HOSTING THE TEA PARTY: MOBILIZATION IN A CONSERVATIVE BUBBLE

by

Elizabeth A. Yates

B.A, Tufts University, 2008

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

The Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Pittsburgh

2014

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

KENNETH P. DIETRICH GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This thesis was presented

by

Elizabeth A. Yates

It was defended on

April 16th, 2014

and approved by

Kathleen M. Blee, Distinguished Professor, Sociology

Suzanne Staggenborg, Professor, Sociology

Rachel Kutz-Flamenbaum, Assistant Professor, Sociology

Thesis Co-Director: Kathleen M. Blee, Distinguished Professor, Sociology

Thesis Co-Director: Rachel Kutz-Flamenbaum, Assistant Professor, Sociology

HOSTING THE TEA PARTY: MOBILIZATION IN A CONSERVATIVE BUBBLE

Elizabeth A. Yates, M.A.

University of Pittsburgh, 2014

The research presented here examines the role of social networks in Tea Party mobilization in central and southern Virginia. It shows how polarization and socio-political segregation contribute to the production of a "conservative bubble" in which the social networks that people inhabit are homogenously conservative, and where opposing views are marginalized or less visible. However, my informants have not merely been passive figures in these large-scale social processes, but have been actively engaged in shaping their own lives and in doing so, the communities around them. This political homogeneity allows Tea Party participants to feel that their activism is supported by those around them, even by people who are not activists. This is manifest in Tea Party recruitment, in which local groups merely have to make their presence known in particular areas in order to attract dozens of new participants. This research speaks to the place of Tea Party mobilization in mainstream society by showing how it is both connected and yet distinct from mainstream social networks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been very lucky to have the support of so many people throughout my engagement in this project. First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis advisors, Dr. Kathleen Blee and Dr. Rachel Kutz-Flamenbaum. Kathy, your vast knowledge and infinite patience are incredible resources for me. Rachel, I relied heavily on your continuous guidance. I would also like to thank Dr. Suzanne Staggenborg, my committee member, for her careful editing and invaluable comments. Many thanks also to my workshop members and my graduate student cohort for their ongoing support.

Of course, I must also thank my informants, who generously donated their time and energy to allow me to complete this project.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner Bruce and my mother Kathy, for their continuous love, support, and generous criticism.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Like many of the Virginian Tea Party activists I interviewed over the summer of 2013, Charlene is a registered Republican. She has consistently voted for Republicans throughout her life, she campaigned actively for Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney in 2012, and she even served as a local delegate to the Virginia Republican Convention in 2013. However, she feels no allegiance to the Republican Party. Rather, she describes her activism as informed exclusively by "conservative" ideals, ones she believes are more likely to be found in the Republican than the Democratic Party. Through her work in the Tea Party, Charlene hopes to "return" the U.S. political system, and society in general, to "conservatism." This attachment to "conservative" as an expression of both individual identity and collective movement identity was consistent among nearly all of my informants. For these women, identifying as "conservative" distinguishes their views from "establishment Republicans," who they believe have, (until recently), dominated the right in mainstream politics. However, the term "conservative" simultaneously reflects their claim to this same mainstream political system, in which conservatism has a long legacy and continuing central role.

The balance of these conflicting claims is strained by the ultra-conservative agenda of the Tea Party, which includes many demands that depart from conservatism as practiced by many Republicans and other self-identified conservatives (Parker and Barreto 2013; Skocpol and Williamson 2011). For example, a recent assertion among grassroots Tea Party groups is that

local sustainable development initiatives, such as bike lane creation and the promotion of pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods, are part of a United Nations plot to impose a single "one world government." Another often-heard Tea Party demand is to abolish the Federal Department of Education. This advocacy represents a step beyond the decades-long campaigns by mainstream conservatives to limit U.S. involvement in global climate change initiatives or to expand local control of schools. While such extremist ideas have circulated among far right groups since the Cold War (Postel 2011), the popularity of the Tea Party has attached them to the mainstream politics and forced politicians in Congress and state governments to address them. Indeed, despite some of these ultra-conservative policy positions, the Tea Party has retained the support of 20-40% of all voters, including over 50% of Republicans and 10% of Democrats, as late as 2013 (Sullivan 2013). Thus, these two faces of the movement are difficult to reconcile: the radical, right wing, ultra-conservative agenda of the Tea Party, with the movement's genuine mass appeal across the nation.

This research investigates this dichotomy within the Tea Party at the micro-level and illuminates the resulting contradiction: a simultaneous assertion to represent mainstream political perspective in the U.S. juxtaposed with a defensive posture that represents these "mainstream" values as being under attack. While large-scale polling identifies the central beliefs, alliances, and demographics of the movement and its supporters across the country, this research uses in-depth interviews to examine the relationships between Tea Party activists and their immediate communities. By analyzing Tea Party activists' participation in various social networks, I respond to the following questions: To what extent are Tea Party activists integrated into their communities? Do they perceive that members of their social networks are supportive of or are

challenging to their activism, and how? How do these relationships impact their recruitment to and participation in the Tea Party?

This research is informed by studies of the role of social networks in social movement mobilization. In particular, I refer to research showing that activists often rely on both activist and extra-movement networks to provide emotional and ideological support to social movement actors, through the creation of a "movement community" (Downton and Wehr 1997; Rupp and Taylor 1987; Staggenborg 1987; Staggenborg 1998). This research also builds on literature assessing the varying salience of social networks to activist recruitment (Jasper and Paulsen 1985; Luker 1984; Passy and Monsch 2014; Snow, Zurcher and Eckland-Olsen 1980).

I place the literature on social movement networks in dialogue with the growing body of work that has documented the increasing socio-political polarization and segregation across the country. These scholars show that social and geographic communities have become increasingly divided along political lines over the past forty years, while ideological attachment has simultaneously become more salient to personal identity (Abramowitz 2008; Bishop and Cushing 2008; Gross, Neil, Medvetz and Russell 2011). As these authors show, social and behavioral patterns among political activists are becoming increasingly common among the general population.

Some social movement scholars have begun to investigate the impact of these trends on social movement mobilization. For example, referring to a new "social movement society," Sidney Tarrow and David Meyer (1998) demonstrate the increasing acceptance and practice of social movement mobilization throughout the general population. Corrigall-Brown (2012) builds on these findings by showing the range of activism in which many of today's social movement participants engage, from attending the occasional protest to living in a movement collective.

Alan I. Abramowitz (2011) ties the increase in activism to polarization, arguing that polarization leads to an increasing number of "potential" activists. The Tea Party mobilization, he claims, occurred when conservative elites "activated" this conservative population. As this emerging body of work implies, social movement activism is no longer the exclusive purview of small cadres of the politicos, but is increasingly tied to mainstream social networks, involving citizens of all ages and political ideologies, and from communities around the country.

The research presented here examines the role of social networks in Tea Party mobilization in central and southern Virginia. It shows how polarization and socio-political segregation contribute to the production of a "conservative bubble" in which the social networks that people inhabit are homogenously conservative, and what opposing views may exist are marginalized or less visible. This political homogeneity allows Tea Party participants to feel that their activism is supported by those around them, even by people who are not activists. This is manifest in Tea Party recruitment, in which local groups merely have to make their presence known in particular areas in order to attract dozens of new participants. This research speaks to the place of Tea Party mobilization in mainstream society by showing how it is both connected and yet distinct from mainstream social networks.

In the next section, I describe my methodology. The third section documents the creation of the conservative bubble by following the ideological evolution of my informants as they came to participate in the Tea Party. The fourth section builds on this data by examining my informants' perceptions of the political orientation of their social networks, and how this relates to their activism. The final section demonstrates one specific mobilization pattern by showing how Tea Party recruitment in these areas relied more on the general existence and operation of the conservative bubble than on the connections of specific social networks.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

I began this project with the goal of identifying the relevance of formal and informal social networks to the development of Tea Party mobilization.[1] I relied primarily on semi-structured interviews, supplemented by participant observation, to collect data reflecting how social networks might be important to the processes of Tea Party recruitment, engagement, and production of ideological support. Using a critical realist approach (Maxwell 2013), I attempted to uncover the subjective meaning that Tea Party activists attach to their activism and to the social networks they inhabit, in addition to the implications of their claims that they might not realize or acknowledge.

---

[1] I originally intended to identify a minimum of six female Tea Party participants who were simultaneously engaged in another or in multiple other non-political organizations, from which I would identify another six subjects who were sympathetic to Tea Party politics and participated in the same social networks, yet were not mobilized in theTea Party. Through this comparison, I hoped to identify salient differences between activists and non-activists from the same social networks. However, this failed to be a viable option, as all but one of my subjects declined to or was unable to identify potential subjects for me from within other groups in which they participated. (I did complete one interview of this nature, but have not included it in my analysis.)

2.1 PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

With the goal of identifying between ten and fifteen subjects, I used a snowball method of recruitment by which I reached out to unknown contacts and then relied on their connections to identify further subjects. As contacts appeared to dry up from one lead, I pursued a different recruitment approach, with a result that I pursued three cycles of informant outreach. As a result of this varied approach, I wound up with an informant pool in which half of the women were drawn from a single Tea Party group, while the other half of the women were from a handful of other local groups.

2.1.1 Focusing On Women

Throughout this process, I focused on female Tea Party activists, choosing to interview only women. I made this decision very early in the project for several reasons: First, female activists have received much attention in their participation in the Tea Party, and I wanted to examine their roles in the mobilization. Second, given that women are frequently the primary engines of social organization and engagement (Putnam 2000), I hypothesized that women's position in this mobilization might be particularly relevant to social network analysis. Finally, I believed that – particularly in this conservative context – as a woman myself, it would be easier for me to build rapport and engage with female activists rather than men (Reinharz and Davidman 1992).

2.1.2 Selecting Virginia

I selected the Commonwealth of Virginia as the location of my field research for several reasons: First, the area had been identified as having a high level of Tea Party mobilization (Skocpol and Williamson 2011) a trend which I confirmed based on online representations of Tea Party group activity in Virginia, as well as by news coverage of the state's gubernatorial election in which the Tea Party was reportedly playing a large role. Second, it was convenient for me to visit from my residence over the summer in Washington. D.C. Third, I have family living in the region with whom I was able to stay, discuss local politics with, and refer to in my efforts to build rapport with participants. Throughout my time in Virginia and D.C., I confirmed the active presence of the Tea Party in the region both in the number and size of local Tea Party-affiliated groups, as well as in the general knowledge of this activity among my family members and others in the area.

2.1.3 Outreach And Snowball Sampling

I began recruiting by reaching out to a single Tea Party group, planning to use a snowball sampling method as subjects referred new participants. As referrals from existing sources dried up, I initiated new contacts through other avenues, ultimately using three entry points to recruit participants, a process I describe below.

I first identified local Tea Party groups by searching in Google for Virginia-based Tea Party groups and perusing their local websites to see that they were sufficiently large and active. In early May, I identified a large and active group that was holding a public event that month. I emailed the contact available on the website, introducing myself as a student and explaining my

interest in obtaining interviews and in attending an upcoming meeting. When I did not receive a response to this inquiry, I attended an event anyway, at which point I introduced myself and gave my card to a couple of women who were hosting an information and sign-in table. After the speaker concluded, I approached a few groups of people, introduced myself as a student and asked a handful of brief questions regarding their interest and participation in the Tea Party.

While several of these people agreed to meet again and provided their contact information, only those who I later found to be part of a "core" group of participants responded to my subsequent requests to meet. Through this interaction, I learned that a number of the most committed female activists had formed an informal group that met monthly on their own. Several of them readily agreed to be interviewed and we promptly scheduled times. My first informant, the primary organizer of this informal women's group, circulated my request for participants to the rest of the women in her group. When they agreed, she provided me with their contact information, which I used to set up approximately half of my interviews, (including one with a woman from an additional local Tea Party group who sometimes participated in the larger group and had thus befriended the women in this informal women's group).

Several weeks later, I attended a national Tea Party-associated rally held outside the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. There, I pursued a similar process of introduction among attendees in the crowd, some of whom I later interviewed, and some of whom I merely chatted with. Given the proximity to Virginia, there were a number of Virginia residents there, several of whom I sought out and requested to interview. Through this event, I met two more informants from two different local groups, one of whom ultimately referred me to another informant from her group. I also spoke to several women from the area who I did not successfully contact.

Finally, in July, I reached out to a contact from the group that hosted the first event I attended, in order to identify more participants, and he provided me with a list of names and telephone numbers of approximately twenty female Tea Party participants from two local groups. I called and left voicemails for all of these women, two of whom I reached and who agreed to be interviewed. Around that time, I also reached out – again – to participants I had already interviewed and asked for more contacts, but none were provided.

2.2 IDENTIFYING THE SAMPLE

2.2.1 Description of Tea Party Groups In Which Participants Were Active

Given this recruitment pattern, my subject pool was ultimately composed of 11 informants, six from one single Tea Party group, two from another, and one each from another three groups. Most of these groups are located in the greater Richmond area, with one from Central Virginia. These groups ranged significantly in size, with the smallest group's regular meeting attendance reportedly ranging from six to twenty participants, (however, this group was in the process of merging with another, larger group), while the largest groups reported that 50 to 70 people attend regular meetings, on average, in the summer of 2013. The largest group has a list serve in the multiple thousands. Most participants reported that their groups had had significantly higher attendance before the "disappointing" 2012 election.

My participants reported that their groups hold monthly or twice-monthly regular meetings, where they generally host speakers or ask members to "educate" the rest of the

participants on issues of interest. They also report occasionally holding "business meetings" to organize election outreach for local and national campaigns and to organize internally. Many groups brought in Republican, Libertarian or Tea Party-identified candidates for local races to speak. Most groups also reported that members regularly attended local political events, such as the school board and county commissioner meetings, in order to track their activities, report back to the Tea Party members, and advocate within these institutions when they deemed it necessary.

Interestingly, participants from all groups reported that – outside of "core" activists and some reliable attendees – many of the names and faces at regular meetings frequently changed. Thus, while a large contingent of local people may attend meetings and rallies and identify with the Tea Party, the majority of the organizing work is completed by leadership and committee members who frequently met separately, outside of general meetings - people who may make up less than half of the people at any given meeting.

Although Virginia is one of the first states where Tea Party groups began to organize at the state level, (Skocpol and Williamson 2011), only one of these groups from which I interviewed participants is part of the statewide Virginia Tea Party Federation, (a loose collection of Tea Party-identified groups). I spoke to a few informants about the financial resources of a few of those groups, who reported that they were financially independent and reliant on volunteer donations for costs such as meeting room rental, signage, etc. Individuals, however, did report utilizing national services such as organizing conference calls, resources which many external sources have indicated are funded by national Tea Party groups (Lo 2011).

2.2.2 Description Of The Participants

Demographically, my informants are similar to the kind of people identified as Tea Party sympathizers in polling, which shows that nationally, Tea Party sympathizers are white, middle- and retirement-aged, middle and upper middle class (American National Election Study Evaluations of Government and Society Survey, 2010, in Abramowitz 2011). They ranged in age from 35 to 73, with a median age of 64, as all but two were 50 years old or older. They all identified themselves as white or Caucasian. Nine of the eleven are married, three have grown children, and one has young children. Six are currently in the workforce, while two are very recently retired, and three have not worked for many years. The ten participants who listed their income indicated annual household incomes ranging from between $25,000 and $50,000, to over $150,000, including four women in the $50,000-$75,000 category, and three over $150,000. Of the ten who reported their highest educational attainment, one had completed high school, three had some college, four had bachelor's degrees, and one had completed some graduate education. Their work experience reflects this range, as a few had working-class jobs, including a school bus driver and a factory clerk, or pink collar jobs, including a secretary and a retail department manager, while still others worked in specialized professions, including an operations analyst and a school administrator. All but one identified as a Christian, including five Baptists.

