

Republican Womanhood: Then and Now

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Abstract:

This paper explores the development of the conception of the republican mother within Enlightenment thought and the Classical Liberal tradition, and how conceptions of the appropriate relationship for women to the state developed in pre-and post-revolutionary America. It then examines the role women have played in political parties and participation in the United States up through the 20th century and today. Many of the same ideas about appropriate public and private activities for the sexes remain, particularly those surrounding family, children, and running for or serving in office. Contemporary women in politics face similar criticisms and backlash about their appearance and femininity as their earlier counterparts, while women themselves have attempted to fuse the public and private innovative ways. To that end, the paper asks whether the basic idea of the republican woman has changed significantly by the 21st century. How much of this same hostility are women in politics subjected to today? Do women in the United States see their relationship to the state as equal to men's, or as something separate and different? Does one of the major political parties represent that view more than the other?

Introduction

1 In the history of western thought the relationship of women to the state has not frequently been a central topic of discussion. Apart from its early consideration in Plato's *Republic*, one of the first major works devoted entirely to this topic is Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* in the late 14th century. Her intent was to argue in defense of women as the keepers of a society's virtue and morals who pass them on to their children. This idea is further developed later by a number of Enlightenment thinkers in England and Scotland, as well as in pre- and post-revolutionary America. It culminated first in the model of the republican wife and then the republican mother whose role was to nurture the civic virtue of husband and children at home, but not to play any direct role in the public world of politics (Lewis 721). Scholar Linda K. Kerber argues that the concept of republican motherhood has been widely accepted and readily used in the United States as justification for women's often limited political activity well into the 20th century.

2 This essay will explore the development of the concept of the republican wife and mother and discuss whether this idea of the republican woman has changed significantly in the early 21st century. While women in the United States today may see their relationship to the state as equal to men's, women in politics are still subject to specific forms of criticism and hostility today.

Republican Motherhood: Origins and Development of a Concept

3 Republican ideology, in its general rather than partisan form, has historically been concerned with men and not with a political community of both sexes. Political ideas, especially those inherited from Aristotle such as the good life in the public arena, have been applied primarily to men relegating women to a lesser and non-public way of service to the polis. “Having learned from Aristotle that politics was the affair of men, Americans continued to discuss political affairs in terms that largely excluded women” (Kerber, *Women of the Republic* 7). Considering this ideological and philosophical heritage it is not surprising that Enlightenment thought despite its potentially gender-neutral stance also excluded women.

4 The Enlightenment era was one of great change with regard to concepts of the state and the nature of citizenship (Leonard and Tronto 33). It was a time for “great questions of political liberty and civic freedom, of the relationship between law and liberty” and of whether or not “women were also to recognize themselves as responsible beings,” capable of being enlightened and of upholding the same responsibilities to the state as men (Kerber, “The Republican Mother” 187). Although some thinkers explicitly addressed the question of women, for the most part women remained on the fringes. Kerber’s extensive evaluation of the main texts of the Enlightenment “reveals that the nature of the relationship between women and the state remained largely unexamined” (“The Republican Mother” 188). According to Leonard and Tronto this era and the resulting ideology of republicanism is part of “a long history of disdain for ‘femininity’ in politics” (33). The ideals around which the United States were formed, especially the notion of the individual with God-given rights and the obligations between citizen and state, were not applied to women.

5 Much of the thought of this period relied on the concept of the ‘state of nature’ to derive and explain political relationships, and based a woman’s purpose on her “natural and proper role” within the family (Lewis 691). It followed that women naturally existed in a private domestic sphere, while men were free to lead lives in the public realm. If a woman’s primary role was a domestic one, then her political capacity was one that only appeared in limited circumstances (Kerber, “The Republican Mother” 188). These assumptions did not go unchallenged. Several thinkers of the English and Scottish Enlightenment, such as Benjamin Rush, made some mention of women in their discussions of the ideals that were to eventually produce a new state in the Americas with the promise of freedom and equality for all. Abigail

Adams is well known for the concerns she addressed in her correspondence with her husband during the 1770s (110). While John Stuart Mill addressed the legal rights of women in the 19th century, he did not necessarily seek to change their relationship to the public sphere. Change in the public realm did not have to mean change in the private, a comfort in a time of conflict and upheaval. In a rapidly changing 21st century, perhaps it has been equally comforting to conservative men to have conservative women like the late Phyllis Schlafly and Sarah Palin reinforcing this tradition.

