have made up only 10.7% of their conference.⁹⁵ Despite their small numbers, though, they have been consistently overrepresented in Conference leadership positions. Given this and my findings in

⁹³ Wong, Scott. 2017 May 17. “Female Lawmakers Flee for Higher Office, Retirement.” *The Hill*.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ House Republican congresswomen comprise 10.7% of their conference during the 109th Congress (2005-2007). See: “History of Women in the U.S. Congress.” Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. <<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/history-women-us-congress>>.

Chapter 4 that Republican congresswomen have found ways to work together collectively, I used this chapter to analyze changes in the representational role of female Conference leaders.

My comparative analysis of the experiences of Susan Molinari, Jennifer Dunn, and Cathy McMorris Rodgers shows that female House Republican Conference leaders have functioned as “critical actors” (Childs and Krook 2009) for women’s representation within their party. That is, they have attempted to use their positions of power to draw attention to Republican women’s institutional interests and priorities. This chapter further demonstrates how personal, political, and institutional factors gave Cathy McMorris Rodgers a larger role in advancing the voices of women members.

Most significantly, McMorris Rodgers was able to both leverage and perpetuate a partisan gender identity among Republican women. Republican congresswomen’s ideological cohesion and dedication to women’s political representation, for example, made it easier for McMorris Rodgers to elevate women’s voices and amplify a collective, gendered party message in ways that previous Conference leaders could not. Indeed, despite McSally’s call for a critical mass of Republican women, she also emphasized that the women sitting at the leadership table mattered in terms of representation: “It’s not just, ‘Oh, we need a woman token.’ These women were elected. I think that shows that we are hopefully potent even though we’re small.” “Since I’ve been here,” she said, “we’ve had to force our way in to say, ‘Do not do that stupid thing that you are about to do,’ and all 23 of us [women] are in agreement. We’ve been able to be a strong voice.”

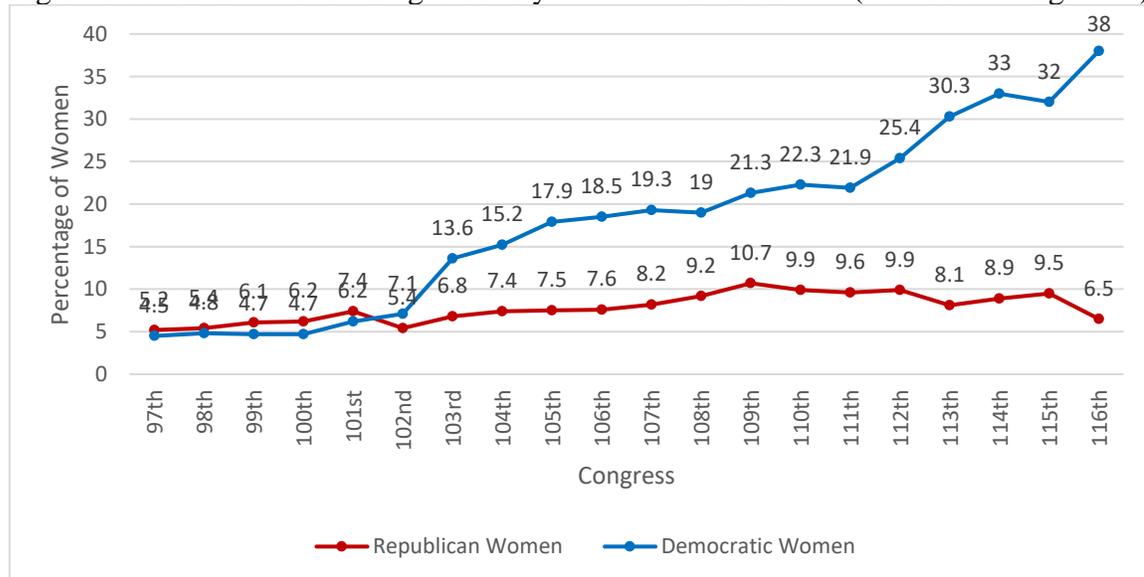
Despite this strong voice, this chapter also paints a more complex picture of women's congressional representation within Republican Party politics. First, in an increasingly competitive and gendered political environment, it is the small number of women in the party that has given them the opportunity to sit in top Conference leadership positions. Women are often encouraged by male party leaders to seek these positions as a way to help combat an anti-woman image of the GOP. I show throughout this dissertation that Republican women are promoted and valued, first and foremost, as loyal party messengers. In analyzing the effects of polarization, I have also found that increased ideological cohesion among Republican women has given women in these Conference leadership roles more representational power in terms of increasing the visibility of Republican congresswomen.