Predictably, my informants are similar politically. Ten out of eleven described themselves primarily as "conservative," sometimes emphasizing it with "very" or even "totally" or "definitely." One described herself primarily as a Republican. When asked to describe their political views according to a scale ranging from 1-7, with 1 being "Very Conservative" and 7 being "Very Liberal," six out of ten marked 1, three marked 2, and one said "3-4." When asked to describe their political party affiliation according to a scale that ranged from "Strong

Pseudonyms	Age	Race	Religion	Married	Children	Working Status	Job Title	Highest Level of Education Completed	Annual Household Income	Ideology 1 (V. Cons.) -7 (V. Lib)	Party Affiliation	Previously Regularly Voted Dem
Candace*	64	White	Christian	Y	Y (grown)	Retired	[Clerk]**	High School	$50-75K	1	Other Party*** [Conservative]	Y
Brenda	52	White	Christian	Y	N	None last 5 yrs.	[Clerk]	Some College	$50-75K	1	Strong R	Y
Nancy	56	White	None	Y	N	Full-Time	Health Insurance/ Real Estate Broker	Bachelor's	$150K+	1	Lean R	Y
Hillary	66	White	Baptist	N	N	Retired	[Teacher]	Bachelor's	$50-75K	1	Lean R	N
Charlene	55	White	Christian	Y	Y (grown)	None last 5 yrs.	[Nurse]	Some College	$125-150K	2	Lean R	N
Charlotte	35	White	Baptist	Y	N	Full-Time	Operations Analyst	Bachelor's	$100-150k	1	Strong R	N
Mary	38	White	Baptist	Y	Y	None last 5 yrs.	[Secretary]	Bachelor's	$150K+	2	R	Y
Catherine	61	White	Christian	Y	N	Full-Time	Bus Driver	Some College	$50-75K	2	Other Party*** [Conservative]	Y
Rita	73	White	Christian	Y	Y (grown)	Full-Time	Department Manager, Retail	unkn.	unkn.	unkn.	unkn.	N
Ann	50	White	Baptist	N	N	Full-Time	School Administrator	Some Graduate School	$25-50K	1	Strong R**** [TP Cons. Rep.]	N
Caroline	65+	White	Baptist	Y	unkn.	Full-Time	Program Manager	Bachelor's	$140-180K	3-4	Lean R	N
NYT/CBC Poll Supporter Profile	75% 45+	89% White	61% Prot. Christian	70% Married	73% Yes	32% Retired 56% Working	N/A	33% Some College 37% BA or Post Grad	Median: $50-75K		48% "Usually" & 18% "Always" vote R	25% vote "Equally" R & D

Figure 1. Informant Characteristics

*All names are pseudonyms. Some individual characteristics and/or information have been swapped among informants in order to protect their identities.
**Brackets indicate job title prior to retiring or otherwise leaving the workforce.
***Informants marked scale as indicated and also wrote the words shown in brackets.
****Informant marked scale as indicated and wrote "Tea Party Conservative Republican"

Democrat" to "Strong Republican" and included "Independent" and "Other," two out of ten marked "Other" and wrote "conservative," three marked "Strong Republican," including one who then also wrote "Tea Party Conservative," four marked "Lean Republican" and one simply "Republican." Thus, with some variation, nearly all of my informants considered themselves solidly conservative at the time of their interview. However, at least five of them had at some point either considered themselves Democrats or consistently voted for Democrats in the past. As will be addressed in greater detail in Section 3.2, these women's lives followed divergent trajectories, but their changing social networks, often marriage and geographic moves, sometimes coincided with ideological shifts. This was particularly the case among informants who had not been raised in the area, who much more likely to have been Democrats at one point in their lives.

As activists, my informants were very new to politics and played a variety of roles within their groups. Ten of the eleven had virtually no activist experience prior to their participation in the Tea Party, while one had done some phone banking for Republican candidates and had been involved with the pro-life movement. The two that could remember any other activism described sporadically supporting occasional progressive or liberal causes in their youth and/or young adulthood. Most had become active in the Tea Party sometime in 2010, when local groups in their area began to organize.

While there was substantial demographic variation among my informants in terms of age, income, occupation, etc., there was little evidence of corresponding trends in ideology, participation, etc. For example, some research has indicated that Tea Party membership is "bifurcated" by class, with older supporters more likely to be well-educated professionals, while younger members are less educated and more likely to have blue-collar jobs (Lundskowe 2011).

However, among my informants, this was not the case. In fact, if anything, the opposite pattern was true; the three youngest women were some of the best educated and/or wealthiest of the group. However, one of the oldest women was also one of the most-highly educated and had one of the highest-prestige jobs. Or, for example, some of the wealthiest and best-educated considered themselves life-long conservatives, while some had dabbled in liberal politics. Larger sample sizes would likely be necessary in order to parse out more specific demographic patterns.

All but one of the participants in my sample appeared to be one of the more dedicated "core" type of activists who had a position in leadership or participated in one or more committees that required them to do more than merely attend regular meetings. However, at the time of their interviews, two of the informants were not actively participating in the Tea Party, as one had taken a break due to personal circumstances, but intended to return to Tea Party activism, while another had left the Tea Party after the loss in the 2012 presidential election, after which she and her husband remained active in other conservative causes, but were currently trying to assess where best to commit their energy.

Among my informants, a handful of them had direct decision-making responsibilities, (for example, determining which speakers to invite or identifying the group's political priorities), while the others were primarily responsible for the grunt work of organizing, including phone banking and door-to-door campaigning, membership coordination and other internal adminstrivia. For many of these women, Tea Party activism was an enormous time commitment, second to nothing in their lives other than their paid jobs and family. For many, participating in the Tea Party was a family affair: of the nine who had husbands, six reported that their husbands also participated with them, and while a seventh husband was not active in the Tea Party, he had

become involved in conservative political campaigns that his wife had encountered through the Tea Party. Again, these participation patterns were not related to age, income, education, etc. Thus, these women represent a sample of the central figures in Tea Party mobilization at the very grassroots level.

2.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

2.3.1 The Course Of The Interviews

I conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with activists, each supplemented by a two-page questionnaire (see Appendix C). Nine were conducted in-person and recorded using either a digital audio recorder or a smart phone. The duration of the interview ranged from approximately one hour to slightly over two hours, and took place primarily at local eating establishments of the informants' choosing, while one occurred at a Tea Party meeting site prior to an event. Two were conducted over the phone and were not recorded; one of the informants refused to be recorded, and I had a technological malfunction with the other. These were also shorter, closer to 45 minutes, and less comprehensive, in comparison to the in-person interviews. One of the phone interviews was conducted in two parts, earlier in the day and later in the day. During phone interviews, I took notes and asked the participants for patience for me to write.

I used a semi-structured interview schedule to gather consistent data and compare responses among informants, (see Appendix B). This semi-structured approach allowed me to modify my interview schedule to allow respondents to identify what is most important to them and speak directly to their interests and beliefs. For example, I asked all informants about the

political beliefs of their families growing up, but some chose to discuss at-length political and non-political experiences in their early years to describe and explain their own political beliefs today, whereas some provided only basic information about their families' beliefs and emphasized later experiences.

In each interview, I asked a series of questions about their current political beliefs, the issues they cared the most about, the evolution of their political beliefs, any previous political experience, the existence of formal and informal social networks in which they are involved, the political beliefs of the people in those social networks, their recruitment into the Tea Party and any efforts they had made to recruit others, their roles and experiences in the Tea Party, and their media consumption. At the conclusion of the interview, I asked each informant to complete a two-page questionnaire that asked them to describe themselves politically on a scale of 1 to 7, to list basic demographic information, and to rate the importance of a handful of political issues (See Appendix C).

2.3.2. Political Disclosures And Self-Presentation

As a relatively young graduate student, a political progressive who grew up in a major city on the "left coast" and had never lived in the South or any other place like it, I knew that, at least in some cases, building sufficient trust to effectively engage with older, Southern conservatives would be a challenge. This was particularly the case in regard to my political orientation; as a professed "progressive" my personal views are likely nearly entirely opposed to the political views of my informants, yet I truly am interested in understanding how the beliefs and actions of conservatives are shaped by and operationalized in their social surroundings. Thus, I attempted to present myself in a manner that was both honest and non-threatening.

16

This negotiation began every time I introduced myself, whether approaching a participant at a rally or meeting someone for an interview, I described myself as a graduate student interested in "political activism" and in the Tea Party in particular, noting the lack of existing research about the Tea Party - sometimes, adding that I wanted to go beyond the stereotypes presented in the media. This introduction reflected a direct intention on my part to persuade my informants that I was not interested in them primarily to "debunk" their ideology or their claims. Indeed, a number of scholars have taken on this project (*eg*. Street and DiMaggio 2011) but my interest has primarily been in contributing to social movement and sociological literature around conservative activism.

Many scholars studying activists on the right have used similar introductions, followed by a strategy of non-confrontation and non-contradiction, allowing their informants to express themselves without challenge, and thus to assume that the interviewer either agrees with them or at least is sympathetic to what they are saying (*eg*. Blee 2003; Klatch 1987). I pursued similar strategies, (as discussed below), but in my case, I also felt compelled to go a step further and disclose my oppositional political orientation. In all but three of the interviews, (the first interview and both phone interviews), I said in passing that I considered myself a "progressive" or "fairly liberal." I felt that this was necessary for several reasons. First, in today's digital age, any informant or potential informant may, with a little bit of online research, identify me as a progressive through evidence online, (especially given some of my informants' commitment to "research" and "knowledge" (*see* Section 5.3), which they often access online). I did not want them to be misled and then feel betrayed, thus ruining not only my relationship with those individuals in particular, but potentially with anyone in their communities and organizations. As I found out, word does travel fast: after I failed to mention my progressive views to my first

17

informant but related them to my second, I immediately got an email from my first informant explaining that she had not "known" and hoped she had not "offended" me. I believe the rest of the informants from this group all knew ahead of time. Secondly, I felt that by being relatively open with my informants, I could build rapport with people notorious for mistrusting academics (Jacoby 2012), I hypothesized that by addressing the "elephant in the room," I might earn trust by not appearing to be deceitful.

Finally, having been influenced by feminist methodology that emphasizes reflexivity and respect for research subjects, (Taylor 1998) I felt compelled to, at a minimum, let them know that I was not a potential convert. If I were being interviewed regarding my political beliefs, I would certainly want to know the general political orientation of the person interviewing me, so I ultimately decided that it would be best to extend the same courtesy, where possible. While I understood that this methodology was developed with the goal of accurately "giving voice" to marginalized and oppressed peoples and does not necessarily apply in the same way in the context of informants of a relatively higher social status, whose cause may oppress others (Hamilton 2008), I also believed that there sometimes remained a power differential in my favor between me and my subjects. For example, in some cases I was better educated, had had greater social exposure to diverse environments, and had relatively greater knowledge of the general political system and its functioning (although this was certainly not the case in many instances). Thus, I wanted to limit my exploitation of that power differential where it existed.

However, having said all of this, by vaguely referring to myself as a "progressive" or a "liberal," I was still not being completely honest regarding my political orientation, experience or beliefs. Indeed, as have many academic scholars in this context, I severely limited my personal disclosures, very infrequently expressing my own views when they contradicted those

of my informants, hiding disgust when informants said things I found abhorrent, expressing an appreciative understanding of ideas I certainly did not agree with, and selectively disclosing some details of my personal life while not others, etc. This was necessary, I believe, in order to engage with my informants at all. As one scholar of the right-wing, Richard G. Mitchell, claims, (reflecting Goffman's discussion of performative interaction (Goffman 1959)), all humans engage in selective self-presentation in their daily lives, and thus the researcher's self-presentation is merely another form of this interaction (Mitchell 1993). Thus, I toed what I thought was a fine line given my interests in advancing this scholarship.

Throughout this project, I found that my informants had mixed reactions to this disclosure, but I believe that it in most cases it was beneficial. Some were clearly not surprised, either if they had been told ahead of time, or if they had assumed it based on my student status (one laughed and joked, "I didn't profile you!"). One informant thanked me and mentioned that she had also been interviewed by another graduate student and that she had wondered about her political beliefs and really "preferred knowing." I maintained a good rapport with my first informant, who, after being told that I was "a liberal" still greeted me with a hug and was very friendly when I communicated with her later. Especially for those who had considered themselves "more liberal" in their youths, they appeared fairly unconcerned. However, with one participant with whom I felt I was struggling to build rapport, I assume that my politics may have had something to do with her less-than-warm demeanor towards me. In other cases, my refusal to outright agree with certain informants on issues seemed to be something they noted. In only one instance do I remember facing an overt hostility: at a national rally, I spoke to a group of three women from New England, one of whom clearly was not happy that I had introduced myself as "a liberal" and said she would rather not talk to me. Afterwards, one of her friends ran

after me and apologized for her rudeness. Furthermore, it is possible that my politics influenced my ultimate access to potential candidates, an issue I will discuss later in this chapter.

2.3.3 Building Rapport

Outside of addressing some overt political differences, I employed a familiar strategy of rapport-building by emphasizing commonalities with my informants. For example, as I have visited the region many times in my life and stayed with extended family, I know the area well enough to talk about some schools and towns; I often know the county names and generally where they are, etc. I also drew on my affiliation with the Catholic Church and my early experience with the Pro-Life movement, a major issue for many people close to me in my family. I could readily identify with those who were the "political black sheep" of their extended families, and as a person with a great number of siblings, I was happy to talk about coming from a big family. I also shared discussions of books and food, etc.

Using such chitchat, I endeavored to create a very informal environment, repeatedly telling my informants that I found their lives very interesting and that I wanted them to be able to talk about what was most important to them. In general, I allowed them to talk at-length about the issues that they cared about, stopping them when time was running low or if they were repeating themselves. This approach worked better with some informants than others, but I believe that I had comfortable and collegial discussions with all but two informants – one over the phone, who was elderly, immediately hostile towards me, overtly racist, and frankly unhappy to be being interviewed, and one who, while polite, never seemed to warm up to me.

2.4 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

In addition to completing the eleven interviews, I also observed Tea Party participants in several informal settings. I attended these events to supplement my findings from the interviews, to identify potential informants, and to build rapport with existing participants. In total, I attended two national Tea Party-associated rallies where I observed events and spoke informally to individuals and/or groups of attendants, some of whom I later interviewed. I also attended two local Tea Party events featuring speakers, as well as an informal gathering of members of a single Tea Party group, where I observed and interacted with a handful of participants.

The first rally and the first special event I attended were both primarily occasions to meet potential informants. However, at the first rally, I asked several of questions of a number of participants in order to supplement findings from my interviews with Virginians. In total, at this rally, I had thirteen interactions involving 21 people. I generally asked them the extent of their participation in the Tea Party, where they were from, how they became participants, had they known anyone in the Tea Party before they became participants, and whether or not everyone they knew agreed with them politically. Their responses confirmed some of my findings and challenged others, (see my discussion in "Reliability"). I wrote field notes on their responses throughout my time there. At this event, I paid nearly no attention to the speakers, (several Tea Party congressional representatives and Glenn Beck), and focused on the crowd.

The second rally I attended was alternately called the "March for Jobs" or the "Anti-Amnesty March," and from my understanding it was an anti-immigration reform rally that was intended to rally Black Americans to the cause by claiming that high Black unemployment was due to illegal immigration. In contrast to my experience at the first rally, at this event, although I

observed the crowd generally, I focused mostly on the speakers, noting that the white speakers primarily discussed the criminality and illegality of immigration, while the Black speakers primarily addressed the economic challenges of unemployment.[2]

Both of the local events I attended took place in a local church that I later learned had been rented for this purpose. Approximately 100 people attended both, and given the nature of the events, I spent most of my time observing the speakers. Especially at the second event, I had attended because my informants had encouraged me to and I wanted to demonstrate my interest. At both times, I took notes while in attendance, but tried not to draw attention to them. I expanded earlier notes later, in private.

Finally, the informal dinner I attended with seven Tea Party women (including one of the women's grown daughters) was one of the most interesting events, but also one of the most challenging. I tried to listen to the various conversations around me, while simultaneously engaging in my own chitchat and eating dinner. The dinner lasted a couple of hours and took place at a local restaurant. The discussion mostly centered around politics, and I paid attention to who was considered an authority on what, what the women were most upset by, what they asked each other questions about, etc. They also discussed gender norms in activism, telling me directly why they thought it necessary to meet separately. However, they also spent a large amount of time decrying the university system, moments that were clearly uncomfortable for me. In this instance, given that it was a restaurant and we were having a meal, I was unable to take any notes until I left, at which point I wrote notes immediately upon returning home.

---

[2] By this point, I had already concluded most of my interviews and was not really looking for new informants. Furthermore, the specific subject of this rally and march was not directly relevant to my interest in social networks, I was merely interested.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS

I fully transcribed the nine interviews for which I had audio recordings, except moments where there was extensive and irrelevant chitchatting or where the audio was inaudible over background noise.

I completed inductive and deductive coding using a qualitative analysis Software. After reviewing my proposal and various memos I had written over the course of my research, I began analysis by a broad coding using 17 large codes, that generally reflected the topics of conversation at those points, (for example I grouped all discussion of my informants' social network participation). In a second phase of coding, I did more interpretive work, differentiating between responses that informants gave that differed from each other, but also how they reacted to certain questions or certain implications. For seven of what I determined were the most relevant codes, I created between five to ten subcodes that identified how my informants described their lives in that particular area and what they implied in doing so. This approach allowed me to document the objective features in their lives, (for example, how many social networks they were involved in), as well as the subjective meaning that they attached to these facts, (for example, which networks do they describe as the most important). Finally, I did my best to identify the various assumptions that my informants made about the way they lived their lives, (for example, that if they did not know otherwise, they counted everyone they knew as a conservative). After each round of subcoding, I printed the grouped quotes and reviewed them, marking representative quotes and passages. I then wrote summaries of my observations and conclusions of most of the subcodes, which I followed by writing a brief summary of that issue as it pertained to each individual, so that I would have a quick reference guide as I wrote final conclusions.

2.6 VALIDITY

A Critical Realist approach to assessing the validity of a research project defines validity as the "correctness" or "credibility" of the resulting conclusions (Maxwell 2013: 122). Relying on this explanation, I will discuss the potential challenges to the validity of my findings.

