

Ta(l)king Women out of the Picture – How Extreme Republican Discourse Framed Women Outside Women’s Issues: 2010–2012

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*The boundary of who I am is the boundary of the body,
but the boundary of the body never fully belongs to me*
(Butler, 2009, p. 54).

Introduction¹

When shooting a photograph, one determines what will be inside its frame and what will be outside. This framing of the photo – which comes long before its hanging on a wall or sitting on a desk – is an integral step that defines its subject by exclusion. In creating a picture, then, one crafts what the viewer sees, and, crucially, what the viewer does not. It is less a spontaneous instance of truth caught on camera than a deliberate policing of the frame’s boundaries to ensure the desired image. And, as noted in the quote by Judith Butler at the outset of this chapter, if one is captured in this metaphorical photo, one is not necessarily also the one controlling its boundaries. In other words, the subject’s position within the image is endlessly vulnerable to the whims of others who fix the frame.

Like the visual framing of images, in political discourse the rhetorical framing device is of utmost importance. The more controversial the issue, the more painstaking it must be framed by politicians to win support for their various positions. In some instances an issue is altered so dramatically in its framing that it becomes nearly unrecognizable. Such is the case with the issues surrounding the resurgence of “The War on Women” ushered in by Tea Party candidates and other conservatives backed by the Tea Party between 2010–2012.

In 2008 Republicans lost heavily in the general election, not only losing the Presidency to relative newcomer Barack Obama, but also losing the Senate and widening their losses in the House of Representatives.² These losses caused a major disruption

1 I want to thank two of my colleagues, Dr. Kirsti Cole and Dr. Sheryl Cunningham, for engaging in discussion and offering their own opinions regarding this chapter. Their insight into the issues surrounding the War on Women has influenced much of my own thoughts on the subject. I also wish to thank Dr. Rania Maktabi for her insightful comments and suggestions.

2 Republicans and Democrats each held 49 seats in the Senate before the 2008 election. After the election, Republicans held 41, and Democrats held 57. In the House, Republicans held 199 seats before the election and Democrats held 236 seats. After the election, Republicans held 178 seats and Democrats, 257.

in the Republican Party, culminating in the rise of the Tea Party movement in 2009. Although this conservative populist movement was initially described as a movement centrally concerned with small government and economics (“Taxed Enough Already” being the rallying cry for the group), the movement soon showed its interest in social and religious views as well. As noted by the Pew Research Center in 2011, all views espoused by the Tea Party were more extreme than the Republican electorate they supported, and could certainly be seen as extreme compared to the general U.S. electorate (Clement and Green, 2011).³ It was within this milieu, these two election cycles energized by the Tea Party, that the discourse of the Republican party (the Grand Old Party, or GOP), regarding women’s issues hardened, demonstrating extreme rhetoric that seemed intent on framing women’s issues without women.

The phrase “The War Against Women” became recognizable in the 1990s when Susan Faludi published *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1991), and Tanya Melich followed suit in 1996 with her book *The Republican War Against Women*. According to both women, this “war” can be traced back to the 1980s and the Reagan Administration, although Melich specifically states that the war began around the late 1970s when the “New Right” Republicans⁴ converged with the “Religious Right”⁵ –