6 The founders of the United States envisioned a government based on the rule of many for the public good – a polity or republic. The stability and competence of that republic depends on its citizens who must be literate and politically savvy (Kerber, “The Republican Mother and the Woman Citizen” 147). Whether women were citizens and a part of that republic remained unclear, though the American Revolution had helped to “speed the integration of women into the civil polity” (Kerber, *Women of the Republic* 8). The late 18th century was a period of significant economic and political change that fostered new participation in the state by men of all classes (Leonard and Tronto 35). It was a time that also raised questions about what form female patriotism might take, whether it could be public and visible, and about the connections between family and polity (Kerber, *Women of the Republic* 9; Lewis 691).

7 It was up to “postrevolutionary ideology in America to justify and popularize a political role for women” (Kerber, “The Republican Mother” 199). Reformers, essayists, and educators began to conceive of a new role for women during this time (Lewis 691-692). This did not happen immediately and came in the form of “an ironic compromise” (Kerber, “The Republican Mother” 199). They “began to construct a rationale that would permit women to attend to political matters without abandoning their domestic responsibilities” (Kerber, *Women of the Republic* 83-84). The rationale and the resulting models were conveyed to the public consciousness in part via popular literature with a consistent moral message (Lewis 692). The republican woman was first a wife and then a mother. The republican wife was virtuous with “unaffected beauty” so as not to distract her husband from his civic interests or to corrupt his morals (Lewis 705). She was “capable of enormous moral authority over her husband” and she represented a “real and important role” in the family and the state (Lewis 720). She was a partner in marriage but also deferred to her husband; she had no more power than her husband allowed.

So a major area for women to exercise influence was through the education of their more malleable children (Lewis 721).

8 The “political role for women...made use of the classic formulation of the Spartan Mother who raised sons prepared to sacrifice themselves for the good of the *polis*. It provided an apparent integration of domestic and political behavior” (Kerber, “The Republican Mother” 188). Based on that model, “a consensus developed around the idea that a mother, committed to the service of her family and to the state, might serve a political purpose. The Republican Mother was to encourage in her sons civic interest and participation. She was to educate her children and guide them in the paths of morality and virtue” (Kerber, *Women of the Republic* 283). In this expanded discourse of republican motherhood, a woman’s political inclusion was grounded in her responsibility to cultivate the proper republican virtues in her husband and children (Leonard and Tronto 33). This responsibility was manifest within the family, so the model republican woman was inevitably not just a wife but also a mother.

9 The republican wife and mother could serve the state, but only indirectly as “she was not to tell her male relatives for whom to vote. She was a citizen but not really a constituent” (Kerber, *Women of the Republic* 283). Her qualifications were defined as a companion and a helper, relegating her to the role of a secondary actor of lower status (Lewis 697). Indeed, the objective of creating a space for women was “not fundamentally feminist” nor was it meant “primarily to enhance the position of women” (Lewis 698). Rather, the republican wife and mother existed for the benefit of the state. Women today continue to be secondary actors in politics still struggling to gain equal status and representation in the state or equal benefits from it. They are underrepresented in Congress, state legislatures, and many other governing bodies (Center for American Women in Politics; McDonagh 536). Women’s political interests are frequently lumped together as the so-called ‘women’s issues’ of reproductive rights and childcare, and less often associated with other important issues of the state, such as security or the economy.