At the same time, however, this analysis also shows how the substantive impact of Republican congresswomen remains limited. Rather than giving women more legitimacy within the party, their visibility and promotion to party messaging roles presents a gendered hurdle to overcome. In particular, I find that women best positioned to climb the leadership ladder struggle to rise above Conference leadership, in part because they are viewed by their male colleagues as tokens for the party. In my final chapter, I present a more in-depth discussion of the potential representational implications of these findings.

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION: GENDERING THE GOP

The 2018 midterm elections resulted in a Democratic takeover of the House of Representatives and a record number of women members of Congress.¹ In the House, Democrats flipped a total of 41 seats for a net gain of 39 seats – the largest victory for the Democratic Party since the 1974 elections following President Nixon’s resignation.² These results further widened the partisan gap between Democratic and Republican women in the House; while Democratic women gained 28 seats, bringing their total to 89, Republican women lost 10 seats, dropping them to 13.³ As illustrated in Figure 1, Republican women currently make up only 6.5% of all House Republicans – the smallest percentage in 25 years.

Figure 1: Women as a Percentage of Party Caucuses in the House (97th-116th Congresses)



Data source: Center for American Women and Politics

¹ Press Release. “Results: Women Candidates in the 2018 Elections.” 29 Nov 2018. Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University.

² Montanaro, Domenico. 14 Nov 2018. “It was a Big, Blue Wave: Democrats Pick Up Most House Seats in a Generation.” *NPR*.

³ Press Release. “Results: Women Candidates in the 2018 Elections.” 29 Nov 2018. Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University.

In the aftermath of the 2018 midterms, Republican congresswomen demanded that their party's leadership prioritize the election of Republican women and outreach to women voters. "Fifty-two Republican women ran for Congress...And only 13 of us made it across the finish line," said Susan Brooks (R-IN), who was elected recruitment chair of the NRCC.⁴ She told *Roll Call*: "It's important that we, as a conference, do a better job of looking like America, and better representing the very diverse country that we have."⁵ In a closed-door conference meeting, Elise Stefanik (R-NY) confronted male leaders about the importance of Republican women's representation. She later told a reporter, "I am going to keep pointing out to my colleagues that we are at a crisis level for GOP women...This election should be a wake-up call to Republicans that we need to do better ... We need to be elevating women's voices, not suppressing them."⁶

And yet, while male party leaders have generally been supportive of this sentiment, they have also been hesitant to empower women or make any substantive changes beyond optics. Despite encouragement from Republican congresswomen and support from other colleagues, Ann Wagner (R-MO) decided against running for chair of the NRCC after a phone call with Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy. "The leader had a different plan," Wagner told reporters.⁷ Stefanik stepped down from her position as NRCC recruitment chair so that she could use her leadership PAC to support Republican women specifically in primary elections. "I want to play in primaries, and I want to play

⁴ Groppe, Maureen. 13 Dec 2018. "Brooks says House GOP women looking for answers as their ranks shrink to lowest levels in 25 years." *Indianapolis Star*.

⁵ Bowman, Bridget. 10 Apr 2019. "House recruiter to GOP: 'Do a better job of looking like America.'" *Roll Call*.

⁶ Bade, Rachael and Sarah Ferris. 11 Dec 2018. "'I wasn't asking for permission': GOP women put leaders on notice." *Politico*.

⁷ *Ibid.*

big in primaries,” Stefanik told *Roll Call*.⁸ But NRCC Chair Tom Emmer was weary of the decision, saying, “If that’s what Elise wants to do, then that’s her call, her right, but I think that’s a mistake...It shouldn’t be just based on looking for a specific set of ingredients — gender, race, religion — and then we’re going to play in the primary.”⁹ Stefanik responded to Emmer’s comment in a Twitter post. With flashing red sirens, she wrote:

I will continue speaking out [about] the crisis level of GOP women in Congress & will try to lead and change that by supporting strong GOP women candidates through my leadership PAC...But   NEWSFLASH   I wasn’t asking for permission.¹⁰

Eventually, Emmer and other male party leaders expressed support for and donated to Stefanik’s E-PAC.