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- 3 The Pew study notes that a September 2010 survey suggests that “almost nine-in-ten registered voters who agree with the Tea Party (88%) prefer a smaller government with fewer services, compared with 80% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents and 56% of all registered voters” (Clement and Green, 2011). “Tea Party supporters” the Pew study suggests, “also tend to take socially conservative positions on abortion and same-sex marriage. While registered voters as a whole are closely divided on same-sex marriage (42% in favor, 49% opposed), Tea Party supporters oppose it by more than 2-to-1 (64% opposed, 26% in favor). Similarly, almost six-in-ten (59%) of those who agree with the Tea Party say abortion should be illegal in all or most cases, 17 percentage points higher than among all registered voters. Tea Party supporters closely resemble Republican voters as a whole on these issues” (Clement and Green, 2011).
 - 4 The “New Right” is a term that describes a trend in conservative thinking that “fuse[d] economic libertarianism with state and social authoritarianism,” which manifested “radical, reactionary and traditional features” (Heywood, 2017, p. 83): “Its radicalism is evident in its robust efforts to dismantle or ‘roll back’ interventionist government and liberal or permissive social values”; its reactionary-ism is apparent “in that both neoliberalism and neoconservatism usually hark back to a nineteenth-century ‘golden age’ of supposed economic vigour and moral fortitude”; and its traditional bent is one in which “emphasis” is placed on the neoconservative concept of “traditional values” (p. 83). The United States’ “New Right” signified most strongly in the decade of the 1980s and is symbolized by the Reagan administration.
 - 5 The “Religious Right,” also known as the “Christian Right,” was a “loose network of political actors, religious organizations, and political pressure groups that formed in the United States in the late 1970s” (McVicar, 2018). This network appealed to Americans by espousing “traditional family values,” backing “free-market economics,” criticizing “secular and materialistic trends in American culture” and suggesting the United States’ “moral and economic decline” was due to those trends (McVicar, 2018). Although this

especially Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority⁶ – and began employing aggressive political tactics regarding issues specifically involving women. If the idea of this war ever diminished, it was revived again during the George W. Bush administration as the “War on Women,” as noted by Barbara Finlay in *George W. Bush and the War on Women* published in 2006 (p. 9), and most recently came to the political foreground soon after the 2010 mid-term elections that swept a number of religiously-minded conservative Republicans into local, state, and federal offices in the United States. With these politicians in place, the Republican Party moved even more sharply toward extreme conservative stances on social issues. Under the guise of fiscal responsibility and religious freedom, old social issues many Americans believed settled – although for some, uncomfortably so – were dredged up and appallingly brought back into the public eye. And in dredging up these divisive cultural issues, the GOP aimed to frame women's issues void of women. Specifically, their framing sought to reposition women ancillary to another subject, subordinate to another subject, or *outside* the frame of the subject altogether.

This chapter will argue that in 2012 the culmination of the extreme conservative rhetoric of Tea Party members and Tea Party backed candidates of the Republican Party since 2010 came to a head. Within these two years, through various rhetorical moves and ideological stances – from transposition to anti-intellectualism and anti-rationalism – extreme voices on the right sought to frame women's issues entirely without women. By means of the aforementioned strategies, the GOP cut and cropped women to the edges, or completely out of the picture of women's issues, while downplaying their importance in those issues altogether. These strategies all seemed to coalesce into an attempt to discount women as subjects in political discourse.

Transposition through Metonymy and Other Rhetorical Moves

Unsurprisingly, most of the arguments in *The War on Women* have revolved around abortion; however, contraception for some reason also became an incredibly hot topic as well. Both were legalized nearly a half-century ago (contraception by 1972 and abortion by 1973).⁷ But here they were, resurrected yet again in the public square in rhetorically remarkable ways. One way the issues re-emerged was through metonymy.

Metonymy is a rhetorical tool in which a word or concept is used to represent some other word or concept closely related to it. According to Roman Jakobson in *Funda-*

network was strongest in the 1970s and 1980s, it has persisted into the 21st century as a significant political force.

6 “The Moral Majority” was founded in 1979 by Jerry Falwell. It was an organization that “acted to mobilize Christians to social and political action” (McVicar, 2018). This organization had much to do with the success of the Religious Right to establish itself as a significant political power in the U.S.

7 Contraception for all Americans (not just married couples) was legalized in *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972) and abortion was legalized in *Roe v. Wade* (1973).

mentals of Language (1956, 2002), the principle of *proximity* is what makes metonymy distinct from metaphor, a tool that works under the principle of similarity (p. 84). The use of metonymy is often a benign commonplace in daily life, a way to mundanely refer to something by way of something else. But, in political discourse it can be manipulated much more insidiously. In the case of *The War on Women*, this rhetorical device has been used by members of the GOP to consistently and extensively underexpose the presence of women while framing issues regarding women's reproductive health around something only approximately related. Not only can women not be spokespersons of the issues, but the delineation "woman" often does not appear in the discourse. While these extreme voices seemed to use the term "abortion" excessively – possibly because the connotations, both sobering and discomfiting, continue to resonate with all people across the political spectrum – the usage of "woman" or "women" in their discourse during these years has been less frequent; this could be because, perhaps, these terms are more problematic and difficult to control. Regardless of the reason, in these cases GOP voices used various rhetorical moves in their arguments, which downplayed the importance of women to the issue, and/or ultimately transposed "woman" or "women," with "baby," "pro-life," or some other metonymic variant.