2.6.1 Researcher Bias

As discussed in Section 2.3.2, I differ in demographic profile and life experience from my informants in many critical ways. These differences have the potential to influence my interpretation of the data at several levels. I relied on a variety of strategies to minimize this impact and be as objective as possible throughout my research.

As discussed previously, my political orientation is generally opposed to the ideology of the Tea Party, a stance which had the potential to bias my interpretation of their accounts. However, I attempted to consider their narratives with a political neutrality throughout the research process. For example, my informants often described their political beliefs as a result of increased knowledge; something progressives such as me would tend to be skeptical of, given that we believe different and better information would lead to a different conclusion. However, as a Sociologist, I am drawn to consider ideas and beliefs as socially produced and subjective concepts that shift based on the narrator and the specific context. Thus, in my interpretation, I emphasized the patterns in social experiences and behaviors, not on the content of the beliefs and information my informants provided. Indeed, in this effort, I focused less on political and more on sociological issues involving lifestyle and life experiences, in both my interview schedule and

in my subsequent analysis, a process which I believe limited the potential for my personal bias to impact my research.

Apart from my political orientation, my status as a much younger, less religious, western urbanite meant that my frame of reference was often distinct from theirs. I attempted to counter this lack of knowledge by probing my informants for the details of explanations or arguments they made in passing. For example, a number of the women described switching churches for reasons of personal taste, etc., and since I am largely unfamiliar with Protestant churches, I followed-up with questions as to what experiences led them to make such decisions, and what they looked for in a congregation of their choosing. In general, I allowed my ignorance of their communities to serve as an excuse to delve into the details of their lives, a tactic other researchers have pursued (Klatch 1987). Through these efforts, I attempted to overcome my personal biases, to the extent possible.

2.6.2 Informants' Reactions

Researchers have noted a frequent validity concern in qualitative research is the tendency that participants have to be influenced by the researcher's presence (Maxwell 2013: 124). In this context, where the informants are political activists working to advance particular goals, and where the interviewer is known to politically oppose them, I believe that the data I collected likely was, to some extent, influenced by my presence as a researcher. For example, I believe that the participants I was able to get access to may be less hostile to "liberals" than some Tea Party members. I heard that some people did not want to participate in the Tea Party for fear of government reprisal, so I can imagine that some activists would not want to divulge personal information to an external scholar, much less a "liberal" one. Furthermore, it is obvious that, as

activists, they are invested in presenting the Tea Party in the best light possible, and thus would be less likely to divulge unflattering information about themselves or their groups.

However, I believe that these concerns were largely mitigated by the fact that I was not primarily conducting an analysis of the validity of an ideology, but rather an analysis of social networks and their impact on mobilization and ideology. A lot of the key information I sought was not information that, I believe, my informants would have thought to obscure or hide. Furthermore, in order to counter my informants' tendency to expound with political rhetoric, I continuously asked personal questions that were not overtly political in nature, employing something like a limited life-history interview method (Blee 2003). Finally, drawing on accounts from existing media and scholarly literature around the Tea Party, I compared my findings to those of others. Furthermore, as I conducted more and more interviews, I adjusted my interview schedule to reflect the claims and explanation of previous participants, thus creating easier comparisons between informants. Finally, in regard to the pool of applicants I was able to reach, while the Tea Party participants most hostile to leftists may not have been in my sample, many of my informants did express disdain or hostility towards "liberals" or other adversaries in general, as well as fears of government retribution, so I am confident that these strains of thought were incorporated into my research.

2.6.3 Generalizability/Reliability

One finding I have drawn from my experience with the Tea Party is that local groups do function independently from one another. Thus, this case study cannot be understood as a representative model regarding all female Tea Party participants around the country, or even in Virginia. However, some of the social processes that I track here, including political and ideological

divisions socially, are occurring in similar patterns across the country, (Abramowitz 2010; Bishop and Cushing 2008). Thus, while my findings cannot be expected to be consistent among all other similar groups, they speak to likely patterns of mobilization in other areas.

For example, one limitation of my research is the particular geographic area I focused on. With one exception, all of my informants lived in counties that are primarily rural, suburban or exurban. While it has been claimed that this is the case for many Tea Parties and has been a central explanation of mobilization for some scholars (Thompson 2012), there are large and active Tea Parties around the country, including some in more urban or close suburban areas. This is particularly relevant to a discussion of political homogeneity in social networks because, presumably, people living in more urban areas will be exposed to greater political diversity. Indeed, in my informal discussions with attendants at Tea Party rallies, participants from more urban or nearer and more affluent suburban communities reported having much more politically varied social networks.

In general, however, my informants fit the general demographic profile of female Tea Party activists nationally (American National Election Study Evaluations of Government and Society Survey, 2010, in Abramowitz 2011). Their accounts of mobilization are consistent with anecdotal research as depicted by other accounts nationally (Skopcol and Williamson 2011). Thus, it is likely that the findings from this study would provide a foundation for comparative and/or similar work in other areas.

3.0 THE CONSERVATIVE BUBBLE: POLITICAL SEGREGATION

When political pundits comment on the growing political divide in this country, they often explain the latest polling data or the blue state/red state map by referencing cultural reflections associated with this divide - the role of the "soccer moms" versus the "hockey moms," for instance. While such labels reflect gross generalizations, a growing body of literature shows that they illustrate a verifiable trend across the United States: the growing relationship between political divisions and social and geographic divisions (Bishop and Cushing 2008). Today, Americans are much more likely than at any time in the previous four decades to live and socialize primarily with people they agree with politically, essentially functioning in socio-political "bubbles" where they encounter little ideological challenge and their political views are encouraged and reinforced on an ongoing basis. While numerous micro and macro-level factors have contributed to this phenomenon, it is clear that this is partly the result of individual choice: Even among Americans who have been exposed to a broad spectrum of views, many choose deliberately to integrate themselves into politically homogenous networks.

As the literature demonstrates, this trend is particularly relevant to social movement activism, as increasing segregation leads to increasing polarization, which leads to increased political participation (Abramowitz 2011). And while this trend may be relatively new to the population in general, movements to self-segregate and form ideological communities have occurred among political activists for generations, as activists seek social support and access to

relevant channels of information (Taylor and Rupp 1997; Staggenborg 1998). Today, Sidney Tarrow and David Meyer (1998) suggest we are witnessing the emergence of a "social movement society," a claim that supports the suggestion that trends of political segregation and polarization initiated among political activists may be increasingly common among the general population.

As this chapter will show, my findings speak directly to this possibility. My informants, like many Americans today, appear to function largely in a socio-political "bubble" whereby most people they know - and especially those they choose to interact with most frequently - share their political views. However, this is not a static existence; the construction and maintenance of this bubble involves action on the part of the individuals involved, reacting and adapting to external forces in life. For my informants, this process began well before their initiation as activists in the Tea Party, but continued as their participation increased. This suggests that political homogeneity is increasingly similar for both activists and the general population.

3.1 LITERATURE: THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL BUBBLES

3.1.1 A National Trend

Scholars from a variety of fields find that people are more attached to specific political ideologies and more likely to live and socialize with other people who agree with them. Alan I. Abramowitz (2008) shows a vast increase in ideological and political congruity across the electorate. People who describe themselves as "conservative" are much more likely today than

in previous generations to consistently vote for Republicans or other conservative candidates, (and vice-versa). In fact, his work shows that rather than assessing individual candidates, today, voters rely more on partisan identity than on specific candidate characteristics. And as the electorate has become more attached to partisan ideologies, candidates and politicians themselves have become far more extreme, eliminating the moderate center - as so many observers have recently lamented (Bishop and Cushing 2008).

Political segregation and polarization is not merely at the individual level, but occurs in whole networks and communities - defined both by geography and social networks. For example, journalist Bill Bishop teamed up with Sociologist Robert C. Cushing to examine what they call "*The Big Sort*," (2008) the gradual "sorting" of Americans into politically homogenous communities, especially over the last nearly forty years. They draw on voting records to show a drastic increase in the percentage of the population living in "landslide" counties in presidential elections, that is, in counties where the winning candidate won by a margin of at least 20%. In 1974, this included less than a quarter of the population, yet in the very close 2004 presidential election, that number had doubled to include nearly half of all Americans.

Not surprisingly, their data show that the political segregation occurring at the county level is even more dramatic in the social institutions within these counties, such as churches and civic clubs. This is true, even in unexpected places; according to their analysis, county residence is a better predictor of political ideology than are the traditional demographic characteristics scholars frequently use, such as church attendance or gender. As the authors explain "….less than half of weekly church-goers and self-described Evangelicals in heavily Democratic counties supported the war in Iraq in 2004. In heavily Republican counties, however, this same demographic group supported the war three to one" (Bishop and Cushing 2008: 48). Thus, as

these data show, people are more attached to partisan identities, and more likely to be surrounded by others who agree with them.

3.1.2 Self-Segregation

Political segregation is not exclusively a result of people growing up in particular areas without exposure to different points of view. On the contrary, people often make choices about where to live, what kind of church to attend, and what political party to vote for, even while they are aware of a wide variety of options.

Journalist Avi Tuschman (2014) attributes the increase in political polarization and segregation partly to a growth in higher education, arguing that "Highly educated liberals become more liberal, while highly educated conservatives grow more conservative." Today, the growth of college-educated citizens may mean that more people feel more strongly about politics, and, since they are more able to make deliberate choices about where to live, politics is more likely to influence which neighborhoods, counties, and communities they inhabit. People deliberately select churches, shopping around for ones that meet their needs, often including a specific political orientation. As Bishop and Cushing explain (2008), migrants to new areas may not explicitly examine voting data before looking at homes, but they look at what sorts of businesses, schools, churches, restaurants, and other social institutions exist - widely understood symbols reflecting local political leanings. As people increasingly use political information to make choices about where to live, eat, shop and worship, they express agency in defining the political context of their lives. Thus, agency is a critical element in the widespread processes of political polarization and segregation.

The energy and effort that people exert in this process speaks to the increasing importance of political ideology as a source of personal identity; that political orientation even exists among priorities when choosing a neighborhood to live in or a school for your children to attend implies that it approaches religion, geographic identity, race, or class as a form of identity. Indeed, sociologists Neil Gross, Thomas Medvetz, and Rupert Russell (2011) posit that the future of partisan politics will be its development as a source of social identity: "....a possible interpretation....is that liberal and conservative now denote political status groups, akin to other status groups such as those around religion, ethnicity, or lifestyle" (344). They call directly for sociological analysis that assesses the role of "political status group membership" in collective action, as well as in other areas of political and social life (344).

Thus, research shows that political polarization and segregation is a self-perpetuating process in which people sometimes make deliberate decisions to move to particular communities or become involved in particular organizations - decisions which lead to further absorption into similarly-oriented social networks, and possibly, into "liberal" or "conservative bubbles."

3.1.3 Polarization, Segregation, and Activism

A growing body of work points to integral connections between political polarization, segregation, and activism. Among activists, political polarization and self-segregation is a well-established phenomenon; much social movement literature shows that activists often draw on ideological and social support in communities of like-minded people. For example, James Downton and Paul Wehr (1997) found that long-term peace activists "self-selected" friends, family and groups such that they operated in their daily lives in an environment very supportive of their activist peace work. Suzanne Staggenborg (1998) showed that a local women's

movement created a supportive community including multiple social centers, behavior also identified in studies of earlier women's movements (Rupp and Taylor 1987). In these instances, activists sought each other out and built supportive communities based on their shared beliefs and worldviews.

However, the recent trends of polarization and segregation imply that this process can also occur largely in reverse, whereby non-activists group together, encourage a particular ideology, and then enter into activism. Bishop and Cushing (2008) claim that political segregation is a cause and a symptom of polarization. Abramowitz (2011) does not address physical and/or social political segregation, but he attributes the rise of the Tea Party directly to increasing political polarity. According to Abramowitz, over the last forty years, increasing political polarization has led to a growth in political activism because "citizens perceive that more is at stake in elections" and are thus more compelled to participate (Abramowitz 2011: 197-198). With respect to conservatives, he claims polarization led to the growth of an "activist Republican base," which was "activated" by conservative elites (200).

This link between increased polarization, segregation, and activism is consistent with the claims of social movement scholars who have noted the dramatic spread in the frequency and acceptance of political protest in the United States over the same time period (Tarrow and Meyer 1998). As the salience of political identity increases (Gross at al., 2011), it influences where people live, work, shop, and socialize, (Bishop and Cushing 2008), which in turn leads to greater political homogeneity and, as a particular political ideology is constantly reinforced, increasing political polarity. Ultimately, these symbiotic processes may lead to the growth of socio-political bubbles. As the following subsection will show, this was the case with my informants in the Tea Party.

33

3.2 FINDINGS: LIVING IN A BUBBLE

With some variation, my informants function in a conservative bubble. They believe that the majority of people they interact with on a daily basis – particularly those they choose to spend time with - agree with them politically. However, the "shape" and strength of this bubble differed among activists, according to lifestyle and personal beliefs. For example, some had "liberal" coworkers whom they saw everyday but did not socialize with, while others did not work and socialized only with family and very close friends; both types of women had different social lives, but had similarly little interaction with anyone who was not conservative. While these women came from diverse backgrounds, in general, their lives were already politically segregated by the time they began their participation in the Tea Party, at which point their conservative bubbles became even stronger. Thus, the existence and maintenance of this bubble is a multifaceted process involving both conscious and unconscious decision-making on the part of my informants, as they reacted to external social forces.

3.2.1 Measuring the Bubble

My informants live in conservative bubbles that range from air tight to leaky – most with a leak or two. I asked them about any groups that they had participated in over the last five years, beginning immediately before their participation in the Tea Party. (Most women began participating sometime in 2010, 2009 at the earliest, and were all interviewed in 2013). I also asked what they did in their free time and whom they socialized with, following up with questions regarding time spent with family, extended family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, etc.

By describing the spectrum and the women who inhabit it with examples of several common patterns, I will illustrate the patterns in their social lives.

At the time of the interview, two women appeared to live in near-complete conservative isolation. They claimed that everyone with whom they regularly interacted was conservative. Not surprisingly, what these women shared was a relatively inactive social life. Neither worked, nor had large families, attended church or participated in formal or informal activities outside of the Tea Party.

For example Hillary, an extremely talkative woman in her sixties, had retired from several decades of teaching history in nearby public schools several years earlier, immediately before volunteering with the Tea Party. She had no immediate family and spent most of her time fixing up a house she had recently inherited. She described her social life as fairly limited: "Usually my socializing and mixing is with this group, [the Tea Party]. My college friends are spread out all over the states. We stay together, we talk to each other by phone." She claims these old friends "agree with everything" she says about politics and the Tea Party. As she'd grown up in a nearby county, she described frequently running into people in the store and at the beauty parlor, people with whom she sometimes talked about the Tea Party with, but who were not able and/or interested in joining. Hillary had attended at least one conservative seminar with a conservative group outside of the Tea Party, but otherwise had not become involved in other conservative groups.

Most of the women I spoke with lived in a slightly "leaky bubble," meaning they had some extended family or coworkers that they described as "liberal" or "Democratic." Among my informants, six of them fell into this category – women who knew and regularly interacted with at least one person they believed disagreed with them politically, although none were

deliberate friends. Compared to women in the first category, they had much more active social lives, and described spending significant time socializing with either family or friends. With one exception, they all worked outside the home, (even the exception was a retiree who was still working when she began her involvement with the Tea Party). All of these women had also become involved to some extent in other conservative groups, at least attending seminars or meetings, or serving as delegates to the Republican State Convention, (although none of these involved nearly as much commitment as their commitment to the Tea Party). Half of them were also more involved in formal social networks outside of politics, including churches and volunteer groups. However, even given all of this exposure to myriad social groups, their interaction with non-conservatives remained extremely limited, often involving only one or a couple family members, or coworkers they had not befriended.

For example, Candace, a warm and friendly woman in her sixties, had one of the most extensive social lives of any of the women I spoke to, yet she had very little interaction with non-conservatives. She was heavily involved in her church and in various groups associated with it, she volunteered extensively with the women's auxiliary branch of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and had for two years held a leadership position in the Tea Party that required an enormous time commitment. She had retired two years earlier after being a clerk for over twenty years in the same office. During that time, she reported a division whereby all of the administrative staff were conservative and the rest of the employees were liberal, and that she'd befriended only the other administrative staff members. She was married and had one daughter. While her local, nuclear family is all conservative, she'd been raised in a mid-Atlantic state where her extended family still lived, all were Democrats. She drove up north to see her family every few months,

and while she had talked about politics with them before, she said it was "….better not to….not very pretty."

Finally, the women on the most open end up the spectrum were three informants with at least one friend that they regularly saw or interacted with who disagreed with them politically. All of these women were heavily involved in church and related activities, two in other volunteer organizations as well. Two worked outside the home, and one stayed at home with her young children, whom she was homeschooling. Two described having exclusively conservative family members, one had at least one Democratic relative.