This dissertation helps to explain Republican women’s underrepresentation in Congress, male leadership’s lack of support for women in top positions of power, and Republican women’s collective efforts to push for women’s increased representation within their party. Indeed, in seeking to understand the evolution of Republican women’s representation – and in particular, the effects of increased party polarization and competition – I reveal an important paradox: that women’s increased visibility and role as party messengers empowers Republican women while simultaneously perpetuating the ideological barriers that prevent them from winning congressional seats and limiting their ability to substantively represent women.

⁸ Pathe, Simone. 4 Dec 2018. “Elise Stefanik Wants to Play in Primaries to Help Republican Women.” *Roll Call*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ @EliseStefanik (Elise Stefanik). *Twitter*. 4 Dec 2018, 9:43 A.M.
<<https://twitter.com/elisestefanik/status/1069950316483874816?lang=en>>

Republican Congresswomen as Party Messengers

I began this project with a broad, overarching question: In what ways do party polarization and competition in Congress affect the way Republican congresswomen represent women? What I find is that strengthening partisanship, ideological cohesion, and interparty competition have shaped congresswomen's role in Republican Party politics by affecting the way they interact with each other and with male party leaders. In particular, I show that Republican congresswomen increasingly speak as and on behalf of women in ways that align with GOP principles. Yet while they embrace their role as Republican Party messengers, they also recognize and collectively advocate for their gendered interests as women within their party.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I used a multi-method approach to analyze changes in the floor speeches of House Republican women over time. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analyses and elite interviews, I find an increasing use of what I call *partisan woman-invoked rhetoric*. That is, Republican congresswomen have been more likely to speak collectively as and on behalf of women in ways that align with the GOP's policy platform, messaging strategies, and party culture. Notably, this rhetoric genders ideologically conservative principles without actively challenging them.

I used Chapters 4 and 5 to delve deeper into the process of Republican women's representation. Through several in-depth, qualitative case studies, I find that partisan woman-invoked rhetoric is not simply a top-down messaging strategy. More specifically, Chapter 4 illustrates the development and eventual institutionalization of a *partisan gender identity* among Republican congresswomen. I show, first, how party polarization and competition have created political incentives and opportunities to organize formally

as Republican women through the creation of the Republican Women's Policy Committee (RWPC). Additionally, this chapter begins to reveal the gatekeeping role of male party leaders. As Republican congresswomen advocate for their institutional interests at the intersection of their gender and partisan identities, their efforts are supported by party leaders insofar as they are perceived to advance the general electoral interests of the party; primarily, Republican women are valued and promoted as party messengers.

Given women's consistent overrepresentation in House Republican Conference leadership, Chapter 5 investigates Conference leaders as potential critical actors for Republican women's representation. In comparing the experiences of Susan Molinari, Jennifer Dunn, and Cathy McMorris Rodgers, I find that each of these female Conference leaders have been gender-conscious actors who have attempted to use their positions of power to enhance women's representation in various ways. Beyond that, my analysis reveals the institutional factors that Cathy McMorris Rodgers, as Conference chair, was able to take advantage of in order to elevate women's voices and amplify a collective, gendered party message. Most notably, McMorris Rodgers simultaneously leveraged the RWPC as a resource and helped to perpetuate the existence of a partisan gender identity among Republican congresswomen. Chapter 5 also highlights the gendered challenges women face in their attempts to rise beyond Conference leader positions.

Overall, this dissertation details the ways party polarization and competition in Congress have created an institutional environment in which Republican congresswomen work increasingly as party messengers, advocating for Republican policies and principles while speaking as and on behalf of women. At the same time, in-depth examinations of

Republican women's interactions with one another and with party leaders suggest that Republican congresswomen continue to advocate on behalf of their own institutional interests not simply as women or as Republicans, but as Republican women. In the following sections, I discuss my contributions to political science literature and the implications of these findings.

Messenger Politics and Collective Action in the GOP

First, my focus on party polarization and competition contributes to current congressional politics and party politics literatures. Through in-depth analyses of members' experiences and interactions, I have been able to unveil some of the previously-overlooked effects of congressional polarization. Indeed, the implications of polarization on the legislative process have been well-documented (Binder 2003; 2016; Lee 2009; 2016; Pearson 2015). Scholars have also noted the growing emphasis on congressional communications (Lee 2016; Malecha and Reagan 2012; Meinke 2016; Sellers 2010) and have found that members' rhetoric has become increasingly partisan (Lipinski 2004; Russell 2018). My gendered analysis of rhetoric further adds to this discussion by expanding our understanding of how partisan rhetoric is developed and disseminated.