For example, when asked in a 2012 interview how he would enforce the law he voted for in 2007 – a law that would criminalize abortions (doctors could end up with felonies on their records and women could be prosecuted) – Tea Party-backed, Rep. Rick Berg in the N. Dakota Senate race answered: "...my position is pro-life. I care about the unborn and that's where we should be in our policy" (as cited in Terkel, 2012).⁸ The exact question from his interviewer, Jim Shaw, was: "Why would you force a woman who has been raped to have to have that baby?" (as cited in Terkel, 2012), a clear question regarding the woman as subject in this situation; yet Berg's answer, using "pro-life" and "the unborn" as subjects is basically a *non sequitur*⁹ in that it literally *does not follow* the logic of the conversation as a whole. His statement itself is an example of *petitio principii*, or begging the question, in which the truth of the conclusion is assumed by the premise upon which it relies (Begging, n.d.).

Likewise, in the Vermont senate race, John MacGovern, another Tea Party supported Republican was asked by his opponent, Bernie Sanders, whether or not he believed that "a woman should be forced by the government to give birth to a rapist's baby against her will" (as cited in Kinzel, 2012). Similar to Berg, MacGovern answered: "Uh, I've always in my career and to this day been loyal to the principle of life. I'm pro-life. I'm profoundly pro-life. I'm pro-life to my core" (as cited in Kinzel, 2012). In MacGovern's case, his words act as a logical red herring by attempting to lure the

8 Rick Berg had been elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, representing a N. Dakota congressional district from 2011–2013.

9 A non sequitur is a logical fallacy in which the conclusion does not follow the premise (Van Eemeren, 2001, p. 297). In looking at the question/answer situation as a logical sequence, the premise would be the question asked by Shaw and the conclusion would be the answer by Berg.

audience away from the question at hand, while his use of *epistrophe* – the repetition of the same ending in a series of lines or phrases (Peters, 2001, p. 261) – attempts to drown out the image of a raped woman via a reprise of feel-good words such as “pro” and “life.” Nearly identical, Berg’s and MacGovern’s tactics transpose women out of the issue and reframe it metonymically through a fetus supported by the politician’s policy position or principles.

When asked by Associated Press journalist Mark Scoloro “how [he] would tell a daughter or granddaughter who became pregnant from rape to keep the child against her will” (as cited in LoGiurato, 2012), Republican Tom Smith of the Pennsylvania senate race who was endorsed by the Tea Party, waxed eloquent on the subject confiding that “he lived something similar to that in his own family,” although, “don’t get me wrong,” he stated, “it wasn’t rape” (as cited in LoGiurato, 2012). However, when prompted by the interviewer to explain how his experience was “similar” to rape, he answered, “having a baby out of wedlock.” Incredulously, the interviewer asked, “[that’s] similar to rape?” and Smith replied, “no, no, no,” but then doubled down: “Well, put yourself in a father’s position, yes, I mean it is similar” (as cited in LoGiurato, 2012). Unpacking Smith’s response suggests a number of things that go beyond simple metonymy. First, he transposes a woman who has become pregnant through the act of “rape,” a real criminal term that is built on the fundamental fact of a person lacking sexual agency, with the gentler euphemism of pregnancy “out of wedlock,” which is built on the exact opposite. The sex forced non-consensually on a woman who is raped is clearly unlike the consensual sex a woman participates in with a chosen partner; it is a faulty analogy, an analogy made between disparate things by overly emphasizing a shared trait (Faulty, n.d.). Furthermore, the latter pregnancy, importantly, connotes shame,¹⁰ which suggests this idea of shamefulness in pregnancy is the shared trait; the metonymic link between the two for Smith. Following these rhetorical moves, Smith then thrusts women entirely from the frame of the issue: it is “his experience,” it is something “he lived.” Amazingly, a “father’s position” – not the raped daughter... or even the pregnant unwed daughter, is the primary subject. The patriarchal head and his feelings are centrally positioned.