10 In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, many women understood how the American Revolution challenged the prevailing order and relationship between ruler and ruled in ways that were anti-patriarchal (Kerber, “The Republican Mother and the Woman Citizen” 148; Lewis 699). The revolutionary attack on forms of domination, however, did little to alter other institutions that were clearly contrary to the egalitarian nature and principles of the revolution:

slavery and domestic relations between the sexes. The Constitution contained the 3/5 Compromise but did not specifically mention women. The emerging informal space for women as political beings still relied on their relations to men. Lewis suggests women were partners in a republican marriage, but not as an egalitarian arrangement (708), because the importance of women's status was largely restricted to the private sphere. Accordingly, men benefitted the most from the revolution and the preservation of traditional practices such as coverture, while any real expansion of women's legal or political power was limited.

11 Women who questioned the system were met with hostility, frequently labeled as masculine and ugly, and denounced as unnatural. From the beginning of the American republic, "to accept [a]...role for women in the public sector was to invite hostility and ridicule" (Kerber, *Women of the Republic* 279). Criticism of women suggested that public involvement turned them into "manly women", willfully giving up their "own rights to 'refined consideration'" (Kerber, "The Republican Mother and the Woman Citizen" 151). This practice of denigrating women who are active in politics or elsewhere in the public sphere has not disappeared. The number of times Hillary Clinton was interrupted by her opponent in the presidential debates of 2016 is a case in point, but not the only one. The same opponent suggested Carly Fiorina was unqualified to run because of her looks. As many candidates, columnists, and bloggers can attest, women in the public sphere are still subjected to high levels of misogyny and vitriol.

12 According to this rhetoric and in keeping with conventional wisdom about men's and women's different natures, a woman's role in the early American republic was predominantly associated with the ability to soften men's worst tendencies, and the power to counteract brutish masculinity with civility (Leonard and Tronto 36; Zagari 194). She was best suited to conveying the morals, values, and manners needed for her sons to become proper citizens and for her husband to maintain his civic virtue (Bloch 100; Kerber, "The Republican Mother" 203; Lewis 703; Zagari 195). Some level of education for women was necessary and justified to maintain the republic because "women's duty to their families required them to sort out public information accurately and to take a political position" (Kerber, *Women of the Republic* 84). Thus, female education was central to the republican agenda (Lewis 702). Still, this education was to enhance her ability to teach her children and to be a good companion to her husband. She needed a "proper education" that would develop her reason in order to serve her husband, sons, and

thereby, the state (Lewis 702). Women did not need to leave their traditional sphere to fulfill their duty to the republic.

13 The republican mother chose a virtuous man for a husband, corrected him when he strayed from civic virtue, and influenced their children accordingly (Leonard and Tronto 37). This role as a wife and mother who could influence men's actions allowed her some power and a connection to the realm of politics but did so without sullyng her femininity. Thus a woman could feel equal as her husband's partner, as her private duties were of at least indirect public importance (Leonard and Tronto 41). Republican motherhood thus signaled conservatism in a time of revolutionary radicalism (Kerber, *Women of the Republic* 283; "The Republican Mother and the Woman Citizen" 152). Following the assumption that women were content with this arrangement, the only major challenge existed for those women who were neither wives nor mothers, and thus without a defined political role. A republican mother was also a republican wife, but there did not appear to be any version of a republican *woman* in her own right. A woman's identity – and her new political agency – were dependent on her relation to husband and male children.

14 Nevertheless the concept of republican motherhood redefined "female political behavior as something valuable rather than abnormal, as a source of strength to the Republic rather than an embarrassment" (Kerber, *Women of the Republic* 284). It allowed her education in the service of the state by way of her family. The republican wife and mother were new identities that fostered the acceptability of education and political knowledge for women, but within limits and without changing the existing order (Kerber, *Women of the Republic* 11; Lewis 718). Women were no longer regarded as pre-political, but were not yet appreciated as fully political either. Thus the Revolution initiated a process we are still involved in today; although women are much more visible in the public arena, their primary association with the domestic and the private sphere continues. The institutions of marriage and family are deeply embedded in the republican ideology that underscores the political system in the United States (Lewis 699). This conservative notion of the family continues to be the central to society in the United States and to exert a decisive influence in politics without much change over time. A look at the two major party platforms will serve to confirm this.