In line with congressional communications literature, I find in this dissertation that individual members are committed to participating in party messaging because it simultaneously benefits their own electoral prospects as well as those of their party. What I further demonstrate, however, is how shifts in the political environment can shape party leaders' perceptions of who is an effective party messenger. By focusing on gender, I

paint a more complex picture of party communications, showing how the symbolism of messengers – not only messages – plays a significant role in party messaging strategies.

More than that, my analysis of the formation of the RWPC highlights the complexities of organizing within the GOP's top-down party structure (Freeman 1986, 339). Despite claims that party loyalty and deference to leadership may be waning following the existence of a “confrontational” Tea Party faction in Congress (Grossman and Hopkins 2016, 104), my study shows that Republican women were able to successfully organize only insofar as they were able to “plead...[their] case to the leadership as furthering the basic values of the party” (Freeman 1986, 339). I demonstrate, for instance, how a combination of partisanship, ideological cohesion, and party competition has created an environment in which women have been able to successfully appeal to party leadership on some gendered demands while remaining unsuccessful in others.

Rethinking the Difference Women Make: The Gendered Effects of Polarization

Perhaps most significantly, this project expands current understandings of women's political representation. In an environment of heightened party polarization and competition, it becomes important to examine changes in the way congresswomen represent women. As the composition and ideologies of women in Congress evolve – and in particular, as the Republican women elected to Congress are increasingly conservative and ideologically indistinguishable from Republican men (Thomsen 2015; Frederick 2009) – approaching studies of representation from a new angle helps to paint a more accurate picture “the difference women make” (Swers 2002) in Congress. I thus began

my analysis of women's congressional representation by rejecting the premise that "women's issues" exist a priori (Reingold and Swers 2011). Rather than focusing on legislative activity around conventional women's issues, this project delved deeper into the claims made in House floor speeches and the gendered intraparty dynamics of the House GOP.

Recent work on claims-making (Saward 2006; 2010) examines how political elites claim to represent women, suggesting that both ideology and partisanship influence the content of representative claims (Celis et. al. 2008; Celis and Childs 2012; 2018; Erzeel and Celis 2016). My dissertation contributes to this scholarship in two main ways. First, by examining the evolution of Republican women's woman-invoked rhetoric over time, I show how individual ideology and various institutional factors shape the types of claims that are made. In particular, I help to reveal the process by which congressional polarization has created a collective voice among Republican women and has amplified gendered claims-making within GOP politics.

Second, my inclusion of identity claims – claims in which women speak *as* women – in addition to representative claims provides a more intricate interpretation of the way conservative women represent women. For instance, if one were to look only at the representative claims of Republican congresswomen – in which they speak *on behalf* of women – one would find a gradual decline in such claims (see Chapter 3). But by including the use identity claims, I show that women's representation can occur in subtler ways. In this case, speaking as partisan women and as mothers demonstrates that Republican congresswomen are increasingly representing women in ways that align with

an ideological rejection of group identity politics and conservative notions of “family values.”

My detailed examination of the collective action efforts and political dynamics within the House GOP also shows that congressional polarization and competition have affected the way Republican congresswomen interact both with one another and with party leadership. The development and eventual institutionalization of a *partisan gender identity* among Republican women suggests there is a change in the nature of women’s substantive representation. No longer should Republican women’s representation in Congress be measured simply by whether their actions on conventional women’s issues deviate from those of their party (Swers 2002). Instead, scholars must work to understand how women’s representation occurs at the *intersection* of gender and partisanship.

More recent research on the gendered effects of polarization has shown that women in Congress are less likely than in previous decades to work across the aisle on legislation and are no longer more bipartisan than their male counterparts (Lawless, Theriault, and Guthrie 2018). Yet legislative activity may not be the only place – or, indeed, the most relevant place – women’s representation can be found. My findings in this project reveal that Republican congresswomen today work to represent women not by moderating their party’s policies, but by working as partisans in gendered ways.

