

## Resources, Masculinities, and Gender Differences Among Pro-life Activists

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Published online: 24 September 2015  
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**Abstract** Abortion politics are often about “pro-choice” and “pro-life” counter-movements trying to gain power by winning the support of political bystanders. While more is known about the reasons people become pro-choice activists, far less research has examined the motives for pro-life men and women. To address the factors that mobilize abortion activism, this study examined the role of education, religious contexts, and gendered expectations in predicting pro-life activism. After surveying 820 college students, our data highlights the importance of activist networks in inspiring activism among pro-life advocates. In gender subsamples, being a biblical literalist, being married, and endorsing patriarchal family structures were linked to more pro-life activism among women, while embracing authoritarian outlooks, having less education, being poorer, and attending religious services did so for men. Implications for gender differences in pro-life activism and the complex ways in which pro-life attitudes intersect with traditional gender roles were explored.

**Keywords** Abortion · Gender attitudes · Pro-life · Political participation

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## Introduction

People in the U.S. are mostly ambivalent about abortion, as most people's beliefs about abortion are not adamantly pro-choice or pro-life (Cook et al. 1992; Strickler and Danigelis 2002). This collective cultural ambivalence contrasts sharply with the absolutist rhetoric of the pro-choice and pro-life movements that have invested considerable resources into crafting abortion debates and influencing public policy. At one end of the continuum, liberal pro-choice and reproductive justice organizations oppose most legal restrictions on abortion; at the other end, reactionary pro-life movement condemns abortion under any circumstances, equating it with "murder." While the size and tactics of the pro-choice and pro-life countermovements change through time, studies suggest that lobbying from interest groups, public opinion of citizens, and direct action from social movement organizations are all predictors of state abortion laws (Camobreco and Barnello 2008; Roh and Haider-Markel 2003). Moreover, the actions of local pro-life groups can result in the traumatization of women seeking abortions (Foster et al. 2013), problems of recruitment and retention of staff in medical facilities (Fitzpatrick and Wilson 1999), and eventual closures of abortion clinics (Jacobson and Royer 2011; Medoff 2009).

While social movements need to continuously recruit members in order to survive, the proportion of people who politically act on their abortion attitudes is remarkably small. For example, one study found that only 2.4 % of college students who strongly opposed abortion ever volunteered at a Crisis Pregnancy Center (Firmin et al. 2007). To discern the pathways to pro-life activism, this study explored the contextual and social-psychological antecedents to anti-choice or "pro-life" activism. Variable selection in this study was guided by the "resource-model" of political participation (Brady et al. 1995) as well as empirical studies on pro-life activists (e.g., Granberg 1982a; Kaysen and Stake 2001; Maxwell and Jelen 1996). While the empirical literature on abortion attitudes is vast and well-established, studies on why people join pro-life protests are much rarer, older, and mostly descriptive (Luker 1984; Scott and Schuman 1988). Moreover, most studies on anti-choice activists were done at the peak of the pro-life mobilization during the 1970s and 1980s and lack comparison groups of people who did not attend pro-life events (Granberg 1982a; Gross 1995; Maxwell and Jelen 1996), so we do not know whether the pro-life activists differed from political bystanders for protests done in the last decade (for the exceptions see Munson 2009; Kaysen and Stake 2001). Therefore, our study asked a relatively simple question: What social and political qualities led college students to engage in pro-life activism during the last decade?

Abortion practices, as well as the political forces behind social policies, are inherently gendered. When addressing sexuality and gender inequities, men notably never get pregnant and often earn cultural support for being sexually active (Caron and Hinman 2013; Kimmel 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), while stereotypical cultural expectations of women focus on them as thin, attractive, "virginal," and motherly (Fahs et al. 2015; Katz and Tirone 2009). Moreover, while women are often advised to stay out of formal politics, the political struggle over children, education, health care, and drug addiction are often considered the privy of

women. Accordingly, several studies have contended that women constitute the majority of pro-choice or pro-life activists, in part because birth control, health risks of childbirth, and possible parenting responsibilities are considered “women’s issues” (Burns et al. 2001; Granberg 1982a; Kaysen and Stake 2001). However, a few studies have found different results, as women may be disproportionately drawn to feminist causes that contested male privilege, while men and women were *equally* drawn to movements that supported conservative gender norms (Gross 1995; Norrander and Raymond 1998; Maxwell and Jelen 1996). Thus, this paper explored this possibility of gender gaps and gender differences within the pro-life movement as an important blindspot in the existing literatures on abortion activism.

## Literature Review

While women may be more attuned to abortion issues than men, there is no single male or female response to unwanted pregnancies. Theories on intersectionality suggest that men and women reside in multiple systems of stratification, and everybody must respond to the various privileges and constraints that are bestowed on the competing social roles they occupy (Hill Collins 1990). For example, pro-choice policies directly benefit more affluent women who have enough income or private health insurance to pay for abortion services (Henshaw and Finer 2003). Conversely, working-class or poor women frequently live in rural areas that lack abortion providers, just as they often have no health insurance and belong to “means-tested” health plans that strictly limit access to abortions.