15 Equating women with nature and consequently with their reproductive capabilities has always been at the heart of their exclusion from politics. According to Rousseau, men and

women served different biological functions. With reference to nature women were bound to the domain of home and family. A woman with more education or knowledge than was necessary to fulfill her duty as a republican mother was seen as betraying her feminine nature and becoming masculine. While the concept of the republican mother allowed for a limited modification of that point of view, this attitude continued to be an obstacle for women of the 19th and 20th centuries who wanted to achieve more than to fulfill the role of the mother. The persistence of this view may also be one of the reasons why even today women who are politically involved are labeled as aggressive, masculine, or lesbian. Accordingly, while campaigning for the presidency in both 2012 and 2016, Hillary Rodham Clinton was subjected to harsher criticism for her public actions than her male counterparts. Her appearance was regularly scrutinized by the opposition, with particular reference to her pant suits, her hairstyle, and her no-makeup look. It is also notable that supporters felt the need to highlight her roles as mother and grandmother during the Democratic National Convention, on a par with her education and actual political experience, as evidence of her capabilities as a candidate to lead the country.

Republican motherhood and the Republican Party?

16 We have to remember that at the time the Republican Party first formed, its issue focus aligned with many women's political interests. This seems to be a reversal of the roles played by the parties today when the Democratic Party tends to be identified with the support for so-called women's issues. Parties were central to the political system in the United States by the mid-19th century: "to be political was to be partisan" (Gustafson 11). This provides the main link between the concept of republican womanhood and the Republican Party for this discussion. What began as a way to justify women's role in politics has now perhaps turned into the embodiment of one party's claim to represent true patriotic womanhood in the contemporary political climate. The concept also serves as a tool for evaluating and judging women in politics today regardless of party.

17 The Republican label was first used in 1854 by those in the Midwest who wanted to create a new party to protest the expansion of slavery within the United States (Gustafson 2). Three women attended the founding meeting in Wisconsin in March of 1854, and women have been involved with the party ever since – whether they could vote or not. The disenfranchisement of women did not mean that they were prevented from participating in or

influencing politics altogether. Their partisan activism was not constrained by the same laws that prevented them from voting, but it was still within the confines of republican motherhood – that is, mostly indirect.

18 While women’s partisan participation predates their voting and even property rights in many cases, “women’s presence was encouraged by a set of deeply rooted ideas about women as mothers, wives, and daughters who could have influence in the civic world by representing virtue, principles, and civility” (Gustafson 9). Thus the concept of the republican wife and Mother continued in the 19th century and was used by the party organization. The Republican Party as the representative of the anti-slavery stance held itself up as the party of morals and the one with which women’s values of family, civility, and virtue aligned.

19 In the early republic, neither of the two major political parties took a consistent position on women (Gustafson 2). Women’s voices and interests were incorporated when they served a political purpose and when the male leadership recognized the benefits of appropriating a particular issue or stance. “The distinct roles women played in the Republican Party were influenced by the needs of the party and party leaders” (Gustafson 3). As the party rose to dominance on the national stage, it also “became the focal point of women leaders seeking allies for their causes” (ibid.). The Republican Party was the hope for women interested in expanding their political rights and roles.

20 The Republican Party had precedent for bringing women into its ranks. The Democrats, and the Federalists, had also welcomed women because of their association with private virtue, but according to Gustafson the Republicans felt women’s influence extended beyond their own families to the community as a whole (10). The republican woman could be a mother figure to those outside of her immediate family. Women could demonstrate their virtue and principles through their party loyalty and have a positive influence in politics, especially during the latter years of the 19th century when corruption had become a major concern. This influence was still indirect – women could support the best men for political office but not take office or make any political decisions themselves.

21 The integration of abolitionists and women’s rights leaders into the party might make it seem dynamic and even progressive, but considering the larger social context of the mid-19th century, the rewards for women’s loyalty were limited. Women did not gain any legal power or autonomy through their activism with the party. After the Civil War, the Republican Party’s

support of the 14th and 15th Amendments, and its agenda that put black men's rights ahead of women's rights, stoked the women's suffrage movement, and left the party open to challenges from its loyalist women, some of whom "demanded that it was time for [the] party to prove itself to women" (Gustafson 39). Indeed, "Susan B. Anthony believed that the Republican Party would be eternally harmed for not supporting women's pursuit of rights" (Gustafson 40). This statement is likely to resonate with many in connection with today's alleged Republican war on women in the arena of reproductive rights, any number of party members' comments on rape cases, or the misogynistic speech of Hillary Rodham Clinton's Republican opponent in the recent presidential race.