Admittedly, because congresswomen do value their partisan identities and understand that public infighting can be damaging to themselves and their party, it may be increasingly difficult to measure the substantive impact of women on the legislative process in this era of polarization. Nevertheless, my dissertation shows that through qualitative analyses, scholars can begin to uncover the representational efforts of partisan

women as well as their successes and continued challenges. On one hand, for example, I show that Republican women's evolving role as unified party messengers is the result of Republican women's ability to collectively organize and advocate for themselves and their interests. On the other hand, the perception by male party leaders that women's visibility can enhance the party's broader electoral interests keeps Republican women primarily in in these messenger roles and can prevent them from climbing higher up the ranks of congressional leadership. These findings suggest that continuing to study the *process* of women's substantive representation – how women acquire influential leadership positions and use those positions to represent women in various ways – remains an important endeavor.

Implications: A Paradox for Republican Women's Representation

The practical implications of these findings are important to consider in terms of multiple dimensions of Republican women's congressional representation. Questions of women's political representation tend to revolve primarily around the link between descriptive and substantive representation (Pitkin 1967): more specifically, do women represent women? But by delving deeper into the question of *how* women represent women (Childs and Krook 2006) in this era of polarization, I begin to reveal an important multidimensional paradox.

First, as scholars like Kanthak and Krause (2012) have pointed out, Republican congresswomen have been given Conference leadership opportunities in their party not *in spite* of their small numbers, but *because* of them. My analysis further shows how institutional and political changes in recent decades have strengthened the role of female

Conference leaders as critical actors by making it easier to elevate Republican congresswomen's voices and promote them as party messengers. Once again, this increased representation of Republican women in party messaging roles is paradoxically a result of the descriptive *underrepresentation* of women in the party: to combat images of the GOP as anti-woman, male party leaders often embrace the idea of women as party spokespeople.

Second, Republican women's growing visibility and representation as party messengers in some ways prevents them from playing a more substantive role in Congress. Republican women are promoted in their party so long as they are perceived as benefitting the party's broader electoral goals without challenging its ideological stances. This incentive to stick to the script may have effects on the way Republican women represent women. In terms of woman-invoked rhetoric, I find increasingly few instances in which Republican women deviate from official party stances, suggesting that the substantive representation of moderate Republican women is relatively limited. The tokenism of Republican women by male party leaders, as I show in Chapter 5, can also present gendered obstacles for women who want to climb the leadership ladder beyond the rung of Conference chair. Thus, women in the GOP have less ability to shape their party's policy agenda than their female colleagues across the aisle, who undoubtedly have more institutional leverage within their party.

Finally, the overrepresentation of women as party messengers may also contribute to the *descriptive* underrepresentation of Republican women in Congress for multiple reasons. First, increased visibility of Republican congresswomen can give Republican voters the impression that women are not, in fact, underrepresented in their party.

Indeed, this may help to explain why a 2018 Pew Research study found that only 33% of GOP voters believe “there are too few women in high political offices” compared to 79% of Democratic voters.¹¹ Rebecca Schuller, executive director of Winning For Women, a newly-formed conservative group working to elect Republican women, noted this discrepancy, saying, “Republican leaders have a job to do in simply convincing voters that there is a problem.”¹² As discussed in this dissertation, one goal of placing women in party messaging roles is to create the appearance that women have a place in GOP politics. Yet when compounded with a party culture that already rejects the premise of gender as an important political identity, the presence of women as spokespeople may simply perpetuate the belief that women’s political underrepresentation is not a problem that needs to be addressed.

Second, in their use of partisan woman-invoked rhetoric, as I find in Chapter 2, Republican congresswomen do not challenge their party’s conservative policies; those policies are merely framed in gendered ways. Chapter 3 further shows that the GOP’s ideological and cultural emphases on traditional gender roles, family values, and a rejection of identity politics are upheld by Republican congresswomen’s use of partisan woman-invoked rhetoric. This becomes particularly important when considering that the claims made by political elites may have the potential to shape public interests (Celis et. al. 2008; Saward 2006; Harris 2013). Indeed, Sellers (2010) shows that legislators can gain media attention through consistent, unified messaging. In this polarized media environment, Harris (2013) contends, “members of Congress, especially high-profile

¹¹ Horowitz, Juliana Menasce, Ruth Igielnik, and Kim Parker. 20 Jul 2018. “Women and Leadership 2018: Wide Gender and Party Gaps in Views About the State of Female Leadership and the Obstacles Women Face.” *Pew Research Center*.