For example, Caroline is in her sixties and worked in a state government office where she said emphatically that she does not talk about the Tea Party: "Oh Lord, I don't mention the Tea Party at my job, I work for the State of Virginia, that's a 'no no.'" While she said they do not talk politics at work, she "hears things" and believes that her office is split between Democrats and Republicans. Outside of work, she socializes with family and friends regularly. Every Friday night, she and her husband have dinner with his cousin and his wife. Interestingly, she said they "generally agree" on "most things," yet the wife "did not vote the same way that we did [in the last presidential election]." This is the only instance I heard an activist say they generally agreed with someone who had voted for President Obama. This may have something to do with the fact that Caroline was the only woman to describe herself as a Republican, not a conservative. Still, she believed her church is conservative and this friend was the only one she could think of that did not agree with her politically. Thus, even among women living in the most diverse circles along the spectrum, people who disagree with them are rare exceptions.

3.2.2 Creating the Bubble

The variation in these women's social networks reflects the evolving nature of social life and way that deliberate decision-making and external forces build on each other. How they describe their social lives reflect varying levels of agency in this process.

Two women claimed direct responsibility for their segregated social lives, expressing a self-conscious interest in spending their free time exclusively with other conservatives. For example, when I asked Nancy, a forty-something-former-Bill Clinton-voter–turned-Tea-Party-leader whether her friends were "Republicans or Democrats"? She said "Republican, overall," but when pressed about potential liberal friends, she laughed hard and said: "No, I don't have any close friends that are liberal." She then followed by saying "….I think you pal around with people, when you have fun spare time, you're not gonna pal around with people who don't share your views of the world, you know?"[3] In another example, Charlotte, a woman who had been born and raised in a very conservative area she described as the Deep South, reported that she worked in an office with hundreds of employees among whom only a handful were conservative; she claimed that she did not think she had much "in common" with most of her coworkers, explaining "I think politics has something to do with that."

In a slightly different example, Ann, the daughter of Baptist missionaries in Africa and currently school administrator at a small Christian school, said that she wanted to focus her limited free time in a particular way: "It's not that I don't care to engage….in political discussion, but I sort of, have a limited amount of time and so I kind of move forward and act on

---

[3] At the time, I asked her about "Republicans and Democrats" here because we had been talking about her family whom she had described as Democrats, but later in the conversation, when discussing George W. Bush and George H. Bush, she described them as "conservative Republicans" and said she "didn't consider Bush to be conservative and share the same kind of views as I do." Thus, when she says that her friends share her values, I believe she means that they are conservative, not merely Republican.

what my convictions are and what my beliefs are, rather than doing a lot of, just political dialoguing."

Two more women explained that they had intentionally surrounded themselves with conservatives, less out of a specific interest in conservative people than to protect themselves from those who disagree with them. Candace explained: "It's a comfort. It's a comfort zone....I guess I feel, at my age, I need some comfort. I put up with a lot of crap for a long time." Another woman, Brenda, had been attached to fiscal conservatism for some time, voting for Perot for president in the 1990s. She told a story about how she'd had a very close friend who she said was a "radical leftist." They had been friends for years, until they had a big fight over politics that ended their friendship, after which Brenda decided she did not want another liberal friend.

> Ever since being burned by that liberal friend of mine....That actually was like a turning point in my life, I mean it was that traumatic for me....I would be hesitant to have another liberal friend, knowing the way that she treated me.

Another two women did not say directly that they had sought out other political conservatives, but did say they had intentionally pursued involvement in particular organizations and groups that reflected their personal value systems, which they recognized were likely tied to conservative politics. They assumed that other people made similar choices, and thus would meet like-minded people through the groups and institutions they chose. "It's not been a conscious effort," said Mary, a homeschool mom of two who, at the time, was pregnant with a third child:

> ....that's kinda how the chips have fallen, because....we do things that are the same. Like, we homeschool, so we have obviously have some similar viewpoints on that. We were, my husband and I, delegates to the Republican convention in Virginia a few weeks ago, and they were there [conservative friends] and we were there all day. So, you know we were hangin' out with them, and you know, Then we go to church with them, so.... It's not a conscious thing.... I think sometimes when

39

you do line up, your paths cross more than they would….if you have divergent views.

Even when women did not comment on the political character of their social networks directly, they described exerting considerable energy in selecting specific groups and organizations in which to participate, selections which often led to conservative social networks. This was often true with regard to churches. For example, Charlotte and her husband had declined to attend a church near them, instead attending church with her family when they drove six hours to her childhood home approximately once a month. "…if I'm gonna go to a church, I wanna go to a church that holds….the same principles and values that I hold. Not, what my husband calls, a watered down version," she explained, claiming it was disrespectful to dress casually, for example. Catherine, a bus driver and founding member of her local Tea Party, did not attend a church until her husband convinced her to go to a "home church" with him, a private worship session held in a private home. As he explained, other local churches were all "corporate," and only sought donations. Candace found her church after attending a 9/11-remembrance service that touched her. She also spent a lot of energy convincing her husband to join the VFW so that she could join the Women's Auxiliary. Mary left her previous church after she heard her pastor imply that he believed in relativism when he told her something was "her truth." She also homeschooled her children and carefully selected the program to reflect her values. All of these careful decisions virtually ensured that these women would spend most of their time in conservative social networks.

Even informants who did have contact with non-conservatives sometimes took action to mitigate the potential influence of alternative viewpoints. Many people who reported working with Democrats or liberals did not befriend them. Others chose not to discuss politics with friends and family who disagreed with them. Still others tended to compartmentalize and

explain the politics of people who disagreed in such a way that they clearly did not identify with them. For example, Rita, a retail department manager reported that basically everyone she knew was conservative, but then said that her husband and son were in a union and that "most people in unions vote Democratic." Mary, the homeschooling mom, enthusiastically claimed to have liberal friends (none of whom lived in the same state), but in her only example, implied that her friend's politics were due to his geographic location and sexual orientation, a cause and effect she struggled to articulate outright:

> I have some super liberal friends - one of my friends, and I love him dearly, I'd take a bullet for him….he and I [are] complete polar opposites. He lives in California. He is, homosexual….He believes in God, but I don't know….that he'd call himself a Christian.

Ultimately, only two participants mentioned regularly spending time with a non-family friend with whom they did not agree politically, without providing some explanation.

Of course, it is rarely possible to identify when, where, and to what extent individuals exercise choice and free will, since perceptions are always biased. However, it is clear from these women's explanations that they deliberately created their conservative bubbles.

3.2.3 Remote Social Networks: Media Consumption and Paper/Online Memberships

Conservative bubbles are not created only by social networks. Right wing media plays an important role in political segregation, polarization and activism (Skocpol and Williamson 2011; Street and DiMaggio 2011; DiMaggio 2012). Professional conservative advocacy groups also have an influence by disseminating news and information about grassroots organizing (Lo 2011).

My research is consistent with much of this analysis, finding that Tea Party activists consume conservative media and news and information from conservative groups. However, their consumption of conservative media was heavily influenced by the social interactions in

41

different parts of their lives. For example, women reported frequently discussing and comparing news from various conservative sources with each other, expanding the experience of consuming conservative media into a social process. Not everyone who hears a Glenn Beck episode is instantly converted to Tea Party conservatism; the impact of such media depends on social networks (among other factors) that support this particular conservative dialogue. Unfortunately, I did not consistently collect information regarding online and paper memberships until the latter half of my research, my data shows that in many instances, Tea Party activists' consumption of conservative news was related to their social networks.

Two women directly attributed their conservative participation to media, yet described "discovering" conservative media through people they knew "in the real world." For example, Candace's first involvement in a Tea Party –related group was in a local Glenn Beck-inspired group called "We Surround Them," a local collection of people who got together after Glenn Beck encouraged people to form such groups. She explained that her husband had been directed to listen to Glenn Beck from a friend, after he expressed his displeasure with the results of the 2008 presidential election, and that was how they heard about the first local organizing. (That group floundered and ultimately dissolved, at which point they found the local Tea Party group in which they currently participate.)

For Brenda, the process was even more transformative. Almost as soon as the interview began, she eagerly told me that, while she'd already had some conservative leanings, there was one specific person who was responsible for her greater commitment to conservatism, and that person was Rush Limbaugh. However, her story demonstrated that her husband was integral in decision to rely on Limbaugh as a source of news and information:

> My husband used to listen to him [Limbaugh] on the radio, and I never did. A lot of times
> I'd be upset about something that I heard on the news, and then he would tell me, 'Well,
> that's not really true - here's the way it actually happened.' And after he would explain

42

something to me, I'd say, 'Well, that makes all of the difference in the world, that changes entirely. How do you know all this stuff?' And he'd say 'I'm tellin' you, it's that guy I listen to, Rush Limbaugh.'

While Brenda credits Rush Limbaugh with her conversion, her narrative demonstrates that her husband also played a central role in her political development. Not only did her husband convince her to listen to Rush, but he also engaged with her in discussion around the news as produced by conservative media, thus reinforcing and supporting her attachment to conservative talk radio. In both instances, conservative media figures were highly influential in these activists' lives, but this influence was mediated through their social interactions in the "real world."

In another example, two other women reported "finding" conservative media after experience in the "real world" led them to become more conservative. For example, Nancy stopped watching "mainstream" news soon after she became involved in the Tea Party, because the information she heard on MSNBC contradicted what she heard at Tea Party meetings, leading her to distrust mainstream media:

> ….It was literally after I went to the meetings…because then I would come home and listen to [Chris] Matthews [of MSNBC] and go, 'Oh my God, what planet are you on?' I had not heard that. I had not…And I was just like, 'Where did you get this information, because that's not what I heard.' You know?

For Nancy, real-life interactions were more influential than media, (although there were likely other influential factors as well), and it was these interactions that led her to conservative media.

While the rest of the women did not relate specific stories regarding their interest in conservative media, they did all consume it. All eleven informants reported either watching Fox News, listening to conservative talk radio, and/or reading conservative websites such as The Blaze (Glenn Beck's site). Indeed, only two of the women described regularly consuming and actively seeking out mainstream or "liberal" news: Nancy read *Bloomberg* weekly, while

43

Catherine reported reading news online from an incredible variety of sources, including English translations of Pravda (a Russian paper run by the Communist Party) and even *Al Jazeera*. However, Catherine was a rare exception in this regard, and, despite constant exposure to other perspectives and a strong interest in "researching" on her own, she still felt that Glenn Beck was the most reliable news source and the one she trusted the most.

These women did not merely absorb the influence of right wing media unknowingly. Most of them expressed an awareness that they were receiving biased new sources, and many embraced it. According to Mary, her choice in news sources was very deliberate: "I realize that people have an angle, you know?…But I trust people because they espouse the same views that I do. So…I know that they're telling it from an angle that I would see it from as well." A few others prefaced their discussion of media consumption by saying something like "All the conservative ones…" indicating that they knowingly and intentionally sought out conservative news sources. Furthermore, many of them expressed great anger over perceived bias of the mainstream media. As Candace wrote in a follow-up email, after being told that I was a "liberal":

> Forgot to tell you before, the reason there is no positive information given in the main stream media (ABC, CBS, NBC, MSNBC, CCN) about conservatives and the tea party movement is because the mainstream media is owned and controlled by powerful liberals. It's in their best interests to ignore us and/or make fun of us.

Hostility towards mainstream media was commonly expressed among my informants, demonstrating again, consciousness regarding media consumption.

Surprisingly, few of my informants emphasized engagement with conservative news via social media, including Facebook and Twitter. Nearly half of them did not use social media sites, only two reported using it frequently, while the rest reported using it infrequently or did not mention it at all.

Finally, half of the women mentioned receiving emails or/or newsletters from conservative advocacy groups, yet this consumption too was often a direct result of in-person interactions. In fact, for most of these women, professional groups were something they became involved in after their involvement with the Tea Party. For example, some got emails from TeaParty.org or Freedomworks, organizations they heard about as they started participating in the Tea Party. However, one said that she and her husband found out about local Tea Party activity through an email listserv her husband was on, while another said that might have been the case. Two reported that they had been on conservative listservs for quite some time, one related to gun rights and gun ownership, the other via socially conservative organizations like Concerned Women for America.

Ultimately, as these examples demonstrate, my informants are not merely passive recipients of conservative news, but consume it as part of the dialogue and interaction in their social lives. They make deliberate choices to read and listen to particular news sources, decisions heavily influenced by their social networks. While right wing media certainly plays a role in the development of conservative bubbles and conservative activism, it must be understand as only one component of a multi-faceted process in which conservative women and men come to accept and trust these news sources, often via influences outside of the media itself.

3.3 CONCLUSION

This section has shown that my informants in the Tea Party function largely in conservative bubbles, a phenomenon that is consistent with larger national trends relating to political

45

segregation, polarization, and activism. However, my informants have not merely been passive figures in these large-scale social processes, but have been actively engaged in shaping their own lives and in doing so, the communities around them. This finding is particularly important because it speaks to the relationship between this mobilization and the geographic and social communities around it. These findings both support and add to earlier social movement studies.

First, I find that most Tea Party activists have been exposed to non-conservative influences at some point in their lives. For the most part, they are not attached to conservative ideology simply because they had never been exposed to anything else; many of them had had diverse life experiences before settling into their current lives. This is in contrast to women in anti-abortion and anti-ERA mobilizations of the 1970s and 1980s (Luker 1984; Matthews and De Hart 1990), many of whom were stay-at-home mothers without college degrees, who attended their local churches and had not spent substantial time outside of their towns and relatively small social communities. These women were allegedly shocked by modern feminism because it was completely foreign to them and ultimately threatening to their way of life.

Many of the Tea Party women in my study had been raised in other parts of the country, many of them in relatively liberal places. All but one had attended at least some college, and more than half had graduated with Bachelor's degrees. In this sense, my informants are more like the women in the "kitchen table activism" depicted in Lisa McGirr's (2001) work on conservatives in Southern California in the 1960s and 1970s. Although my informants were not as young nor as affluent as the anti-Goldwater campaigners and John Birch Society members McGirr depicts, many of my informants in the Tea Party worked outside the home (all of them had at one point in their lives, and half had had full careers), and over half had gone to college. Like McGirr's subjects, these Tea Party activists are not merely emerging from conservative

46

bubbles for the first time in their lives, but drawing on personal experience in and out of conservative circles. For example, one Tea Party activist had been a Criminology major and Sociology and Psychology double minor in college. Another had been involved in animal rights activism. While these women do live in largely conservative bubbles, this has not necessarily always been the case, but neither is it terribly recent.

Secondly, these conservative communities were developed before the women became political activists, not after. This is in contrast to many studies on the Left that examine social movement communities and networks in which activists become radicalized or conscious and then seek out others like them (Downton and Wehr 1997; Staggenborg 1998). While some of this behavior occurred with my informants (see the following subsection), most were already living and socializing with people who agreed with them before they had even heard of the Tea Party. After mobilizing, while they made friends and established connections in politically active circles, most changed their social circles very little – they still have the same close friends, the same spouses, and live in the same places, etc.

The following section will build on these findings by dealing in more detail with the perceptions of Tea Party participants regarding their activism and how they relate, as activists, to the rest of their communities.

4.0 LOCATING THE BUBBLE: ACTIVISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR COMMUNITIES IN GREATER SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

The previous section showed that national socio-political trends have the potential to impact social movement mobilization, as suggested by my informants in the Tea Party and their experience in a conservative bubble. This section builds on these findings by addressing how these social movement actors perceive themselves and their activist networks in relation to greater society.

Extensive literature shows that social movement actors may perceive themselves along a scale of "mainstream" to isolated, depending on the particular context. These perceptions reveal critical dynamics between the movement and the social and geographic communities in which they are located, information that informs the goals, strategies, and effects of the movement. Recent scholarship addressing the growth of conservatism points to the particular dynamics among conservative communities, whose relationship with the American "mainstream" waivers from alienated victimhood (Lassiter 2006) to confident majority (*see* Rohr 2010).

My findings on the Tea Party reveal a complex relationship with the communities they inhabit, dynamics that reflect the movement's overall claim to represent a broad population of Americans while simultaneously painting themselves as struggling "underdogs." This is evident in how my informants frequently assert that they speak for all "conservative Americans," thus implying a demographic many times the size of their activist networks. At the same time, many

simultaneously express a sense of alienation and claim to be an embattled minority. This internal contradiction is facilitated by the imposition of a complex definition of "conservative," one that is broad enough to include essentially everyone Tea Party activists identify with, activist or not, but narrow enough to create a contrasting population of non-conservatives by which Tea Partiers define themselves against. Thus, while they are unlikely to confront ideological challenge in their daily lives, they are a minority among their friends and family in their willingness to confront perceived enemies, a dynamic that results in a sense of isolation for some participants.

4.1 LITERATURE: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND SOCIETY

The relationship between social movements and society is complex and dynamic. While social movements often challenge society with claims on behalf of a specific minority group, they may also challenge the legitimacy of the state on behalf of the majority, claims that may shift and transform throughout the mobilization. These changes may be deliberately strategic, reflections of genuine beliefs, or combinations of both (Poletta 1997, 1999). Indeed, how activists perceive their relationship to greater society impacts how they mobilize and reflects their overall ideology and worldview.