22 In 1872, the Republican Party officially recognized women's concerns as part of its platform, but neither of the two major parties took specific action to advance women's legal or political rights immediately thereafter (Gustafson, 41). Women remained with the Republican Party as the one most in-line with their specific goals related to temperance and corruption. By the early 20th century, thanks in part to the Progressive Movement and women's organizations, "no political party believed it could take women's support for granted...; neither could the parties completely ignore women" (Gustafson 142). Women had been successful at helping push through 'protective legislation' during this era – laws that recognized some rights for women and provided special protections for them from long working hours or hard labor, which were thought to be detrimental to their feminine nature and roles as mothers. The separate spheres for men and women were still very much a part of the discussion.

23 Also by the early 20th century, the discussion turned to "the relationship between women's independent political organizations and political parties and when and how women should hold political office" (Gustafson 142). This was still before the 19th Amendment but indicates that the party was taking on some leadership to integrate women into the political system as individual citizens approaching full rights. Republican women's clubs and auxiliaries allowed women to nominate candidates and exercise influence. It was through these clubs and organizations that partisanship became "an expected and accepted political identity for women" in the first two decades of the 20th century (Gustafson 153). Women's role in politics was well on its way to being more formal and solidified. If the creation of the concept of republican wife and Mother had been the first step on the path to full political rights, then women's affiliation with political parties was the second.

24 The suffrage movement was seeking the vote for women so they could have a direct and more powerful voice in choosing representatives, but advocates did not yet have the election of women to political office on their agenda or consider that a priority. Women had been appointed to some positions in the late 19th century, but they were mostly seen as the exception even by women themselves. It was still regarded as a given that politics was for men and women were not naturally motivated or inclined to seek office, an argument still heard today and one of the reasons organizations like EMILY's List and WISH List exist. The proportion of women in office remains low at all levels of government (Center for American Women in Politics; McDonagh 536). Those who did seek public office in the early 20th century gravitated toward positions in schools or somehow connected to the welfare of women and children, based on women's supposed special training and natural abilities in those areas (Gustafson, 153). Even the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1917 promoted the fact that the few women serving in office at the time were all mothers. Again, this still resonates today with Clinton's campaign, which deemed this a necessary part of her portfolio of qualifications to lead.

25 Although for a long time women have recognized that the vote and one's party affiliation were the way to exercise power, and while they eventually won the right to vote, gendered norms about social roles continued to influence where and how that power might be used. Republican motherhood was a concept not exclusively claimed by the Republican Party at its inception. Today, the most traditional aspects of the concept do appear to be more closely aligned with the party as the bastion of conservatism in the United States. The greater involvement of women in public life since the second wave of the feminist movement raises the question of where the republican woman might fit today.

Republican or republican womanhood in the new millennium?

26 What is women's relationship to the republic today? Is it radically different from what it was at its founding, or do we still find traces of the republican wife and mother? If we are, as some may suggest, still living in the Enlightenment era, then a persistent orthodoxy that emphasizes biological differences between men and women continues to inform our evaluations of them as political beings. The suffrage movement of the 19th century and the revolutions in gender relations of the 20th century advanced the belief in the applicability of Enlightenment

ideals to all human beings. But even in the 21st century the implementation of this belief is still incomplete.

27 The American Revolution started the process of integrating women into political life, but also raised questions about whether a woman could be an equal citizen. Since the ratification of the 19th amendment women have equal opportunities with regard to political representation, but there are still lingering questions about women's direct political involvement. The failure of the ERA is an example of how women as citizens still have different and fewer rights, and therefore a different relationship to the republic.