¹² Schuller, Rebecca. 26 Jul 2019. “Yes, the GOP Has a Woman Problem – Yes, It Can Be Solved.” *The Hill*.

elected party leaders...produce and model party rhetoric likely to be echoed by party activists and other attentive elements of the public in ways that propel further party polarization” (110). In short, the messages put forth by Republican congresswomen can have tangible effects on the political environment.

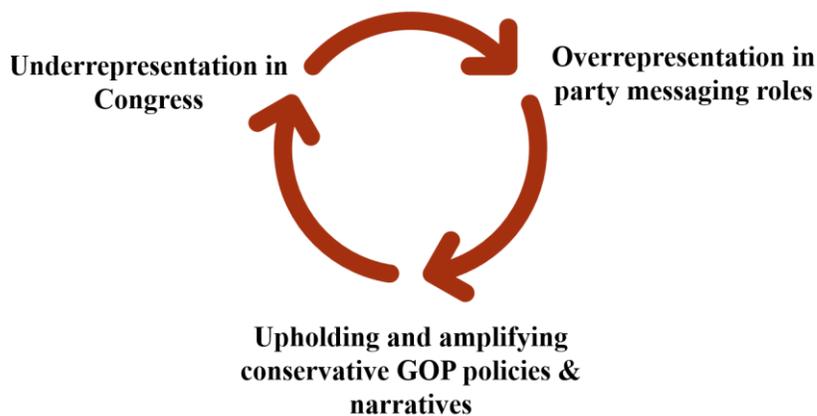
As described in Chapter 1, Republican women candidates face ideological and cultural challenges that make them less likely than Democratic women to make it through their primary elections. In particular, an increasingly polarized environment means Republican women must work harder than Republican men to prove their conservative credentials (King and Matland 2003; Schneider and Bos 2016);¹³ they are also less likely than Democratic women to benefit from identity-based groups due to a general rejection of identity politics on the Right (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018; Kitchens and Swers 2016). As scholars continue to strive to understand the causes of the descriptive underrepresentation of Republican women in Congress, I argue that it is important to take into consideration the representational behavior of members of Congress rather than simply focusing on the candidacies of Republican women. By collectively producing gendered messages that align with the GOP’s policy platform, messaging strategies, and culture, Republican congresswomen are potentially perpetuating, rather than challenging, the ideological barriers that prevent female Republican candidates from winning congressional seats.¹⁴

¹³ Also see CAWP analysis: Dittmar, Kelly. 2013. “Primary Problems: Women Candidates in US House Primaries.” A Closer Look. *Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University*. <<http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/primary-problems-10-1-13.pdf>>.

¹⁴ The most recent examples of this can be seen in the candidacies of Rep. Renee Ellmers and Dr. Joan Perry. Ellmers, a strong conservative who was originally championed by the Tea Party in her 2010 race, was challenged by a conservative man and eventually defeated during her 2016 primary election in North Carolina’s 2nd district. In the neighboring 3rd district of North Carolina, Walter B. Jones, Jr. passed away, resulting in a special election in 2019. Here, there were hopes that Dr. Joan Perry, a staunch conservative

This multidimensional paradox, in which Republican women's descriptive and substantive *underrepresentation* is linked in various ways to their *overrepresentation* as party messengers, may seem like an endless cycle (see Figure 2). Yet my dissertation also highlights the potentially transformational significance of a *partisan gender identity* among Republican congresswomen. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, as Conference chair, not only leveraged the Republican Women's Policy Committee to amplify women's voices; she has also helped to strengthen the recognition of a partisan gender identity through her mentorship. As I show in Chapter 5, recently-elected Republican women, like Elise Stefanik and Susan Brooks, entered the institution motivated to work as and on behalf of Republican women. A recognition that their interests differ from both Democratic women and Republican men, and a willingness to challenge male party leaders in order to achieve those interests, may hold the key to breaking the cycle of Republican women's underrepresentation in Congress.

Figure 2: A Paradox for Republican Women's Congressional Representation



running on a pro-life agenda, would result in one more Republican woman elected to Congress. Yet Dr. Perry, unable to prove that she was adequately conservative, also lost her primary to a Republican man.