Recent scholarship has encouraged observers to refrain from viewing social movements as simply opposed to or differentiated from dominant society, but rather as forces that are simultaneously products of society and change-creators within it (Steinberg 2002). Various conceptions of this view exist, including the "submerged networks" suggested by Alberto Melucci (1989), "dialogical analytic" described by Marc W. Steinberg (2002), and "intersectional construction of identity" proposed by Jo Reger, Daniel J. Myers and Rachel L.

Einwohner (2008), among others. While these interpretations vary significantly, they share an emphasis on the connections between social movement actors and the environment from which they emerge and in which they operate. Activists draw on the cultural meanings and paradigms of dominant society with which they are familiar, even as they re-interpret and create new frameworks and meanings. Social movements, depending on the context, may rely on shared claims to broaden their representation, or emphasize distinctiveness to create boundaries between groups within society. As these scholars show, the relationship between social movement actors and broader society shifts and evolves, but remains salient.

Social movement actors themselves perceive and react to these dynamics. Literature refers to the strategic work of social movement entrepreneurs and leaders who are sensitive to such dynamics in their efforts to "frame" movements in various campaigns (Snow and Benford 2000), but others also emphasize the "instinctual" nature of framing, in which actors rely on their genuine understandings and reactions to politics and events (Goodwin, Jasper and Jaswin 1999). Both perspectives reflect social movement actors' engagement and interaction with political and social institutions in a broader context (Alimi 2009; Chesters and Welsh 2004; Diani 1996).

Framing is not the only way to examine this dynamic; social movement actors also reveal their perceived relationships to greater society by their personal relationships in and outside of the movement. For example, many activists view creating a strong network of politically, socially, and emotionally supportive people an essential component of sustained activist involvement (Staggenborg 1998; Taylor 1989; Downton and Wehr 1997; Corrigall-Brown 2012). Activists who choose not to or who are not able to remove themselves from their pre-activist social networks sometimes feel ostracized or alienated from their earlier friends and family (Downton and Wehr 1997; Warren 2010).

However, most of this literature is built on case studies in which the activists consider themselves to be directly challenging dominant society that marginalizes them; many leftist activists today describe powerful moments of conversion, consciousness-raising and ideological transformation that changed their lives, often removing them from previous social networks (see Downton and Wehr 1997). In contrast, more "mainstream" movements, (also less demanding ones), do not necessarily involve the same transformation of social networks (Della Porta and Diani [1999] 2006). Florence Passy and Gian-Andrea Monsch (2014) show that supporters of a highly visible large national organizations (Greenpeace) did not involve particular social networks, but that engaged individuals were throughout involved society, existing without the creation of their own subculture. As Jo Reger (2008) found in a comparison of two feminist mobilizations, similar movements may mobilize very differently based on whether or not they perceive themselves to be in a welcoming or a hostile environment.

In conservative movements, where activist networks are not well-established and elite connections with mainstream political parties and organizations are highly influential, activists might not have the same interest and/or wherewithal to create a more exclusive activist community, and that elite leadership may have a vested interest in representing their politics as "mainstream." However, conservative ideology also has a history of relying on a "victimization" frame, which implies a level of alienation from the rest of society (Lassiter 2006). Recent scholarship examining the rise of conservatism has identified various dynamics among conservative populations that speak to the perceptions and self-understandings of conservative actors. For example, Andrew J. Perrin, J. Micah Roos and Gordon W. Gauchat (2014) find that adherents of distinct and even seemingly opposing conservative traditions, from "cultural Libertarianism" to "Biblical literalism," are linked together by a common conservative identity

51

that is based on shared cultural knowledge. As the following subsection will show, although conservative activists identify closely with the people in their surroundings in the conservative bubble, some still feel the need to build additional activist networks.

4.2 FINDINGS: THE NEWEST SILENT MAJORITY

A common refrain among Tea Party activists nationally is to identify themselves as the "new Silent Majority," thus explicitly claiming heritage in the conservative electorate who brought Republicans Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan to the presidency. In making this and the related representative claims to stand for "Americans," "the middle class," or "regular people," Tea Party activists attempt to identify themselves as mainstream Americans who are mobilizing against "radical" liberalism imposed by dominant elites. Indeed, President Nixon's depiction of the "Silent Majority" was intended to speak to a politically unmobilized population of Americans who did not identify with the progressive demonstrations of the anti-war and women's rights movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, possibly even with the Civil Rights Movement (Lassiter 2011). This call followed the growth of conservative grassroots mobilizations, whose participants acted in the name of patriotism to combat perceived communist threats through organizations such as the John Birch Society (McGirr 2001) – an organization many scholars have shown to be ideologically related to the Tea Party (Postel 2011). While the Birch Society and other groups had widespread influence throughout the period, historian Matthew Lassiter points out that the majority of citizens were not directly involved in these groups, and that the

electoral base that Nixon and Reagan created was much closer to the political center than were the conservative activists of the period (Lassiter 2006).

The Tea Party adopted the framing of the broader population, not a radical minority. For example, by claiming that the policies they advocate are derived directly from the Constitution, they imply that to disagree with their advocacy is to challenge the foundation of the American political system – a move that frames their opposition as the radicals, not themselves. Indeed, this is a variant of the common strategy among mainstream political parties, which all claim a direct heritage in the Constitution and the "Founding Fathers."

By repeatedly claiming to speak for or to act on behalf of a wider population of "Americans," "conservatives," or "regular people," Tea Party activists stress that they oppose extremist and radical liberal elements. While the Tea Party in some ways resembles the John Birch Society and Goldwater campaigners, it is not these political organizations that they overtly identify with, but rather with the broader electorate of the period. This distinction reveals their perceived relationship to mainstream current and historical population of white, middle class Americans.

My informants frequently made such broad representational claims. For example, Catherine, a working class woman who, as recently as 2008, had been a Hillary Clinton supporter and considered herself a Democrat, directly invoked the Nixon phrase and claimed that – contrary to popular depictions – the Tea Party represented the political views of the majority of Americans.

> …A lot of people think that the Tea Party is an extremist bunch of people….I think that we are absolutely the Silent Majority in America…I think that more people than not….feel….that limited government, fiscal responsibility and free markets….I think that more people than not in America feel like that. I don't think that….most people expect to have the government raise you from cradle to grave.

Catherine depicted Tea Party ideology in very broad terms, outlining a general political agenda that, doubtlessly, many Americans share - particularly conservatives. By claiming that most Americans don't "expect to have the government raise you from cradle to grave," she implied that those who disagree with the Tea Party are the true extremists, with a radically different political perspective from the majority of Americans.

Informants rarely implied that the majority of Americans supported their specific political agenda items. Rather, some claimed that many people, especially conservatives, agreed with general Tea Party ideology, but simply did not know enough information or have enough interest to have formed opinions regarding specific political issues. For example, Nancy, a middle-aged woman who had voted for Reagan and Clinton because she was attracted to their "optimism," claimed that many conservatives merely hadn't been "paying attention," but would soon see how damaging Obama's policies were, after "Obamacare" went into effect. "There's a lot of hidden people out there that just, I just think they have not listened enough to the issues - they do not pay attention enough."

It was clear from my participants' statements that they largely identified with the "hidden people" in their communities – who they believed were conservatives, but were not Tea Party participants. Many went out of their way to describe themselves as "regular" people, much like the people they know and spend time with who are not in the Tea Party. They described working class and middle class jobs, and "conservative" homes and lifestyles. Many of them emphasized their statuses as political novices – claims that were particularly salient to their own comparisons between themselves and "elites" in Washington, (Republicans and Democrats) who they felt the Tea Party challenged. In this way, they conveyed their strong identity with the working and middle people they believe they represented.

Further, my informants' repeated references to Patriotism, Constitutionalism, and American ideals underscore their claim to represent the interests of a population bigger than themselves: "….[It's] not just [about] me…and my rights….property rights - everything rights," explained Candace, "It's all about all of us Americans that were born here." Even while Candace advocates, merely in passing, the exclusion of foreign-born Americans, she speaks in the name of a much broader population. Other Tea Party activists claimed to be working on behalf of future generations, and were frustrated that friends of theirs with their own children weren't becoming involved. Throughout, all of the women I interviewed described their ideals as directly derived from the American political system. As others have noted, this claim is exclusionary in that it emphasizes a white, native-born ownership over American national heritage (Zeskind 2009). But it also reflects an attachment to a population much broader than their activist networks. While patriotic claims are certainly a political strategy, in the Tea Party they also reflect a genuine belief that these activists are the inheritors of the American political tradition and that to oppose their agenda is to challenge the cultural and ideological foundation of the United States

All these related claims – to represent Americans, conservative Americans, or "regular people" – are certainly influenced by Tea Party participants' social location in the conservative bubble. Given that they believe that nearly everyone they know and most of the people they spend time with agree with them politically, it is easy to see how they became convinced that they represent a much larger population. While some of them described themselves as the majority of the population while others assumed they were a smaller group, all maintained that they represented something much more popular than is demonstrated in their local meetings.

To some extent, these activists are correct: numerous polls over the four years since the Tea Party mobilization began have indicated that anywhere from approximately 20% to 40% of the population supports or views favorably the Tea Party (PewResearch 2013; Sullivan 2013). Even some of the most radical claims of the Tea Party are supported by a large percentage of Americans. For example, a 2010 poll found that 40% of Americans and an incredible 67% of conservatives think that President Obama is a Socialist, while one in four Americans would go so far as to say "he is a domestic enemy that the U.S. Constitution speaks of" (Schlesinger 2010). And of course, these supporters are most likely to be found close to home for Tea Party activists: Although Tea Party data is difficult to come by the "South Atlantic" has the country's highest number of Tea Party participants, and all of the major population centers in the commonwealth of Virginia have multiple and active Tea Party groups (Burghart 2013).

4.3 FINDINGS: LONELY MEMBERS OF THE MAJORITY

Despite living in politically homogenous communities where they were unlikely to encounter significant ideological challenge, and a shared belief that their movement is broadly representative, nearly half my informants expressed feelings of political isolation and alienation – emotions that the Tea Party helped alleviate for them. Three women described this feeling as a motivation for joining the Tea Party. For example, Catherine, who founded her local Tea Party group and worked with a political mix of people but otherwise spent time with conservatives, described the early process of organizing as primarily educational and social: "Well, I guess when we first started, we were more about educating each other and really, more of a

camaraderie feeling - that you were not alone, because everybody….was being bombarded about how great this Administration was, how wonderful everything was gonna be." Her husband, the group's co-founder said he had been "depressed" and gave a very dramatic depiction of their early days: "Now people realize that they're not by themselves. In the beginning, I felt like I was alone." This couple said they knew a lot of people who had since changed their minds, but when I asked whether these people had previously disagreed with them, or merely been "uninformed," they quickly replied that they had been "uninformed."

Other women also said that one of the reasons they enjoyed the Tea Party was the comfort and support it provided them, implying that they felt alienated from the outside world. The most striking example involved Candace: When she began her participation with the Tea Party, she worked in an office with liberals, but was only friends with her conservative coworkers. Still, she had the most extensive conservative social network of all my informants, including regular participation in church and volunteer activities, all in conservative communities. Our discussion prompted her to consider the political makeup of her friends and family, and she admitted that she was living in a "bubble": "So I guess I'm like, in a bubble around me….Guess that's what I'm doing," she said out loud, but almost to herself. As we continued to talk and she pondered it further, she expressed more ownership over this experience: "Yeah, you know, I guess I do put myself in a bubble, and I only….associate on purpose I guess…. I have to think about that."

So while she openly admitted to spending nearly all of her time with people she felt agreed with her politically, only a few minutes previously, she had described her social experience in the Tea Party as a relief from the isolation and alienation she felt as a conservative: "….In this world of liberalism, everywhere, out there, taking away our freedoms, we felt like,

we, as women in this Tea Party, we needed to have each other to talk to - to lean on." She

described the "comfort" she derived from spending time with "like-minded" people with whom

she shared similar interests:

> It's like a support and praise group, all wrapped into one; we're all like-minded
> and we all believe the same things, we're all working towards the same goal, and
> that's unusual….we….got so much off our chest, and felt so good to know that
> we had so many like-minded, especially women, in our group. That it was just a
> comfort thing for me.

Still, feelings of isolation were not the dominant emotion my informants expressed. Only

half described this kind of reaction, and even among these women, some expressed contradictory

feelings at other points during the interview. Furthermore, none of them felt so alienated that

they felt they needed to move, change jobs, or create entirely new social circles, as have activists

in some other movements (Downton and Wehr 1997; Warren 2010). These contrasting feelings

speak directly to the activists' perceptions of themselves as related to their communities. The

following two subsections will address the origins of these overlapping responses.

4.4 FINDINGS: DEFINING "CONSERVATIVE:" POLITICS AND WORLDVIEWS

About halfway through the course of my fieldwork, I attended an event sponsored by a local Tea

Party group entitled "What is a conservative?" In an hour and a half-long panel, three speakers

from around the commonwealth discussed their views on conservative politics to answer for

themselves "Am I a conservative?" Several informants had strongly encouraged me to attend in

order to better understand the movement, but some clearly also believed that this panel was

important for them personally to see. For all but one of my participants, the term "conservative"

was essential to their self-understandings, and it was important to them to continuously improve their comprehension of the word and its implications.

The speakers at this event repeatedly emphasized components of a political agenda that included smaller government, decreasing regulation, an attachment to the "original" intentions of the Founding Fathers and the writers of the Constitution, etc. This was consistent with the definition of political conservatism my informants had described. However, while they were extremely attached to the word as related to their political activism, they were equally likely to use it to describe a much more general, ideological perspective that they attributed to people without any connection to the Tea Party or even to conservative politics. In this way, my informants' multifaceted use of the word "conservative" reflects how they feel similar to - and yet sometimes alienated from - the rest of their communities. The following discussion will describe the various meanings of the word "conservative" as implied by my informants, with attention to how these meanings reflect my informants' perceptions regarding their relationships with their broader communities and social networks.

In my research, it was immediately clear that the term "conservative" was the word Tea Party activists use to identify their political orientation. Ten out of eleven informants labeled themselves this way, nine of them in response to the open-ended question: "How would you describe yourself politically?" Furthermore, it was also the way that they described the Tea Party movement as a whole. Two women specifically referred to their mobilization as the "conservative movement," indicating the collection Tea Party and similar groups, (for example, the Glenn Beck inspired We Surround Them or the 9/12 organizations). Two women described Tea Party rallies as "conservative rallies," while others referred to "conservative folks" or "conservatives" when talking specifically about Tea Party activists.

Furthermore, throughout the interviews, the activists repeatedly used the term to make distinctions between people they supported politically and those they did not. This was particularly the case in regard to the difference between establishment Republicans and conservatives – a distinction all but one of my informants made. For example, Mary, a relatively recent conservative convert, responded to my question about her political party affiliation by explaining that she technically had none and would vote for whatever candidate was conservative: "I vote Republican more, because the typical Republican candidate lines up more with conservatism - although not all of them do." In this instance, Mary, like most of my informants, emphasized the distinctiveness of political conservatism as she perceives it. As another informant explained, political conservatism (according to Tea Party activists) reflects a specific interpretation of the Constitution, one that many Republicans do not share: "I didn't like George H. Bush. I thought - he was not a conservative. His son is not a conservative. And by that I mean truly fiscally and Constitutionally conservative." According to my informants, the term "conservative" has a specific and distinct political meaning that excludes many people, particularly "establishment" Republicans, who would doubtlessly identify as conservatives themselves.

However, despite the specificity my informants attached the political use of the term, they still identified most of their friends, family, acquaintances as "conservatives." I found this surprising, given the depiction of Tea Partiers as extremists within the Republican Party (Parker and Barretto 2013) I expected Tea Party activists to tell me that they had a lot of friends, who were loyal to the Republican Party, supported immigration reform as a business necessity, etc. However, this was not the case. Very rarely did informants distinguish between Republicans and

conservatives with whom they had a personal relationship with. Rather, they did so when they described elected or Republican Party officials.

When I pressed a few informants about differences between conservative activists and their friends and family who were conservative but non-activist, they very rarely drew distinctions related to politics or ideology. For example, Candace explained that the women in her various formal social networks shared the same political views, but simply did not want to become involved. When I asked her if they "agreed with her politically" she responded "Most of them the same. We're all pretty much conservative, pretty conservative." But when I asked her if they "support" the Tea Party, she emphatically replied in the negative. When I pressed her to explain the difference between herself and conservatives who do not support the Tea Party, she merely said that they did not want to get involved: "They're doing their own thing their own way. 'I have to do it my way. I don't wanna join a group, that's gonna tell me to do, what not to do….;" I asked her again if they "really" agreed with and cared about the same issues, and she confidently responded affirmatively. Similar exchanges occurred in nearly all of my interviews. Other than the few exceptions of liberal or progressive friends, the political distinctions my informants drew were variations on conservatism. While a few people mentioned Libertarianism or more liberal social views, none indicated that these distinctions distinguished them from conservatism, and in fact de-emphasized such differences (a few even identified themselves this way). And when they told me about failed attempts to recruit their conservative friends, family, and acquaintances to participate in the Tea Party, not a single woman provided an ideological or specific political answer. Rather they described lack of interest, knowledge, or, in a few instances, a fear of government retribution.