28 In many Enlightenment texts, women are described in relational terms as daughters, wives, and mothers, whereas men are conceived of as autonomous beings. This view persisted well into the 20th century, as Betty Friedan's analysis of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) exemplifies. Still today women who are neither wives nor mothers are not easily incorporated into our social and political structures. Society is the family writ large, and within the family there exists a hierarchy based on sex (Lewis 699, 713). This is one of the reasons why the debates about definitions of marriage and about abortion rights are highly politicized; they upend long-held conventions about what it means to be a woman. Both issues are addressed in the latest Republican Party platform.

29 In relating the debate about republican motherhood to the present political situation we can foreground links and invite comparative analyses between between women's increasing political consciousness and group organization during the Revolution, and similar processes in the 20th century. Thus women were a part of the war effort in the 1940s and did not always readily return to the domestic sphere afterward. The post-war period saw the start of another revolution in society and women claiming their rights in the 1960s and thereafter. The American Revolution led the way for the suffrage movement, while WWII fed into the development of the Women's Rights and liberation campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s. Each stage was part of the larger philosophical and ideological framework of its time, and at each stage women worked to assert their voices and secure their place in the discussion. At the same time, and at both stages, there were women whose participation in that discussion preserved tradition and supported conservatism in the face of much radical change. Phyllis Schlafly, conservative activist and former Republican candidate, placed emphasis on traditional gender roles and the family, much like some of the reformers of the 18th and 19th centuries before her. She argued that separating

women from their natural roles as wives and mothers would cause them harm and damage the fabric of society. In the current era, the post-Cold War world of globalization and multiculturalism, many conservative women in the United States are again catering to this idea.

30 Phyllis Schlafly was “America's best-known advocate of the dignity and honor that we as a society owe to the role of fulltime homemaker” (Eagle Forum). She was an educated and politically involved individual but we may view her as a newer version of the republican wife and mother. Phyllis Schlafly was a leader in the defeat of the ERA. While she made her arguments against the ERA primarily on the basis of states’ rights, the rationale went further. Schlafly’s answer to the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s is the Positive Woman, a concept that resembles the republican wife and mother and reinforces conventional wisdom about the differences between the sexes. Her reasoning is eerily similar to arguments made by Enlightenment thinkers about the natural roles of and appropriate spheres for men and women. For Schlafly the differences between the sexes and the concomitant gender roles are both innate and immutable; therefore, efforts to change them via ‘social engineering’ or acts of government will and must not succeed, as they would cause major damage to the spiritual values of the citizens and the social fabric of the United States. These arguments were highly influential among many conservatives during her campaign against the ERA in the 1970s, and have a similar resonance today. Schlafly is not the sole representative of this point of view, and recent Republican campaigns and efforts by Republican-controlled state legislatures to restrict abortion or LGBTQ rights and limit definitions of marriage are a case in point.

31 Family continues to be a key issue for conservatives today. Changes to the definition of marriage, as well as women who choose not to be wives or mothers, are seen as challenge to the roots of social and political organization in the United States. The notion of family as the basic unit of society is a hallmark of conservatism, and we often hear about the importance of family values from conservative leaders across the country. Today’s concept of the republican woman is a cultural symbol distinguishing women as a group, and an “emblem of national identity” (McDonagh 547). The republican woman might be defined as conservatively pro-family in a heteronormative understanding of the term with clearly defined roles for female homemaker and male breadwinner. She can be educated and participate in politics as long as she upholds these family values. The republican woman also takes an anti-gay rights (marriage and adoption in particular) as well as an anti-abortion rights stance. This definition of pro-family is the 21st

century's measure of the real republican subject and the "real American." And yet even women who identify with this notion are not always comfortable with a conservative orthodoxy making choices for them (Saulny n.p.). The most conservative positions about women, as voiced by Rick Santorum or Rush Limbaugh, and the machismo of Donald Trump, do not always sit well with women who grew up in a context of and are accustomed to their role as individual citizens in the republic.