Shockingly, the 2012 campaign season disgorged constant dialogue surrounding “rape” for the GOP, which became a consistent talking point for them, but an appalling conversation for much of the rest of the country.¹¹ Because Americans on the whole

10 “Out of wedlock” is a term used in many U.S. religious communities to denote something that takes place outside of marriage. In these communities, pre-marital sex (sex before marriage) is looked down upon, as is becoming pregnant without first being married. Smith opposed abortion in all cases, and his open acknowledgment of his faith during the campaign, as well as his use of “out of wedlock” in this instance suggests his view is a result of his religious convictions.

11 To be clear, the reason Republican candidates discussed rape so often is because they were consistently asked about their stances on abortion. The Republican Party in general is pro-life or anti-abortion (The 2012), but some candidates make exceptions for the

are sympathetic to rape and incest victims across the political board in the abortion debate (Gallup, 2018),¹² these pro-life/anti-abortion candidates had a challenging job framing an abortion stance that remained stringently consistent with their beliefs, yet did not fly directly in the face of most of the citizenry of the country.

We now come to the most brazen and alarming moment in the run-up to the 2012 elections (which will not fully come to light until later): Tea Party Republican Todd Akin, running for a Senate seat in Missouri, referred to something he called “legitimate rape,” in an interview with KTIV TV,¹³ noting that in “legitimate rape,” pregnancy “very rarely” occurs (as cited in Blake, 2012). A furor arose after these remarks because people understood that effectively Akin was at the least equivocating¹⁴ and at the most attempting to redefine “rape,” which would suggest some rapes are not actual rapes, and should therefore be excluded from the discourse. Through his rhetoric the violated bodies of sexual violence are transposed out of the frame of this issue, while a type of rape deemed “legitimate” by Akin takes center stage. Captured in this frame are the assertions that not only is “legitimate” rape extremely rare, but that women who *are* impregnated have not been “legitimately” raped. We will return to Akin’s comments later in the chapter.

Another person to fall into the precarious position of discussing his views on rape publicly was John Koster, a Tea Party Republican running for a Washington state House race. Questions to him about his stance on abortion were diverted to an in-depth discussion about rape and incest. As he freestyled his answer, he referred not once, but twice to “rape” as a thing: “But the rape thing... you know, I know a woman who was raped and kept her child, gave it up for adoption; she doesn’t regret it. In fact, she’s a big pro-life proponent. But on the rape thing, it’s like...” (as cited in Weiner, 2012). Rape, for Koster, is “the rape thing,” which is certainly easier to say because it minimizes the trauma of the term by adding both a definite article¹⁵ and a non-de-

health of the mother, rape, and/or incest. Often journalists will ask candidates who are pro-life/anti-abortion without exception to explain how they justify disallowing these exceptions.

- 12 In May 2018, Gallup asked Americans if an abortion should be legal in the first trimester if the pregnancy is caused by rape or incest. 77% of their respondents believed it should be legal in these cases, and only 21% believed it should not be legal.
- 13 H.R.3, the “No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act” is a bill that was introduced to the 112th Congress (2011–2013) of the U.S. by House Representatives Chris Smith (R-New Jersey). The bill was passed in the House, but did not come up for a vote in the Senate. The early language of the bill would have changed the term “rape” to “forcible rape,” stimulating many to argue that Republicans were trying to change the legal definition of rape. Todd Akin was a sponsor of the bill.
- 14 Equivocation occurs when a speaker plays on the ambiguity of an important term in an argument (Hansen, 2015).
- 15 A definite article is a word that identifies a specific thing. In English, *the* is a definite article. An indefinite article is one that does not indicate a specific thing. In English, *a* and *an* are indefinite articles.

script placeholder.¹⁶ The placeholder *thing* after the term “rape” functions to make indefinite the normally definite article *the* while signaling the overall term’s insignificance. Add the faulty generalization¹⁷ of his quaint narrative of the woman – whose only consequence of rape has been that she has become a major pro-life proponent – to Koster’s dismissive attitude on the topic, and the horrific nature of rape becomes a fairytale depiction of everything *except* actual rape.