However, a specific political orientation was only one aspect of the conservative identity Tea Party activists implied. For my informants, the term "conservative" refers to a political agenda intimately tied to a specific worldview or value system, something they described as occurring at a deep, personal level. This dual meaning was immediately apparent in the way that my informants responded to questions about their political views with a mixture of both political and more personal worldview elements. For example, when I asked Charlene, a stay-at-home mother of two recently grown children, how her political views evolved over her life, she began with a personal narrative. She described her strong admiration for her father, who was a small business owner but had grown up the son of a sharecropper in the deep South, who she believed had achieved the American Dream "due to his own efforts." She then described her experience in that household as "essentially the beginning of my involvement as a conservative person." While she described conservatism as a specific political orientation that would not apply to many Republicans, she also described it as something she first became "involved" in completely outside of an overtly political context.

Throughout the interviews, informants elaborated on their identification as "conservative" either by articulating specific political beliefs, or by describing a broader worldview. For example, Hillary, a single woman in her sixties who had taught social science for decades in local public schools, said she was a conservative because of her personal worldview, then transitioned seamlessly to a more specific political explanation: "Well, I think conservative. You know, I believe that people should work for what they have. They shouldn't expect other people to give it to them." This account was followed immediately by a political explanation: "I believe….that the government should be run exactly the way it's laid out in the Constitution….I do believe in fiscal [conservatism] F-I-S-C-A-L, definitely."

Tellingly, several activists specifically mentioned the principles of Christian faith as influential in their political development. As Candace described her political conversion from being a Democrat: "I think the first step for me was becoming a born-again Christian, reading the Bible, see what the Lord has done for us, and what how he wants us to live, and, that is totally conservative, his view, Jesus' view for the world and how to live is conservative…." For Candace, her political views are derived from the same principles that dictate daily life. From this perspective, she explained the perceived predicament of her son-in-law, a man she believed shared a similar worldview as she did, but because of his work was hesitant to express, or even to develop his political thoughts: "….he's conservative to the core, but then, he's got his….personal hat, and he's got his work hat on, and he's gotta be completely different." By referring to him as "conservative to the core," she went beyond saying that he simply agrees with her on certain political issues and merely will not discuss them but she implied that he is a particular kind of person with a particular worldview.

It is important to emphasize that these two facets of the term "conservative," political and based on a worldview, were used simultaneously to describe a single identity. This complex meaning of "conservative" reflects my informants' conflicting feelings towards the conservatives they knew outside of the Tea Party: While they believed that everyone agreed with them politically, some still felt isolated, possibly because they were frustrated with their friends, family and acquaintances who demurred mobilizing and actually advancing their shared interests. My informants rarely expressed alienation from their friends and family due to ideological disagreements. Rather, they expressed frustration that more people would not join them.

4.5 CONCLUSION

As this section has described, my informants inhabit communities that they feel are largely supportive of their activist work. While this generally results in feeling that their movement represents a much larger population, it can also result in feelings of isolation that only a small minority of people are willing to mobilize on behalf of this population. As the country becomes more politically divided and communities become more politically homogenous, people's existing social networks may provide sufficient emotional and ideological reinforcement to support political activism. As this occurs on an increasingly large scale, societal conceptions of "mainstream" or "dominant culture" may become relative concepts based on specific geographic and social location.

5.0 BUBBLE RECRUITING:

TEA PARTY MOBILIZATION IN A CONSERVATIVE BUBBLE

The previous section demonstrated how ideologically and culturally similar Tea Party activists feel towards the people in non-activist networks around them. The following section will build on those findings to demonstrate how this similarity facilitated "self-recruitment" (Luker 1984) and "stranger recruitment" (Jasper and Paulsen 1995) into the Tea Party through "bubble recruiting."

In the conservative bubble, individuals are constantly exposed to so many different conservative influences that distinctions between activist and non-activist events and among sources of information and experiences are sometimes either unnoticeable or even irrelevant. Thus, recruitment narratives among my informants often follow non-linear trajectories in which activists learned about the Tea Party movement and information about their core issues simultaneously through national media and local movement and non-movement sources. Indeed, by targeting members of the conservative bubble, Tea Party leaders merely had to advertise their organizations in order to rapidly mobilize a constituency. In some cases, based on their experiences prior to mobilizing, women showed up ready to "dive in" and participate. In others, their commitment to becoming a political activist developed fully after learning more inside of the movement. In any case, the cohesiveness of the conservative bubble ensured a consistency between the movement's political narrative and the extra-movement narrative, a dynamic that

facilitated rapid and broad mobilization throughout the area. Thus, my findings regarding recruitment patterns in the Tea Party in Virginia reflect and advance existing literature regarding social movement recruitment and social networks by identifying the interplay of movement and non-movement influences in politically homogenous spaces.

5.1 LITERATURE: "SELF-RECRUITMENT"

A large body of literature points to the importance of social networks in social movement recruitment. However, many authors show that social networks play a much less direct or less obvious role in recruitment in particular types of movements and in particular circumstances: where movements have high visibility (Passy 2003), movements are tied to "moral shocks," (Jasper and Paulsen 1995; Jasper 1997) social networks are non-existent, (Jasper and Paulsen 1995) or participation is considered either/or low-risk or low-commitment (Passy 2003; Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen 1981). Furthermore, in their recent critique of the field, Passy and Monsch (2014) point to the importance of differentiating the role of network relationships in socializing a potential activist to be sympathetic to the cause and inspired to believe in the efficacy of protest and in presenting and encouraging specific participation opportunities. Drawing on McAdam and Paulsen (1993), Passy and Monsch also emphasize the processual nature of recruitment, in which private and organizational ties may have different roles at different points in the recruitment process. The following subsection will rely on these claims to orient a discussion of the various circumstances that facilitate recruitment not directly related to social networks.

The most obvious factor in facilitating social movement recruitment outside of social networks is high visibility, particularly through the media (Passy 2003). This element is essential to self-recruitment both as a component in socialization and in identifying specific opportunities. Through media exposure, individuals may come to both identify with a movement and/or to be aware of its existence and opportunities to participate. Especially in the context of the rise of conservative media (Burack and Snyder-Hall 2013), the salience of movement visibility is clear.

For example, using a comparative study of different types of social movement organizations, Passy (2003) showed that in the World Wildlife Fund, a high-visibility movement, 30% of members were recruited via media exposure, a proportion that was nearly twice as high as in the Bern Declaration, low-visibility movement. In another example, Luker (1984) found that anti-abortion activists who mobilized after the high visibility decision in *Roe v. Wade* referred to the decision as a moment of realization for them, after which they sought opportunities to participate. One activist described her husband showing her an article in the paper about the decision one evening and she was so struck by it that she saved the paper for many years.

A second condition that facilitates self-recruitment is the occurrence of a "moral shock" (Jasper and Paulsen 1995; Jasper 1997). According to Jasper, a moral shock occurs when individuals experience an event or learn new information that somehow either evokes or challenges deeply held beliefs. Moral shocks cause a strong emotional response that makes people "inclined toward political action" leading some to seek out opportunities for mobilization outside of their social networks or personal ties to a movement (Jasper 1997: 106). Such a phenomenon has been documented in many protest mobilizations, including *Roe v. Wade* and the

67

anti-abortion movement (Luker 1984), exposure to violent images of animal abuse in the animal rights movement (Jasper and Paulsen 1995), and information about U.S. involvement in Latin American wars in the peace movements (Nepstad 2004).

The theory of moral shocks emphasizes a particular moment in time when potential recruits suddenly experience an emotional "trigger" (Jasper 1997), but theorists also emphasize the processual nature of the experience. A moral shock can occur as an immediate reaction (as with the anti-abortion activists after the *Roe v. Wade* ruling), or a longer-term response to a cumulative series of events in which a single moment serves as a "last straw" (Jasper 1997: 106) or a "crystallization of awareness" (as with incidents involving personal observation of racism for white anti-racists who had begun to question racial inequality) (Warren 2010: 33). Indeed, the distinction between these two patterns of moral shock is not always discrete. Individuals are shocked by events or pieces of information that conflict with their existing ideological and moral framework, which is itself evolving.

What distinguishes mobilization through moral shocks from other types of mobilization is that it largely occurs outside of sustained social movement participation (Jasper 1997) and the influence of social movement discourse (Wettergren 2005). Effective social movement leaders do produce shocks (for example, by showing gory images of violent animal rights abuses), or take advantage of external shocks (for example, by depicting *Roe v. Wade* as a threat to civilized society). However, these interactions do not transform individuals' ideologies or frameworks, but rather mobilize people or radicalize them with "shocking" new information that either deepens their beliefs or persuades them they need to take action in response (Gould 2009). Thus, the explanatory power of the moral shock concept is that it shows one way that large numbers of new activists mobilize rapidly. Furthermore, it identifies a specific mechanism by

68

which cultural and political ideologies among the general population contribute to social movement mobilization.

Finally, the literature notes other movement and activist characteristics that correlate with self-recruitment. One is a low risk or low commitment required. When movement participation is not life-threatening, or when activism is not a life-changing time commitment, people are more likely to self-recruit (Passy 2003). Another factor is relative biographical availability; that is, people are more "open" to recruitment when they have fewer personal constraints and commitments (Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen 1981).

The following sections demonstrate how these circumstances occur in the conservative bubble.

5.2 FINDINGS: TEA PARTY "SELF-RECRUITS"

After the Tea Party mobilized so rapidly and in such great numbers, many observers asked to what extent these groups were populated either by participants of previous conservative mobilizations, churches in the Christian Right, or even local private organizations such as parent-teacher associations. Some evidence of experience in these kinds of organizations has been found. For example, Skocpol and Williamson (2011) discover that some of their informants had first experienced grassroots politics in the 1964 Goldwater campaign and several scholars have noted the high incidence of evangelicals in the Tea Party and some leadership connections between the Tea Party and the Christian Right (Montgomery 2011). Yet, no examination has found this to be a widespread explanation for the mobilization of the Tea Party. While decentralization of the grassroots component may mean that some Tea Parties are tied to a

specific organization or social network, none has been identified as such so far and my study also finds that this was not the case. The following section will describe the different ways that my informants first learned about the Tea Party and decided to participate. I conclude by describing patterns of failed recruitment by my informants among their own friends, family and acquaintances.

Although most of my informants were not recruited through conservative networks, many did have close ties to conservative organizations such as churches or volunteer groups. Only two women I interviewed reported being recruited into the Tea Party through a friend or acquaintance. The remaining nine described processes of "self-recruitment" or "stranger recruitment," in which they pursued participation after exposure to the movement from sources to which they had little commitment or obligation. Furthermore, in nearly all of the cases, the women described learning about the Tea Party a variety of ways and from a variety of sources. In fact, many could not exactly recall how they found out about exactly which Tea Party-related group or rally because they had been exposed to information about the Tea Party from so many different sources around the same time. However, by piecing together the events and trying to place them in chronological order, it is possible to identify common patterns and factors by which my informants first learned about the Tea Party.

Nearly all informants mentioned the media as an early source of information about the Tea Party. For most women, media (conservative and mainstream) provided information as to what the Tea Party was nationally and what it claimed to represent although they learned about the specific details of their first Tea Party-related event through local advertisements. In general, recruitment narratives included references to a combination of sources of information. For example, Candace reported that her husband was upset after President Obama's election, he was

"advised" by a friend to listen to Glenn Beck, and from him they heard about the Glenn Beck Tea Party-style group "We Surround Them," (the title comes from Beck's assertion that politicians are "surrounded" by "regular" people and need to be accountable to them (Beck 2009)). This group ultimately dissolved, leaving Candace and her husband to seek out another group, which they eventually found through a Tea Party ad in a local paper.

Four women mentioned local signs advertising Tea Party groups along the highway as the first source of information about specific meetings. Placed on private property along the highway, these signs are favored by a handful of groups in the state. Large, wooden and yellow, they are impossible to miss. They sometimes display meeting times and locations, and other times conservative messages. They continue to get attention today, and were certainly integral to early mobilization. For example, Brenda, a homemaker who hadn't engaged in politics since a few youthful animal rights' protests many years earlier, explained that she had initially heard about the Tea Party from news and felt compelled to join: She found her opportunity after seeing a sign along the highway advertising a local group: "Yep. I saw a sign one day and it said something about it, and so I guess that was how I found it - cuz they didn't have a website back then. It was from the sign. It said where they meet and what time, and I just went to a meeting."

A few other women in the same area mentioned seeing physical signage as something that stuck with them. For example, Nancy, an independent health insurance broker and real estate agent, described seeing the a sign the same day she first heard about the Tea Party on the Christ Matthews show on MSNBC:

> ….it just so happened, I see this sign, it's posted in front of our neighborhood. I go home, I turn on the news and literally, as I turn on the news, they're talking about 'Tea Party groups are starting to get ahold across the country,' but I'm thinking this is weird, I've never heard of this before, so I start listening to the news thing, and then I thought, you know what, I'm gonna go to the meeting.

Most others were less sure about their memories; three said they assumed they heard about their first rally from conservative list-serves or conservative websites, but couldn't remember which ones. Others reported seeing both news coverage and local advertisements around the same time. One mentioned national mainstream media, local signage, and an encounter with a stranger at the dump who struck up a conversation about "the government" and told her about her local Tea Party group. Many women say they got information about their local groups at larger local rallies. For these women, their decisions to join the Tea Party were the result of exposure from several sources.

Only two women were recruited to their first Tea Party event by people they knew, that is, directly via a traditional social network. Rita reported that she'd heard about the Tea Party "by word of mouth," and while someone she worked with told her the details of her first meeting, she attended alone, but found that she knew a number of people at the meeting once she arrived. Mary was recruited by someone she knew through her church. Interestingly, at the time, Mary lived in another state and did not attend a heavily conservative church, and even reported engaging in an intense political discussion with an Obama supporter in Bible study around that time. Before moving to Virginia, she had also lived in a politically mixed neighborhood and had friends nearby who did not agree with her politically. At the time she was recruited, in could be argued that she did not live in a conservative bubble.

Despite functioning in conservative bubbles where pretty much everyone they know agrees with them politically, my informants largely failed as recruiters. That is, not only were their conservative social networks irrelevant to their own recruitment, they were not sites at which they could recruit others. Five women reported attempting to recruit friends, family and/or acquaintances; four did not even try. Of those who did try, only one reported success, and

she, in fact, was the founder of a local group who had started it with a few of her coworkers. No one else reported successfully recruiting any participants, other than one or two new people who they convinced to stop by a meeting.

This lack of success was not primarily due to political disagreements. In fact, several reported that people thanked them for their efforts. Granted, they were certainly more likely to target people who they believed agreed with them, but at least one mentioned trying to recruit everyone she came into contact with.

Many potential recruits turned down Tea Party activists with the usual responses, either too busy or simply not interested in politics. Informants also reported two common reasons that they believed were a distinct problem for the Tea Party. Three described collective action as somewhat inconsistent with their overall views. As Charlotte, a married professional in her late thirties explained, collective organizing goes against their beliefs in the importance of individualism and independence:

> I think it has to do with….libertarian, ideals. ' Stay out of my life. I know what's best for me, how dare you presume that you know what's best for me?'….If I don't want the government to impose upon me what they want me to do, why would I want to impose upon some poor soul pumping gas at the next gas pump, what my political views are?

According to Charlotte, political advocacy sometimes felt like intruding in people's privacy. This informant had a particularly obvious Libertarian inclination, but even some of the more traditional conservatives said similar things about conservatives they knew not wanting to get involved in politics or to join groups.

The other reason that organizing for the Tea Party was difficult, my informants reported, was a fear of governmental retribution. Charlotte joked that her husband called people with such fears "tin hat people" because they were always worried someone was out to get them, but even while he joked, she and her husband did understand and take very seriously this concern, as did

my other informants. This was an especially prominent topic at the time, with the news that IRS agents had scrutinized new non-profit applications with words like "Patriot" and "Tea Party" in their names – a move that conservatives claimed was a politically motivated attack on the Tea Party. As Nancy, who was also a health insurance broker explained it to me, the new healthcare law involved the IRS (in order to determine income eligibility) in the providence of health services. If medicine ultimately became socialized, she explained, she feared that opponents of the government would be penalized by being prevented from accessing healthcare: "If you don't like my politics, then does that mean I don't get a heart transplant? If you don't like my politics then does that mean I don't get a lung transplant?"

Thus, nearly all of the women in my sample sought out participation opportunities in the Tea Party, joining often without knowing anyone save their own husbands, in response to local advertisements, signs and media attention. The circumstances that led to this type of pattern are directly related to the functioning of the conservative bubble, as I will discuss in the next subsection.