Limitations and Future Work

One limitation of this study is the lack of comparison between Republican men and women in the House. Indeed, examining how Republicans – both men and women – are engaging in partisan woman-invoked rhetoric would allow for a deeper analysis of the dynamics of gendered party communications in Congress. One major change in the use of woman-invoked rhetoric among Republican women over time has been the increased use of identity claims – and in particular, claims of motherhood. Analyzing changes in the way Republican men speak for women may shine more light on the idea that men in the party view women as the primary messengers for gendered communications.

Second, my project shows that Republican congresswomen rarely deviate from party policy stances when discussing what they believe to be important to women. Yet to gain a more thorough understanding of whether Republican women are challenging party leaders on policy, it will be necessary for researchers to qualitatively analyze the behind-the-scenes role women may play in the policymaking process. In this era of polarization, it is increasingly difficult to determine how women are making a difference within the institution of Congress. I thus call on scholars to continue gendering their analyses of internal party politics in order to pinpoint the subtle yet substantive ways women work on behalf of women in ways that their male counterparts do not.

Third, while the claims-making literature suggests that the claims made by political elites have the potential to shape public interests, it is unclear what effects partisan woman-invoked rhetoric has had or will have on public opinion. Future research should thus seek to understand how receptive Republican voters are to these types of gendered claims. Along the same lines, my study focuses solely on House floor speeches.

It may be beneficial to expand this analysis to include press releases or media commentary in order to more thoroughly understand who is participating in these gendered party messages and how they are being disseminated to the public. Doing so would also deepen understandings of whether and how partisan woman-invoked rhetoric works to uphold barriers for female candidates.

Fourth, I noted in Chapter 5 that there has been a national effort among Republican committees to increase outreach to women voters. In her analysis of abortion policy frames at the state level, Amanda Roberti (2017) finds that recent anti-abortion policies sponsored by Republican legislators are being framed as “pro-woman.” These observations raise questions regarding the nationalization of Republican messaging strategies. How are state and national party organizations working together to gender their communications efforts and what impact might this have on women’s representation?

Finally, the existence of an institutionalized partisan gender identity among Republican congresswomen raises questions about whether and how this has played out on the Democratic side. I am particularly interested in understanding differences between the creation and accomplishments of the RWPC and the Democratic Women’s Caucus. In an era of party polarization and competition, how are Democratic and Republican women advocating for their interests at the intersection of their gender and partisan identities, and what might this tell us about the ways in which specific party cultures affect women’s representation?

Gendering the GOP

Following a Democratic wave in the 2018 House elections, Cathy McMorris Rodgers decided against seeking a fourth term as chair of the House Republican Conference. A few days prior to that, Liz Cheney (R-WY) had announced she would run for the position of Conference chair. In a Dear Colleague letter, Cheney criticized the communications strategy of the Conference. "Although the 115th Congress has been one of the most productive in history, our message isn't breaking through," she wrote.¹⁵ Yet while Cheney was critical of McMorris Rodgers's broader messaging tactics, it appears we will see little change in the types of gendered claims made in Congress. Cheney contended, "What we need to be doing is laying out the extent to which women care about national security. Women care about economic growth. They care about jobs. We need to get on offense."¹⁶

Throughout this dissertation, I make the case that studying Republican women's representational behavior is an important endeavor if we are to truly understand the evolving dynamics of women's congressional representation. Republican congresswomen recognize the value of their presence in the institution. They believe in the importance of reaching out to women voters and recruiting women candidates. And perhaps most significantly, they have sought ways to mentor one another and organize collectively around their partisan gender identity. Yet, in their attempts to the gender the GOP, they have been relegated primarily to party messenger roles. Whether and how Republican

¹⁵ Devaney, Jason. 7 Nov 2018. "Liz Cheney Running For House GOP Leadership Post." *Newsmax*.

¹⁶ Detrow, Scott. 15 Nov 2018. "Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney Vows to Change Republicans' Messaging." *All Things Considered*. *NPR*.

congresswomen will gain enough institutional power and choose to use that power to break down existing barriers for Republican women remains to be seen.