32 Gustafson notes "the consistent difficulty people had, and still seem to have, with women taking on political roles" which is "rooted in deeply held ideas about womanhood and manhood," and all of which relate to the appropriate public and private functions of men and women (3). The lack of a history of women in prominent political positions means "the public continually observes the political woman as an awkward, illegitimate, or misbegotten phenomenon" (Gustafson 4). Of course, Gustafson wrote this before Nancy Pelosi became Speaker of the House, Sarah Palin was named to the Republican ticket in 2008, and Hillary Rodham Clinton became the first woman to garner the presidential nomination for a major party in 2016. All three are wives and mothers, yet they were and are still subjected to intense public scrutiny and criticism – more often and more severely than male politicians by most accounts. Are they more acceptable as political figures today than Victoria Woodhull in the 1870s or Geraldine Ferraro in the 1980s? Yes, and no. Clinton was poised to become the most powerful woman in the world, but in spite of her experience and qualifications could not win over enough voters in many areas of the country, especially those espousing traditional and conservative views of men, women, and family. Executive political power remains elusive for women in the United States.

33 Enlightenment thinkers – male and female alike – discussed the role of education for women. While this debate has changed, we might still get the sense that a woman's education is not meant for her benefit alone, but also for her husband and children. A young woman is encouraged to have a career – partly for its own sake or her personal fulfillment – but equally so she can provide for her family and preserve a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. Economic realities by the turn of the 21st century have altered the picture of the family in the United States (see Shriver, et al.). Even as the dual-income or co-breadwinner family, which has become the norm, places husband and wife on more equal ground, it is still often framed by a traditional patriarchal family structure.

34 Education for women is now a good by itself – it serves the purpose of developing women’s intellectual capacities and her individual interests as well as providing opportunity for independence. These are feminist goals, which were not addressed by the original concept of the republican wife and mother and her need for education (Lewis 702). Today conservatives do support education and a public life for women while still maintaining her role as the caretaker of the family, in much the same way the creators of the republican wife and mother did. We might think of this as reconciling competing conservative and feminist views, if we define feminism as the realization of women’s intellectual and civic capacities while upholding her traditional roles as wife and mother.

35 Phyllis Schlafly called herself an anti-feminist instead, characterizing feminism as the attempt to destroy those traditional roles, which according to her are reserved for women only. Still, conservative women like her might consider themselves feminist based on education and political careers, though neither necessarily indicates liberation from *expected* ties to the domestic and private sphere. Given Schlafly’s personal religious beliefs and background, it is not surprising that she opposed abortion rights and the ERA – or that she maintained the centrality of a separate domestic sphere for women. While this could be seen as an empowering definition for women, it implies that women have no choice but to occupy it and that men are excluded from it. Sarah Palin may be the prime example of republican – and Republican – womanhood in the new millennium, when citizenship for women is constrained by what Leonard and Tronto refer to as “compulsory heterosexuality” (42). The republican woman is now defined by the ability to appropriately balance her education, career, and traditional position as wife and mother. It might appear empowering and actually in line with a feminist agenda, but ties to home and family continue to proscribe a woman’s full involvement as an individual in the political arena. Women thus remain partially disenfranchised, and the republican woman continues to be defined by her relationship to others.

Conclusions and areas for further research

36 Further discussion of this topic could focus on women of both major parties, especially those who have been less visible or sensationalized by the media but are still powerful and influential. These may include elected representatives such as Susan Collins, Kelly Ayotte, Kristen Gillibrand, Lisa Murkowski, or Amy Klobuchar, to name a few. How do these women

reflect the concept of the republican woman in the United States today? Interviewing women in elected office at the national, state, and local levels, as well as women of rank and file or the party in the constituency, and capturing the opinions of young women who identify as conservative but may have very different ideas about their role in the nation than their mothers or grandmothers is essential. This data may have implications for the way the parties organize in the future, and how candidates can appeal to and capture the votes of women across the ideological spectrum, who are now the majority of voters in the country.

37 The concept of the republican woman in the 21st century incorporates feminist notions of equality when it comes to expanding women's access to education, career, and participation in the state, but it falls short in that women are still subject to harsh judgement and criticism when they stray from more narrowly defined roles as wives and mothers. Women have created new space for themselves in relation to the state but still have not been accepted as equal players in the world of politics.

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