5.3 FINDINGS: "SELF-RECRUITMENT" IN THE CONSERVATIVE BUBBLE

Earlier, I identified a series of conditions that facilitate social movement recruitment without social networks. I also described the patterns of this "self" and "stranger" recruitment among my informants in the Tea Party. The following discussion will link these claims by showing how and to what extent these conditions were present in the case study addressed here and how they are related to the presence of the conservative bubble. As this section will show, throughout the

recruitment process, activists were exposed to conservative forces inside and outside of the movement simultaneously, resulting in a recruitment process by which the Tea Party movement itself played varying roles.

One factor that facilitated Tea Party recruitment was the high movement visibility of the Tea Party. The vast media coverage of the Tea Party is well documented (Banerjee 2013; Boykoff and Laschever 2011; Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin 2011). Media coverage is very significant, ensuring that many private citizens, even those without any history of activism, would learn about the Tea Party. According to a national poll in April 2010, only 28% of Americans reported never having "heard or read" about the Tea Party, while 50% said they had "heard or read" "a lot" or "some" (New York Times/CBS News 2010).

These effects were likely magnified for people living in a conservative bubble. Indeed, the right-wing media has a very strong presence in conservative communities, and has been integral to the growth of the Tea Party (Skocpol and Williamson 2011). However, it is not only Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh that were influential figures among my informants, but local conservative news sources and personalities as well. For example, Doc Thompson, a conservative radio personality currently in Ohio, got his start out of the Richmond area and was an early supporter of the Tea Party locally. Among my informants in the conservative bubble, local figures raised the profile of the Tea Party and linked it to a local identity.

Finally, high movement visibility is related to the timing of the mobilizations. While the first Tea Party rallies in the country took place in February 2009, none of the women I interviewed became involved in local groups until the spring of 2010, at which point most of their groups were just starting up. By that point, several national rallies had been held in nearby Washington, DC, as well as in Richmond and other parts of the state. National and local news

had spent the last year frequently covering - and in the case of conservative media, encouraging - the Tea Party. By the time Tea Party founders began announcing themselves publicly in the area, all they had to do was make their presence known to attract participants. For example, Catherine, who, with her husband and several coworkers founded her local Tea Party, merely placed an advertisement in their local paper showing the time and location of their first official meeting, to have 80 people show up, only a handful of whom they had ever met before. As mentioned previously, nearly half of my informants mentioned visible signage in the area as a factor in their decision to participate. As I learned from one of the women responsible for the signage, the signs have all been placed on private property along major highways, by sympathetic property owners - some of whom actually participate in the Tea Party and some of whom don't. Apparently the locations were found by word of mouth in the community. By the time I visited the area in the summer of 2013, Tea Party license plates, window stickers and flags were common sights all over the area, proof that the visibility of the movement remained in the area.

A second condition of the self and stranger recruitment present in my case study and in the conservative bubble more generally is the common occurrence of "moral shock." Like the activists discussed in the case studies on moral shock, my informants described particular events and pieces of information in terms that clearly demonstrated shock. They also described their ideology not as changing, but as deepening or becoming a mobilizing force through their participation in the Tea Party. However, while many described shocks as occurring prior to their mobilization, they also identified instances of shock after beginning participation in the Tea Party and learning more about the issues they cared about. Many women described both. Thus, as in other cases, the incidence of moral shock in Tea Party mobilization reflects the salience of

existing ideologies and beliefs in the population as they are incorporated into social movement mobilization. However, in this case, the similarities with which they describe occurrences of shock before and after their mobilization demonstrate the weakness of the boundary between activist and non-activist networks, as they are populated by people with similar beliefs and access to similar sources of information. In the conservative bubble, moral shocks occur similarly inside and outside of the Tea Party.

The language used by my informants revealed their overwhelming shock to national political events prior to and in the early stages of their participation in the Tea Party. Many described shock and outrage over fiscal spending associated with the Great Recession, immediately before the Tea Party mobilized. For example, Catherine expressed great disgust and shock with both the mortgage bailout and the stimulus package in particular, describing her opposition to this fiscal legislation in overtly moral tones:

> I was totally blown away by the stimulus package - that sent me over the edge…. I've never been a political activist ….But, frittering away almost $800 billion in September, to bail out companies….If you were not doing business in a manner that you can make a profit, you do not need to be bailed out. That ticked me off - TARP did. I didn't agree with that. And the Stimulus, like I said, I was like 'This is wrong. All of this is wrong. Why? Why are they using the money that hardworking Americans [earn]….for all these things?'

Other participants described similar emotions when asked how they became involved in the Tea Party. For example, Candace described being very upset about the election of President Obama: "….when he was voted in, within three months….I could tell, just by the media, by this, by that, my friends talking - that this was bad. This was really bad. That's when the Tea Party, this Patriot movement, started forming…."

Participants used similar language to describe their shock at information they learned after they began participating. In this context, informants often explained that they believed the United States government was not following the Constitution, and that such violations were

"unprecedented" in the Obama Administration. For example, Charlene, a lifelong conservative who had had no experience in politics beyond voting before her participation in the Tea Party, explained that she felt that Glenn Beck and the Tea Party had "awakened" her to dramatic changes in the nature of the government that she had previously not noticed:

> We were asleep….we were just lulled into a sense of 'Well, this is America, you know, you do the right thing, you work hard, you go to school….you pay your taxes, and you don't really have to pay attention, you know, [to] who the politicians[are]; they might be Democrats, they might be Republicans….so they go one way this time, this way the other time, and, they're all Americans, they all understand the classic view of what America is, and are grounded in that,' but that's no longer true.

Other expressed shock regarding alleged Constitutional violations, particularly related to national healthcare legislation and the coverage mandate. For women in the Tea Party, requiring citizens to either subscribe to health insurance or pay a fine was Unconstitutional and reflected what they perceived as very threatening government intrusion: According to Nancy: "Your bank account will be tapped by the IRS, they have permission to do it under….Obamacare. If you don't pay your penalty, they will get it out of your account….That is un-American. It's not American. It's not the way we've ever done this before."

Again, as discussed in the previous section, most activists did not describe themselves as having a transformed ideology through participation in the Tea Party, but rather, claimed they had cemented and expanded their views, based on the vast amount of knowledge they had gained through their participation. In the conservative bubble, it is this knowledge that they believe separates them from most of the people that they know, not an ideology. For example, Hillary, a lifelong resident of the area and stalwart conservative, explained that one reason many people she knew did not participate was that they simply didn't realize "how bad" the political situation is, something she believed they would learn if they attended Tea Party meetings with her:

> A whole lot of these people are conservative people and of course they don't like Obama, alright, but they haven't gotten burned, hard enough….to really

78

keep up. You learn a whole lot here. You know, you really do. I've learned a
tremendous amount here, about stuff.

This emphasis on becoming "informed" about what was "going on" was a central
component of the Tea Party, according to most of my activists. "The Tea Party is important
because I'm much better-informed, locally, nationally, and federally. The education I get out of
the Tea Party is important," said Caroline. Participants from all five of the groups represented in
my project described the major function of meetings as informative sessions with speakers
regarding various topics. They also described holding "business meetings" around elections in
order to organize people, but they often focused on continuing education and information
provision. Even in a small, self-organized group of women, several said that the central purpose
of meeting was to "share" information with and "learn off" each other. In fact, the three
participants who least emphasized knowledge acquisition (two from one group and one from
another) expressed frustration that so much of the Tea Party revolved around "talking" and not
"doing." Thus, because of the intense education that nearly all Tea Party participants feel they
had, many attribute the difference between conservative activists and non-activists to level of
knowledge. Thus, they are largely convinced that if others "knew" what they knew, they would
be equally shocked, and motivated to participate.

Thus, in the conservative bubble, the strategic framing implemented by social movement
organizers was important to the initial mobilization, but it was not entirely distinct from the
ideology and framing potential activists were exposed to outside of the Tea Party. In the
conservative bubble, lots of sources provide information leading to moral shocks.

Another social movement characteristic related to self- and stranger recruitment is the
relatively low-level of risk and/or commitment required of potential activists. In the case of the
Tea Party, while some potential recruits may have perceived participation as high-risk, compared

to movements who regularly face violent state repression, the Tea Party is clearly relatively safe. And, while many participants did, in fact, become extremely committed activists who changed their lives around their participation, many more did not. Indeed, the organizing nature of the Tea Parties that included in my sample followed a pattern in which a handful of "core" activists handled most of the work, with decision-making further centralized by a few individuals. Meetings are often stand-alone events featuring speakers, etc. Nearly all informants explained that regular meetings hardly ever had the same people. Thus, while groups were always trying to organize committees and get participants more involved, people were always welcome to participate as little or as much as they wanted. Thus, it was perfectly normal and acceptable for people to show up to meetings of interest every few months, and possibly attend a rally or even make some phone calls around election time, or, for someone in a leadership position, to work daily.

This kind of very public organization, with a broad range of commitment opportunities, might not be possible outside of a location with a large conservative constituency and a base in the community. Thus, the presence of the conservative bubble facilitates this kind of organizing.

Finally, biographic availability is another factor associated with self and stranger recruitment. This was certainly a factor in my case study; as shown in Table 1 (p. 12), only half of the women I interviewed worked outside of the home, and only one had small children. They are also all relatively financially secure, (in that they or their husbands are at least employed), etc. While this is truly an individual-level factor, it is clear that some communities have more of this type of potential recruit than others. And in a conservative bubble, populated by many older and relatively wealthier Americans, potential recruits are more likely to be available.

5.4 CONCLUSION

As political scientist Alan I. Abramowitz (2011) claims, the Tea Party mobilization was the result of a long-term process of political polarization which created a conservative base" that was "activated" by conservative elites after President Obama's election. The recruitment patterns examined here show how the conservative bubble operates as a mechanism to facilitate this "activation." In the conservative bubble, where people are simultaneously exposed to myriad sources of information about conservatism, Tea Party recruitment occurred through both movement and extra-movement forces, relying on a combination of media coverage, inter-personal networks and local Tea Party advertising to convince recruits that mobilization was necessary, and to show them where to get started. As previous case studies show, this type of self and stranger recruitment is more common where social networks are present (Jasper and Paulsen 1995). As society becomes increasingly segregated politically, and yet people are simultaneously withdrawing from traditional forms of associational life (Putnam 2000), recruitment patterns in the Tea Party may become more prevalent in social movements across the political spectrum.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Social movements attract attention for how they differ from mainstream society. By making previously unrecognized claims, exhibiting uncommon behaviors, and disrupting the "normal" functioning of the rest of the world, social movements draw boundaries that distinguish themselves from the rest of society. However, in order to arrive at the public stage, and especially to stay there for more than a brief moment, movements must simultaneously appeal to a popular faction or an ideological component of culture that has some basis in the rest of the population. This paper examines the evolving dynamic between a social movement and broader society by analyzing the interactions between individual social movement participants and the non-activists in their immediate social networks.

I found that female Tea Party participants in Virginia are closely tied to their local communities through close personal connections to formal and informal institutions, as well as in a shared ideological framework, realities that combine to create what I call a "conservative bubble." However, these conservative bubbles did not emerge independently from the rest of society, but developed over the course of my informants' lives, as they made specific and deliberate decisions regarding where, how, and with whom to spend their time. And while my informants thus played a large role in the creation of their own social networks, this process of political segregation and polarization was occurring simultaneously across the country, so that by the time conservative elites called for a grassroots mobilization in 2009, conservative bubbles

throughout Virginia and everywhere else were ready to sprout independent Tea Party mobilizations.

The trajectory of these women's activism and relationship between their Tea Party groups and their communities implies broader changes throughout the national body politic. First, in contrast to the most visible and powerful conservative movements in the United States in recent history, with the exception of the Christian Right (Oberschall 1983) but including the pro-life movement, anti-gay marriage mobilizations, and gun rights activity, the Tea Party emerged not around a single issue or campaign, but has maintained mobilization focused on a broad agenda. And while political polarization has often been explained by a few "hot-button issues" such as abortion (DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson 1996; Evans 2003), mass support of the Tea Party demonstrates the powerful salience of a much broader political ideology. For example, my informants demonstrated intense passions around a range of topics; They were all incensed by prominent issues such as healthcare legislation and the debt crisis, but they were often equally irate about more recent and less well-known issues, such as conservation easements and local school boards funding iPads for every student. These Tea Party activists moved from issue to issue with equal passion, repeating their attachment to a "conservative" ideology. This evolution indicates the future longevity of the movement, as cadres of newly-mobilized conservatives build the skills and knowledge to address an increasing number of issues.

Importantly, it also suggests that the cultural and social connections between a distinct lifestyle and a political ideology have cohered into a widely recognized mobilizing identity. While observers have frequently described social issues as particularly powerful symbols of distinct lifestyles (Luker 1984), Tea Party activists adapt their mobilizing issues and symbols to the current political context, whether it be a presidential election, raising the debt ceiling, or the

Benghazi tragedy. My informants' inclination to approach each and every issue from a "conservative" perspective reflects the salience of this broader framework. The fact that they are so confident in the support of their non-activist friends and family members further demonstrates the profundity of this identity, and thus its mobilizing potential.

The moral shock pattern of recruitment in the Tea Party is consistent with this possibility; other instances of moral shock in protest literature involve social and personal issues, often ones that are particularly compelling through visual imagery (Wettergren 2005). In contrast, the moral violations experienced by the Tea Party were in response to mortgage and budget policies – a far cry from the dramatic imagery of unborn children and tortured animals. True, the movement relies on mobilizing symbols including American flags, "Founding Fathers," and the threat of Socialism, yet these symbols possess mobilizing power partially because of their generality and flexibility; they are symbols that translate easily from issue to issue and location to location. To my informants, the Tea Party represents their worldview, which is both personal and political. This phenomenon among conservatives is not entirely new; it began with the broad-based right-wing mobilizations of the 1960s, and shifted into Christian conservative movements, anti-abortion mobilization, etc. (McGirr 2001). Today, the political polarization initiated in those periods has permeated much of the greater population, and the Tea Party is one effect of this trajectory. As political identity becomes increasingly salient and merges with other components of identity (Gross, Medvetz, and Russell 2011) even the most mundane policies will have the potential to ignite emotional responses.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Dear Ms./Mr._____,

Hello, my name is Liz Yates and I am a graduate student pursuing a PhD in Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh. I am writing because I am currently in the process of conducting research in preparation for my Master's thesis, and I am interested in learning more about the Tea Party and other organizations in the _____ area. In particular, I am interested in interviewing Tea Party participants in _____ about their experiences.

I would love to start by attending your next _____ Tea Party meeting – would that be possible? I am living in Washington, D.C. for the summer and am easily able to travel to _____.

I would appreciate any information or suggestions for research you are able to provide. I am also happy to answer any further questions you may have about my project and interest in the Tea Party.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you!

Best,

Liz Yates

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Date/Time:

Let's start right away by talking about your current political views. How would you describe your political views today?

- Do you usually vote for a particular party?

- Do you identify with a particular party, tradition, or group?

Now, I'd like to ask you about how your political views may have changed over the course of your life.

- How would you describe your family's political views when you were growing up?

- How would you describe your parents' and/or siblings' political views now?

- When and for whom did you first vote?

- What has influenced your political views? Have there been events, or people that have influenced you politically?

- Would you say your political views have changed at all over the last five years?

- If so, what has influenced this change? Have there been events, or people that have influenced you politically, over the last five years?

- Did you ever participate in politics before your participation with the Tea Party, other than voting?

- For example, did you ever attend a rally, go door-to-door advocating for a candidate or a campaign, collect signatures for a ballot or candidate, etc.?

- Do you remember if you ever openly supported a candidate or campaign by wearing a button or T-shirt, signing a petition or trying to convince a friend to vote for a candidate?
- What political issues are the most important to you today, and why?

- For example, taxes, healthcare, education? Or specific bills or pieces of legislation, locally or nationally?

- How concerned are you about the recent scandals involving IRS audits and the Administration's reaction to the attacks in Benghazi?

Now, I'm going to talk to you specifically about your experience with the
_____ Tea Party.

- How and when did you find out about the Tea Party in general and about this local group in particular?

- What would you say is your role is/was in this group?

    o Do you or have you had official titles?
    o What kinds of things do you do with this group?
    o Are there subcommittees or specific issues you have or share responsibility for?
    o How has this changed over time?
    o Do you think that you've learned or improved new skills, like public speaking or group organizing?

- What is your time commitment, in terms of time you spent with the group and time you may have spent independently working for the group?

    o How has this changed since you started participating in this group?

- How many people show up to the regular meetings?

    o How many of those people that are currently active would you say you interact with regularly?

- How many of them would you say you know?

- How many of them would you say you've worked with?

- And how many of them would you say you've become friends with?

- Has this changed over the course of your participation?

  - When the group was bigger did you work directly with more of them or did you get to know them?

  - How many friends would you say you made with people that are no longer active?

- What is your Tea Party group's goal? Have your goals changed during your participation?

  - Do you feel like you've been successful in making a difference in politics, or in your community as part of the Tea Party?