APPENDIX A:
LIST OF REPUBLICAN CONGRESSWOMEN INTERVIEWEES

103rd/104th Congresses:

Helen Bentley
Jennifer Dunn
Tillie Fowler
Nancy Johnson
Sue Kelly
Jan Meyers
Susan Molinari
Constance Morella
Sue Myrick
Deborah Pryce
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Marge Roukema
Olympia Snowe
Barbara Vucanovich

114th Congress:

Diane Black
Marsha Blackburn
Susan Brooks
Renee Ellmers
Virginia Foxx
Kay Granger
Vicky Hartzler
Cynthia Lummis
Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Martha McSally
Kristi Noem
Martha Roby
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Elise Stefanik
Ann Wagner
Jackie Walorski

APPENDIX B:
SAMPLE PROTOCOL (114th CONGRESS)

INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION
(review before starting the recorder)

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. As you know, the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University is conducting this research project to examine how women members of Congress navigate the current political context to achieve policy goals and effectively represent their constituencies.

We recently provided a consent document to your staff explaining the parameters for the interview. I would like to conduct this interview “on the record” and record it so that we can quote you accurately in the products of our research and make transcripts available to other researchers in the future. Of course, you are free to go “off the record” at any point, and anything you say “off the record” will never be attached to your name or attributed to you in any product of our research.

Do I have your permission to conduct the interview on the record and to record it?

[If YES, proceed to semistructured interview questions]

[If NO, note the preferred parameters for the interview and adjust format as needed]

(1.) In addition to representing your district as a whole, are there particular people or interests inside or outside your district that you feel a commitment to work on behalf of here in Congress?

PROBE: Who are they?

PROBE: How do you do that?

(2.) We know there are many items on your agenda, but what is the one thing you would most like to accomplish during this Congress?

(3.) How has the current environment of party polarization affected your ability to pursue your goals?

Possible probe:

Many officeholders are frustrated with the gridlock and party polarization that seems prevalent in Washington these days. Given the current environment, where do you find satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment in your job as a Congresswoman?

(4.) Do you think the women in this Congress are more or less likely than the men to work together across party lines? Why?

Probe only for longer serving members:

Do you think women are more or less likely to work together across party lines now than in the past? Why?

(5.) Have you worked on legislation with other women members of Congress during the current session? If yes, can you describe this collaboration? (who and what)

(6.) Have you worked on legislation with one or more members of the other party during the current session? If yes, can you describe this collaboration? (who and what)

PROBE: How did you develop these relationships/this relationship with [x]?

(7.) Do you think the presence of women members has made a difference here in Congress in recent years? If so, how? If not, why not?

PROBE: if answer is policy, ask “What about on the way Congress works?”

PROBE: if answer is process, ask “What about on policy?” “On committees?”

PROBE: Are there times when women have played an influential role in *preventing* something from happening?

PROBE: if party caucus wasn’t mentioned, ask “And what about within your party?”

PROBE (HOUSE DEMOCRATIC WOMEN ONLY): “What about the increasing number of women of color? At the Center, we’ve noticed that the presence of congresswomen from diverse (racial/ethnic) backgrounds is at a historic high.”

PROBE (REPUBLICAN WOMEN ONLY): “What about the increasing number of conservative women?”

(8.) Do you think women members face any unique challenges or opportunities within Congress because they are women?

PROBE: What about women of color? Women in the Democratic/Republican party?

(9.) Could you tell me about your current role in the debate about X? Why did you take X position/ propose X bill/ introduce X amendment?

[Note: tailor question to MC activities]

(10.) Clearly there are differences, but do you think women in Congress have anything in common?

(11.) In what ways, if any, do members of your staff influence your legislative strategies or priorities?

(12.) We’re also interested in how women navigate difficult situations as they pursue their goals. In terms of your own legislative strategies and priorities, can you think of a time when it was difficult to pursue your goals within your party caucus or other legislative caucus, or within a committee?

PROBE: How did you navigate that situation?

(13.) Was there a time during the current session when you were able to help block something from happening?

THESE ARE ONLY FOR REPUBLICAN WOMEN

(13a.) Do you think Republican women approach conservative issues or policies differently than Republican men? If so, how?

(13b.) In 2012, House Republican women formed the Republican Women's Policy Committee. Can you tell me about the motivation behind creating this group?

PROBE: What would you consider to be a major accomplishment of the RWPC?

(13c.) In 2012, House Republican women formed the Republican Women's Policy Committee. How familiar are you with/active are you in this organization?

(14.) Is there anything else that I have not covered that you think is important for us to know? What didn't we ask that we should have if we want to understand how women are faring and what they are achieving in this Congress?

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