The next example is in regard to Paul Ryan,¹⁸ the Tea Party endorsed Speaker of the House, and 2012 Vice Presidential nominee. He responded to an interviewer’s question regarding his stance on abortion and exceptions for rape and incest. Ryan stated: “Well, so, I’m very proud of my pro-life record, and, um, I’ve always adopted the idea, the position that, the method of conception does not change the definition of life” (as cited in O’Donnell, 2012). Again, we see metonymy work furiously to transpose the harshness of pregnancy through “rape” and “incest” (words that decidedly connote violations of women, and also demand empathy) to the more sterile, “method of conception.” This change in language implies women as well, yes, but it also acts as a euphemism that diminishes the need to empathize because of its neutrality: “method of conception” infers a woman’s calculated and desired hope for pregnancy, without any suggestion of a lack of agency or flagrant violation of someone’s body. In this way, Ryan links euphemism and metonymy to obliterate women – especially victims of horrifying crimes – from the issue’s frame.

In a final example, this chapter explores the House Committee on Oversight and Reform hearing regarding certain aspects of The Affordable Care Act.¹⁹ The hearing, chaired by Darrell Issa on 16 February 2012, was titled “Lines Crossed: Separation of

16 In linguistics, the placeholder lies under the umbrella of “filler” words, which are spoken “devices” in conversation “that can be deployed after the current word has been brought to completion to delay the next word due” (Fox, 2010, p. 2). These fillers, such as “um,” and “ah,” in English, indicate that the speaker is not yet finished speaking (Davis and Maclagan, 2010, p. 190). However, the placeholder has been found to “carry a range of morphological markings,” one form of which is “appropriate for adjectives and adverbs” (Fox, 2010, p. 3). This is the form employed by Koster.

17 Faulty generalization is a logical fallacy where a speaker reaches a conclusion from weak premises” (Dowden, n.d.b).

18 Paul Ryan is a Republican from Wisconsin who was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1998. He became the Speaker of the House in 2015.

19 The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, or just The Affordable Care Act (ACA), otherwise known as “Obamacare,” was enacted in March 2010 during President Barack Obama’s first term in office. The ACA was a major overhaul of the United States’ health-care system. One thing significant to this study is that the law required that all insurance programs subsidize contraception (birth control measures) under the category of preventative care. In the U.S. context, this was quite a change since one’s health insurance was historically bound to one’s employer; this meant that one’s coverage was determined by said employer, and not by the individual. For more information, please read the Act in full; the website is noted in the bibliography.

Church and State. Has the Obama Administration Trampled on Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Conscience?” However, it quickly became clear that the subject of the panel was really women’s issues, especially female contraception. The transcript of the hearing exhibits about ten references to “man” or “men,” (roughly half or more of these are the archaic term for “human”). However, surprisingly the word “woman” is used at least 16 times and “women” is used at least 80 times; there are roughly 25 instances of “birth control” (always female), another 14 or so references to “the pill” (birth control for women), and around 45 to “abortion”: all things metonymically related to women. Yet, the panelists told the conveners of the hearings and the audience that this was clearly *not* about women.

Under the guise of “religious freedom” and “freedom of conscience,” the hearing attempted to separate women out of women’s issues; but it was the visual of the first expert panel – five men – that made it unspeakably clear women had not only been transposed, but summarily erased from the frame altogether.²⁰