- What do you hope to accomplish in your participation in the next year? In the next ten years?

- What would you say are the strengths of this group and what are the weaknesses, if any?
  - For example, in terms of the people, the leadership, the structure of the group?

  - Are there decisions that others have made that you have disagreed with?

  - Or ways the group has grown that you think have been really beneficial?

  - The issues chosen to focus on?

  - The opportunities for participation?
  -

Ok, now I'm going to ask you about the different kinds of groups you may belong to. Can you tell the names of all of the formal and informal groups that you have been involved with over the last five years? I mean any kind of group you can think of - Just think of all the times you have attended meetings of any kind. This can include church membership, political organizations, parent groups, reading groups, self-help groups, regular "ladies luncheons," neighborhood groups, etc. If you have been involved in some groups, just tell me the names or types, I'll jot them down and then we can go through them one by one, or, if they are related to each other, we can go through them in groups.

- One by one, or maybe in a few groups, let's talk about each group:

- What was the name of the group and what is its purpose?

- How did you find out about it?

- What was your role was in this group? Did you have an official title? What kinds of things did you do with this group?

- What was your time commitment, in terms of time you spent with the group and time you may have spent independently working for the group?

- How many other people were in this group? How many of them would you say you interact with regularly? Would you say you made friends in this group?

- How long did you participate in this group?

- How did your participation in this group change over time?

- Why did you decide to leave [if you left]?

- What would you say were the strengths and weaknesses of this group?

- How did your participation in this group change your thinking about yourself, the world, politics, etc.?

OK, now I'm going to ask you a few questions about your recent employment history. Are you currently working?

- If so, are you working full or part-time?

- Where do you work? What is your job title?

- What kind of a place is it? How many people work there?

- Have you had any other jobs over the last five years?

- Do you think that this job has changed the way you think about politics or society at all, over the last five years?

Are there groups that you are officially a member of but that you don't actually attend meetings or events with?

- Maybe you pay dues or donate money?

- Maybe you are on their listservs?

OK, now I'm going to ask you about what kind of news you watch, listen to or read. What news sources do you most trust?

- Are there particular commentators or authors you trust the most? Why?

- Are there particular Websites, blogs or Twitterfeeds you regularly check? How often would you say you check those? Daily? Weekly? Monthly?

- Do you ever participate in online forums?

  How often do you go on facebook?

- How often would you say you read articles or blogs posted by friends?

- How often do you post articles or blogs?

- Are you on twitter?

- How often would you say you read articles or blogs posted by friends?

- How often do you post articles or blogs?

- Do you ever watch or listen to some of these sources with other people?

    o If so, who do you do this with and how often would you say you do that?

    o Do you ever forward political articles or blog on to other people? How often and with whom?

OK, now I'd like to ask you about how else you spend your time.

- What else is important to you in your life?

- Do you have close friends or family, or hobbies that you spend time on?

- When you spend free time with other people, whom would you say you spend the most of your free time with? Your immediate family? Extended family? Neighbors? Coworkers? Other friends?

Now I'm going to ask you a little bit about the political beliefs of your friends and family outside of people you know from the Tea Party.

- If you're married, does your spouse also participate in the Tea Party with you? To what extent? How so?

- When you think of these people, would you say that they agree with you about most political issues?

- Do you know? Which ones do you think agree or disagree with you? To what extent do you think they agree or disagree with you?

- How do you know? Have you talked to them about it? Do they use bumper stickers, signs, pins, etc.?

How often do you talk about [insert political issues most important to her] or the Tea Party with people who haven't been directly involved in any Tea Party group?

- Who do you do this with?

- Do you ever ask them to participate with you?

- How many friends or acquaintances would you say you've gotten to join you in Tea Party activities at one point or another? How many of them have stayed to participate for longer periods of time?

- If friends of acquaintances have declined to participate, why do they usually say they can't?

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE

Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity(s): _____

Religion: _____

Current Marital Status:

      □ Married   □ Divorced   □ Single   □ Other:_____

Do you have children? □ Yes   □ No

    If "Yes," please list the ages and genders of each of your children:

    _____

    _____

Town/City/County of Residence: _____

        Type of Residence:

                 □ House   □ Apartment   □ Other: _____

    Do you currently own your home? Yes □   No □

    Do you or have you, in the past, owned any other properties? Yes □   No □

Are you currently working outside of the home?:

    □ Full-Time   □ Part-Time   □ Not at all

    □ Retired   □Student

    Job Title/Former Occupation: _____

Highest Level of Education:

    □ Some High School/Secondary School   □ High School/Secondary School

    □ Some college   □ Associates Degree   □ Bachelors Degree

    □ Graduate Degree   □ Technical Degree

Yearly Household Income:

    □ less than $25,000   □ $25,001 – $50,000 □ $50,001- $75,000

    □ $75,001 - $100,000   □ $100,001 - $125,000   □ $125,001 - $150,000

    □ More than $150,000

  Who earns your household income? (Or, before retiring, who earned your income?)

    □ You are the sole breadwinner or earn significantly more

    □ Both partners earn about the same

    □ Your partner earns significantly more

    □ Not applicable

How would you describe your political views, according to the following political scale? (Circle one.)

Very Conservative			*Moderate*			*Very Liberal*
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How would you describe your political party affiliation, according to the following scale?

□ Strong Democrat
□ Democrat
□ Leaning Democrat
□ Strong Republican
□ Republican
□ Leaning Republican
□ Independent
□ Other Party (_____)
□Not Sure

How important to you are the following issues, according to the following scale?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	Not Sure
Taxes	□	□	□	□
Jobs	□	□	□	□
Federal Deficit	□	□	□	□
Education	□	□	□	□
Abortion	□	□	□	□
Immigration	□	□	□	□
Foreign Policy	□	□	□	□
Gay Marriage	□	□	□	□
Gun Rights	□	□	□	□

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abramowitz, Alan I. 2011. "Grand Old Tea Party: Partisan Polarization and the Rise of the Tea Party Movement." Pp. 195-211 in *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Alimi, Eitan Y. 2009. "Mobilizing under the gun: theorizing political opportunity structure in a highly repressive setting." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 14(2):219-237.

Banerjee, Tarun. 2013. "Media, Movements, and Mobilization: Tea Party Protests 2009-2010" Pp. 39-75 in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change (Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change, Volume 36)*, edited by Patrick G. Coy. Cambridge, MA: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Barreto, Matt A., Betsy L. Cooper, Benjamin Gonzalez, Christopher S. Parker and Christopher Towler. 2011. "The Tea Party in the Age of Obama: Mainstream Conservatism or Out-Group Anxiety?" Pp. 105-137 in *Rethinking Obama (Political Power and Social Theory, Volume 22)* edited by Go Julia. Cambridge, MA: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Beck, Glenn. 2009. "We Surround Them." April 2. Retrieved April 9, 2014. (http://www.glennbeck.com/content/articles/article/198/21018/0).

Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes And Social Movements: An Overview And Assessment." *Annual review of sociology* 26(1):611-639.

Bishop, Bill and Robert G. Cushing. 2008. *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Blee, Kathleen M. 2003. *Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Boykoff, Jules and Eulalie Laschever. 2011. The Tea Party Movement, Framing, and the US Media. *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 10(4):344-361.

Burack, Cynthia and Claire Snyder-Hall. 2012. Introduction: Right-Wing Populism and the Media. *New Political Science* 34(4):439-454.

Burghart, Devin. 2014. "Status of the Tea Party Movement – Part 2: Tea Party Members, Supporters and Sympathizers." Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights. Seattle. January 21st. Retrieved April 9. (http://www.irehr.org/issue-areas/tea-party-nationalism/tea-party-news-and-analysis/item/527-status-of-tea-party-by-the-numbers).

Chesters, Graeme and Ian Welsh. (2004). "Rebel Colours:'Framing'in Global Social Movements." *The Sociological Review* 52(3):314-335.

Corrigall-Brown, Catherine. 2011. *Patterns of Protest: Trajectories of Participation in Social Movements.* Berkeley, CA: Stanford University Press.

Della Porta, Donatella and Mario Diani. [1999] 2006. *Social Movements: An Introduction. Second Edition.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Diani, Mario. 1996. "Linking Mobilization Frames And Political Opportunities: Insights From Regional Populism In Italy." *American Sociological Review* 61(6):1053-1069.

DiMaggio, Anthony. 2011. *The Rise of the Tea Party. Political Discontent and Corporate Media in the Age of Obama.* New York: Monthly Review Press.

DiMaggio, Paul, John Evans, and Bethany Bryson. 1996. "Have American's Social Attitudes Become More Polarized?" *American Journal of Sociology* 102(3):690-755.

Disch, Lisa. 2012. "The Tea Party: A White Citizenship Movement?" Pp. 133-151 in *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Downton, James V., and Paul Wehr. 1997. *The Persistent Activist: How Peace Commitment Develops And Survives*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Einwohner, Rachel L., Jo Reger and Daniel J. Meyers. 2008. "Introduction: Identity Work, Sameness, and Differences in Social Movements." Pp. 1-17 in *Identity Work in Social Movements*, edited by Rachel L. Einwohner, Jo Reger and Daniel J. Meyers. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Evans, John H. 2003. "Have Americans' Attitudes Become More Polarized?—An Update*. *Social Science Quarterly 84*(1):71-90.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life.*

Goodwin, Jeff, James M. Jasper and Jaswin.1999. "Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory." *Sociological Forum* 14(1): 27-54.

Gould, Debra B. 2009. *Moving Politics: Emotion And ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gross, Neil, Thomas Medvetz and Rupert Russell. 2011. "The Contemporary American Conservative Movement." *The Annual Review of Sociology* 37:325-54.

Hamilton, Carrie. 2008. "On Being a 'Good' Interviewer: Empathy, Ethics, and the Politics of Oral History." *Oral History* 36(2): 35-43.

De Hart, Jane Sherron and Donald G. Matthews. 1990. *Sex, Gender and the Politics of the ERA: A State and The Nation.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Jacoby, Russell. 2012. "Dreaming of a World with No Intellectuals." Chronicle of Higher Education. July 16th. Retrieved April 8, 2014. (https://chronicle.com/article/Dreaming-of-a-World-Without/132813/).

Jasper, James M. 1997. *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography and Creativity in Social Movements.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Jasper, James M. 2011. "Emotions and Social Movements: Twenty Years of Theory and Research." *The Annual Review of Sociology* 37:14.1-14.9.

Jasper, James M. and Jane D. Paulsen. 1995. "Recruiting Strangers and Friends: Moral Shocks and Social Networks in Animal Rights and Anti-Nuclear Protests." *Social Problems* 42(4):493-512.

Klatch, Rebecca. 1987. *Women of the New Right.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Lassiter, Matthew D. 2006. *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics In The Sunbelt South*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lo, Clarence Y. H. 2011. "Astroturf versus Grass Roots: Scenes from Early Tea Party Mobilization." Pp. 98-129 in *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Luker, Kristen. 1984. *Abortion And The Politics Of Motherhood*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Lundskow, George. 2012. "Authoritarianism and Destructiveness in the Tea Party." *Critical Sociology* 38(4):529-547.

Maxwell, Joseph A. 2013. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach. 3rd Edition.* Los Angeles: Sage.

McAdam, Doug and Ronnelle Paulsen. 1993. "Specifying The Relationship Between Social Ties And Activism." *American Journal of Sociology* 99(3):640-667.

McGirr, Lisa. 2001. *Suburban Warriors: The Origins Of The New American Right*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Melucci, Alberto. 1989. *Nomads of The Present: Social Movements And Individual Needs In Contemporary Society*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Meyer, David S. and Sidney Tarrow. 1998. *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century*. Oxford, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Mitchell, Richard G. 1993. *Secrecy And Fieldwork* 29. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Montgomery, Peter. 2011. "The Tea Party and the Religious Right Movements: Frenemies with Benefits." Pp. 242-274 in *Steep: The Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Nepstad, Sharon Erickson. 2004. *Convictions of the Soul: Religion, Culture and Agency in the Central American Solidarity Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press.

New York Times/CBS. 2010. "Poll: National Survey of Tea Party Supporters." April 12, 2010. Retrieved April 9, 2014. (http://documents.nytimes.com/new-york-timescbs-news-poll-national-survey-of-tea-party-supporters)

Oberschall, Anthony. 1993. "The New Christian Right: Culture Conflict in the Eighties." Pp. 339-382, Chapter #13 in *Social Movements: Ideologies, Interests, and Identities*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Parker, Christopher S., and Matt A. Barreto. 2013. *Change They Can't Believe in: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Passy, Florence. 2003. "Social Networks Matter: But How?" Pp. 21-46 in *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*. Edited by Mario Diani and Doug McAdam. New York: Oxford University Press.

Passy, Florence and Gian-Andrea Monsch. 2014. "Do Social Networks Really Matter in Contentious Politics?" *Social Movement Studies* 13(1):22-47.

Perrin, Andrew J., J. Micah Roos, and Gordon W. Gauchat. 2014. "From Coalition to Constraint: Modes of Thought in Contemporary American Conservatism." *Sociological Forum*.

Pew Research. 2013. "Tea Party's Image Turns More Negative. Ted Cruz's Popularity Soars among Tea Party Republicans." Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Retrieved April 9, 2014. (http://www.people-press.org/2013/10/16/tea-partys-image-turns-more-negative/).

Postel, Charles. 2011. "The Tea Party in Historical Perspective: A Conservative Response to a Crisis of Political Economy." Pp. 25-46 in *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse And Revival Of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Reger, Jo. 2008. "Drawing Identity Boundaries: The Creation of Contemporary Feminism." Pp. 101-120 in Identity Work in Social Movements. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Reinharz, Shulamit and Lynn Davidman. 1992. *Feminist Methods In Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rohr, Robin. 2010. Tea Party: American Revolution 2.0 Silent Majority Silent No More. Seattle, WA. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform

Rupp, Leila and Verta Taylor. 1987. Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Schlesinger, Robert. 2010. "Party of Nuts: Poll Shows GOP Thinks Obama is Muslim, Socialist: A scary number of people seem to believe some wacky things." U.S. News and World Report. March 24th. Retrieved on April 9, 2014. (http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/robert-schlesinger/2010/03/24/party-of-nuts-poll-shows-gop-thinks-obama-is-muslim-socialist).

Skocpol, Theda and Vanessa Williamson. 2011. *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Snow, David A., Louis Zurcher and Sheldon Ekland-Olson. 1980. "Social Networks And Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach To Differential Recruitment." *American Sociological Review* 45(5):787-801.

Staggenborg, Suzanne. 1987. "Life-Style Preferences And Social-Movement Recruitment-Illustrations From The Abortion Conflict." *Social Science Quarterly* 68(4):779-797.

Staggenborg, Suzanne. 1998. "Social Movement Communities and Cycles of Protest: the Emergence and Maintenance of a Local Women's Movement." *Social Problems* 45(2):180-204.

Street, Paul and Anthony Dimaggio. 2011. *Crashing the Tea Party: Mass Media and the Campaign to Remake American Politics.* Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Taylor, Verta. 1989. "Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance." *American Sociological Review* 54:761-775.

Steinberg, Marc W. 2002. "Toward a More Dialogical Analysis of Social Movement Culture" Pp. 208-225 in *Social Movements: Identity, Culture, and the State* edited by David S. Meyer, Nancy Whittier, and Belinda Robnett. Oxford University Press: New York.

Street, Paul and Anthony Dimaggio. 2011. *Crashing the Tea Party: Mass Media and the Campaign to Remake American Politics.* Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Sullivan, Sean. 2013. "The Decline of the Tea Party –in 5 Charts." *The Washington Post.* December 13. Retrieved April 9, 2014. (http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2013/12/12/the-decline-of-the-tea-party-in-5-charts/).

Taylor, Verta. 1989. "Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance." *American Sociological Review* 54(5):761-775.

Taylor, Verta. 1998. "Feminist Methodology In Social Movements Research." *Qualitative Sociology* 21(4):357-379.

Thompson, Michael J. 2012. "Suburban Origins of the Tea Party: Spatial Dimensions of the New Conservative Personality." *Critical Sociology* 38(4):511-528.

Tuschman, Avi. 2014. "Why Americans Are So Polarized: Education and Evolution Improvements in learning—which correlates with stronger partisanship—and the tendency to choose likeminded mates may be helping to create divided politics." *Atlantic Monthly.* February 28. Retrieved April 9, 2014. (http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/02/why-americans-are-so-polarized-education-and-evolution/284098/).

Warren, Mark R. 2010. *Fire in the Heart: How White Activists Embrace Racial Justice.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Wettergren, Asa. 2005. "Mobilization and the Moral Shock." Pp. 99-118 in *Emotions and Social Movements*, edited by Helena Flam and Debra King. New York: Routledge.

Williamson, Vanessa, Theda Skocpol and John Coogin. 2011. "The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism." *Perspectives on Politics* 9(1):25-43.

Zeskind, Leonard. 2012. "A Nation Dispossessed: The Tea Party Movement and Race." *Critical Sociology* 38(4):495-509.