Transposition through Anti-intellectualism and Anti-rationalism

Underlying *The War on Women* are not simply the ways in which certain conservative politicians replace women in the frame of social issues, but the ideological strain of anti-intellectualism that has festered in the U.S. for decades, and especially its related sentiment identified by Susan Jacoby as *anti-rationalism*. The idea of anti-intellectualism in this chapter is derived from a general sense of Richard Hofstadter’s concepts in his 1963 book *Anti-Intellectualism in Public Life*, which suggests that anti-intellectualism is a disdain for the life of the mind, for what we might call “academic” subjects, and for precise logic and reasoning. Anti-rationalism, according to Jacoby in her 2008 essay “The Dumbing of America,” is not just a penchant for ignorance, but an “arrogance” about that ignorance, a “smug[ness]” in which Americans believe “they do not need to know [certain] things in the first place” (p. 2). They revel in that ignorance (think, for example, the “gut feelings” of President George W. Bush regarding Vladimir Putin’s soul in 2001).²¹ So, anti-rationalism is an extension of anti-intellectualism with the addition of an emotional component: hubris. To follow are a few examples of how right-wing anti-intellectualism and anti-rationalism have attempted to frame women’s issues in *The War on Women*.

Rush Limbaugh – a radio personality of the extreme right who is nonetheless taken seriously by the mainstream GOP even today – became an unsurprising figurehead in *The War on Women* when he stepped into an argument regarding the subsidiza-

20 Please see the photograph by Center for American Progress online. Full citation is in the bibliography.

21 At the 2001 summit in Ljubljana, Slovenia, to the question: “Do you trust Vladimir Putin?” George W. Bush answered: “I looked the man in his eye. I was able to get a sense of his soul” (Wyatt, 2001). This comment suggested that Putin’s soul was a trustworthy one, with good intentions.

tion of contraception, specifically birth control pills. While mocking Sandra Fluke, a Georgetown law student who advocated for subsidization, Limbaugh demonstrated astonishing ignorance regarding basic facts of female reproduction.²² He suggested that the student was “going broke” because “She wants all the sex in the world, whenever she wants it, all the time”; that “She’s having so much sex, she can’t afford it” (as cited in Wemple, 2012). As noted by Adam Serwer in *Mother Jones*, “Limbaugh repeatedly suggested that the amount of sex a woman has is related to the amount of birth control she needs to take, as though women took birth control pills” only on the days they have sex, which is “how, say Viagra, the erectile dysfunction medication works” (2012).

This kind of ignorance regarding a subject that MSNBC cable television host Rachel Maddow jokes as having been taught in “freshman year human biology” (2012) is astounding to many Americans but to these extreme members of the GOP – many of whom continue to argue that the earth is no older than 6,000 years (Newport, 2012) – this man, who has no idea how female contraception works in the first place, is a reasonable spokesperson for a debate on contraception. Predictably, no Republicans had much to say about Limbaugh’s rants (at least 20 attacks on the student over two days), and not one of them thought it noteworthy that the radio host did not understand how the pill worked. For this wing of the GOP, generally, one does not need to understand the science of an issue to frame the debate; a strong opinion repeated with malicious merriment seems just as valid.²³

In this vein, we revisit John Koster. His “rape thing” comment was not the only thing unfortunate about his interview. Along with another candidate, Roscoe Bartlett (Tea Party Caucus incumbent up for reelection in the 2012 Maryland U.S. House seat race), Koster makes the anti-intellectual argument that because something is not as frequent as something else, it is not important. Koster suggests that “incest is so rare, I mean it’s so rare” (as cited in Weiner, 2012); somehow expecting his audience to understand that the “rarity” of incest excuses his not having to consider it in the argument surrounding abortion. And Bartlett states that the “percentage of abortions for rape” is “tiny. It is a tiny, tiny percentage” (as cited in Volsky, 2012). The logical assumptions hidden behind these few words are that their anti-abortion stances should not have to make exceptions for victims of rape or incest who may want abortions be-

22 Sandra Fluke was not permitted to speak at The House Committee on Oversight and Reform hearing on 16 February 2012, spoken of earlier in this chapter. Darrell Issa, the chairperson of the hearing, refused her request. She was later allowed to speak at a Democratic Steering and Policy Committee meeting on 23 February 2012 (House Committee).

23 It should be noted that this chapter does not cover even a fraction of what Limbaugh said about Sandra Fluke. The lengths to which Limbaugh went in order to mock her, and the palpable sexism and misogyny within his attacks are breathtaking; an analysis of these events could be a chapter in and of themselves. For a list of his 20 major attacks, please see Wemple (2012).

cause pregnancy through these means is less frequent. These kinds of arguments rely on illogical comparisons between figures and frequency, faulty equivalences between various types of pregnancies that end in affirming the consequent – “treating a sufficient condition” (something that happens rarely should not be considered valid in the abortion debate) “as a necessary condition” (van Eemeren, 2001, p. 298) – summarily crowd out of the frame the human factor of the woman and her body.

To continue the incident, after having explained how miniscule the number of rape and incest victims who become pregnant is, Bartlett is challenged by an audience member who states, “There are 20,000 pregnancies every year from rape.” To which Bartlett retorts, “Yeah and how many abortions? In the millions” (as cited in Volsky, 2012), assuming tit-for-tat logic stands up in political discourse. Astonished, the audience member replies: “That’s 20,000 rapes, that’s 20,000 people who are violated” (as cited in Volsky, 2012). Only when this audience member confronts Bartlett with the fact that this number, this “tiny, tiny percentage” is in fact not the whole picture, and rather pulls actual people – violated women’s bodies – back into the frame does he seem to snap out of his false equivalence²⁴ numbers game, and finally ends with “I know... I know...” (as cited in Volsky, 2012).

The GOP in general is notoriously antagonistic toward science (consider, for example, GOP stances on climate change, the age of the earth, evolution, etc.),²⁵ so when they do embrace “science,” their more extreme members’ anti-intellectual and anti-rationalist impulses tend to make science less scientific. Joe Walsh (incumbent Tea Party Republican running for the 2012 Illinois house seat), for example, attempted to use his understanding of science to argue against having any exceptions for abortions, even discounting the life and health of the pregnant woman. For Walsh, some kind of vague “advances in science and technology” eliminated the risks of pregnancy and childbirth for pregnant women (as cited in *The Young Turks*, 2012). He never actually names these amazing advances in both science and technology (although it is interesting to witness a GOP politician attempt to use “science” as support for his argument at all). But, with his final sentence, he belies his faith in said science and technology and illustrates his anti-rationalism regarding the topic of abortion.

After he has noted that “science and technology” have made pregnancy more like not being pregnant at all, the real impetus behind his stance shines through:

*“This is an issue that opponents of life throw out there to make us look unreasonable. There’s no such exception as life of the mother and as far as health of the mother... same thing. [...] the... health of the mother has been... has become a tool for abortions anytime under any reason” (Walsh as cited in *The Young Turks*, 2012).*

24 A false equivalence is a logical fallacy in which one argument or claim is set up as logically equivalent to another argument or claim when it is not (Dowden, n.d.a).

25 For a view of Republican sentiments toward science even prior to the Tea Party, please see Seth Shulman’s book, *Undermining Science* (2006). Full citation is in the bibliography.

These final sentences have nothing whatsoever to do with science *or* technology and simply state matter-of-factly Walsh's desire to eliminate abortion altogether. Surprisingly, unlike previous GOP examples, he does not attempt metonymy or euphemism in order to avoid conjuring women. He arrogantly believes his passionate disinformation about science and technology regarding pregnancy is an effective foundation on which to base his reasonableness. In fact, he is so smug in his reasonableness that he plants "mother" squarely in the frame.

Interestingly, it can be argued that his use of "mother" instead of, say "woman," seems to make his comments that much more shocking. After assuring his reasonableness, he preserves the "mother" in the frame but discounts her need for "health" and even "life," a risky move since most people have a visceral reaction concerning "mothers." "Women," they may be dubious about, but "mothers" is a loaded term encapsulating a number of things most sentimental to our cultures; therefore, it seems the irony of his self-proclaimed reasonableness on the one hand and sanctioning mothers to death on the other is completely lost on him.

Returning again to another previously mentioned politician, Todd Akin (the "legitimate rape" politician from Missouri), we finish an analysis of his full comment. His use of metonymy was interesting enough, but the rest of his comment is what puts him in the limelight of this section on anti-rationalism. "From what I understand from doctors, that's [pregnancy from rape] really rare. If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down" (as cited in Eligon & Schwirtz, 2012). Like Limbaugh, his ignorance of both reason and science, especially as related to what the female body can and cannot do is astounding, but his conviction *in* that ignorance is something else entirely.

Similar to Akin, during a debate in the Indiana senate race, Richard Mourdock stated, "Even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape, then it is something that God intended to happen" (ABC, 2012). Although many critics of his comment grasped the low-hanging fruit in order to condemn what he may not have particularly meant: that God condones rape; it seems more appropriate to attack the more outrageous belief behind the remark that he clearly does assume, which is that reproduction is somehow magical and mysterious, that humanity has yet to figure out these mysteries, and that pregnancy in general often relies on divine intervention. His willful ignorance of biological facts and his adamancy that God trumps biology is a stunning reminder of anti-rationalism in the GOP.

Finally, Tom Corbett, the Tea Party ally and elected Governor of Pennsylvania, supported a bill in 2011 that would have required all women seeking abortions to have an ultrasound (not specified as vaginal or abdominal) which would be explained in detail by the doctor while the screen with the ultrasound image was placed in the woman's line of vision.²⁶ To be clear, the ultrasound was medically unnecessary, as

26 House Bill 1077, or "The Women's Right-to-Know Act," was passed in committee February 6, 2011, and sent for debate on the floor. A March 12 debate on the bill was cancelled by House Majority Leader Mike Turzai.

were the details of the ultrasound that must be explained by the doctor, and only vague references to the fetal size, age, and heartbeat were used to “scientifically” or “intellectually” justify the ultrasound in the bill. When asked by an interviewer whether or not he thought “the bill goes too far” by making the “woman look at [an] ultrasound,” Corbett stated “I don’t know how you make anybody watch, [clears throat...], ok, cause you just have to close your eyes” (as cited in Bassett, 2012).

It is obvious that although Corbett and anyone else discussing this bill cannot engage its requirements in a scientific way or defend its components through rational deliberation, his simple, off-handed rhetoric regarding the bill demonstrates quite clearly the extreme right’s willingness to forcibly assert their physical will upon another person – a woman specifically – even transvaginally. In other words... to literally rape for their cause.²⁷ Corbett’s explanation suggests an aggression toward and power over women that ends in forcing women to watch their own assault... although they can “close their eyes” if it becomes too unbearable.

Conclusion

As exemplified throughout this chapter, the extreme right – embodied by the Tea Party that arose in the Republican Party in 2009 and held immense influence over the 2010 and 2012 elections – attempted to move women out of women’s issues by transposing them from the frames of discourse via rhetorical moves and specific ideological arguments. By metonymically transposing “women” linguistically, the GOP ejected women and their bodies *outside* the rhetorical framing of the issues. This was done even more effectively when paired with the seemingly endless anti-intellectualism of the GOP and their deep sense of anti-rationalism. In the nexus of these rhetorical and ideological moves, they attempted to erase women’s bodies and voices from the portrayal of women’s issues in the national discourse. By discounting women’s bodies and alienating even the timbre of women’s voices in such discourse, Republican power endeavored, and continues to endeavor, to prevent women’s images and participation in national dialogues about themselves.

It is now 2019. The Tea Party has lost influence (Mascaro, 2018), but was successful in thrusting the Republican Party to the right on women’s issues. What many may have thought was an anomaly in *The War on Women* between 2010 and 2012 – a part of a multifaceted backlash against the election of Barack Obama and the progressive causes for which he advocated – has become mainstream in the GOP. From the 2016 election of a candidate to the highest office in the land who has overtly bragged about sexually harassing women throughout his life, to the recent, explosive Senate hearings of the newest Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh in September 2018, we can see

27 Although it may seem an extreme analogy, unnecessary medical procedures that penetrate a woman’s body have been compared to rape since the transvaginal ultrasound laws have appeared around the country. For a thorough exploration of this comparison, please see Kelsey Anne Green’s 2013 article in the bibliography.

the GOP continues to systematically minimize or disregard women as subjects in the frame of political discourse. A study exploring the years 2012 to the present would be a valuable addition to our understanding of this ongoing and disheartening *War*.

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