To explore the role of social cleavages in pro-life activism, the resource model offers a succinct answer as to why people remain politically disengaged: “because they can’t, because they don’t want to, or because nobody asked” (Brady et al. 1995, p. 271). The notion of “they can’t” suggests a dearth of necessary resources to be political. While crucial resources may come in many forms, the resource model emphasize the importance of financial situations, educational attainment, free time, and civic skills. The claim of “they don’t want to” deals with a lack of psychological engagement in politics. This indifference to politics is sometimes seen as political ignorance, but the resource model assumes that lack of participation is more of a reaction to a lower sense of political efficacy and greater levels of individualism. The “nobody asked” idea implies that people are isolated from the recruitment networks that mobilize citizens into action.

### “They can’t”: Income, Educational Attainment, and Gender Cleavages

The “resource model” assumes that upper and middle-class individuals retain the economic resources that makes activism easier (e.g., more disposable money, greater amounts of free time, or a sense that they should not be resigned to problems in their life). Greater educational attainment is associated with higher levels of feminist activism for all citizens (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010), but the role of education and income in pro-life activism is less certain. Several studies have asserted that pro-life activists have greater educational attainment than most

Americans (Granberg 1982a; Kaysen and Stake 2001; Maxwell and Jelen 1995; Norrander and Raymond 1998). Conversely, two studies found that greater educational attainment lessened pro-life advocacy (Gross 1995; Munson 2009) while two studies failed to detect any educational effects on pro-life activism (Guth et al. 1993; Maxwell and Jelen 1996). When analyzing income and pro-life activism, the literature is mostly underdeveloped and contradictory (Munson 2009). One study found that income failed to predict pro-life activism (Gross 1995) while another claimed that pro-life activists are poorer than most conservative Christians (Guth et al. 1993).

Abortion politics are often related to practices of marriage and childcare. In general, married women are less politically engaged than single or divorced women, especially when wives are “stay-at-home-moms” (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Conway et al. 1997; Fahs 2007) or when they routinely defer to their husband’s dictates (Burns et al. 2001). While marriage might lower overall political participation among women, some have argued that marriage can have the reverse effects for conservative social movements about abortion. Accordingly, pro-life women were more likely to be married and have more children than other women, and pro-choice women were rarely married and most often worked outside of the home when they got married (Kaysen and Stake 2001).

### **“They don’t Want to”: Framing Grievances, Efficacy, and Collective Identities**

Frames are generally conceived as cultural tools that provide “tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin 1980, p. 6). Frames are essential to social movements because they highlight certain aspects of reality in ways that promote a particular problem definition, moral evaluation, and suggested remedy (Gamson 1992).

Competing social movement organizations generally frame abortion as either a “moral injustice” or a “right.” Pro-choice organizations embrace abortion as an element of a broader “rights” narrative, which encompass a women’s right to equal treatment, freedom from sexist elements of sexuality and family life, and the right to have autonomy from state or religious interventions dealing with women’s bodies (Ferree 2003). Conversely, the pro-life movement frames abortion as an issue of religious immorality, “traditional family values,” “protection for the unborn,” and the “sanctity of human life.” The extent to which an individual’s worldviews corresponds to pro-life messages often relates to the resonance or salience that these aspects of abortion have on their lives (Gamson 1992). Since some scholars argues that the pro-life movements lack an unified master frame (Munson 2009), our goal was to identify which one of competing movement frames had the sort of resonance that inspired people into pro-life activism.

### **Perceptions of Gender Injustice and the Moral Legitimacy of Abortion**

Women have been traditionally taught to prioritize the private world of home and family and told to leave the world of public politics to men. As such, women who

embraced traditional notions of femininity were generally less politically engaged than those with more modern gender ideas (Conway et al. 1997; Schussman and Soule 2005). Following this logic, pro-choice activists generally see systematic forms of sexism (Kelly and Breilinger 1995) and object to many aspects of traditional gender roles (Conway et al. 1997; Nelson et al. 2008).

While feminists seek broad scale changes in gender relations, pro-lifers want to defend different aspects of their traditional lifestyles. Research has suggested that pro-life activists often covet gender conservatism in the family, are alarmed about premarital sex, reject divorce for women, are upset when “boys act like girls,” demean homosexuality, and object to women in the workforce (Granberg 1982a; Guth et al. 1993; Luker 1984; Munson 2009; Strickler and Danigelis 2002). Moreover, one study noted that pro-life activists believe that the liberalization of gender roles is generally making U.S. society “worse than before” (Scott and Schuman 1988).

While gender conservatism may precede pro-life activism, so might a panic over a “feminist-secularization” of the United States. In pro-life circles, religious convictions seem to play a pivotal role in direct action protests against abortion providers (Maxwell and Jelen 1995). Anti-abortion politicking might spring from religious doctrines that combine condemnations of abortion with a belief that government should exist to restrict the “baser” drives of humans (Earle et al. 2007). Religious tenets can also offer a rationale for disobeying secular laws and a sense of security that their political deeds might help them in their afterlife. Accordingly, some studies contend that pro-life activism is driven by vague desires to “preserve basic morals” (Gross 1995) or save the nation from moral decline (Scott and Schuman 1988; Maxwell and Jelen 1996). Moreover, people who attended pro-life events were more rigid and orthodox in their religious beliefs than people in the general population (Guth et al. 1993; Norrander and Raymond 1998) and pro-life men focused on hierarchical, God-centered beliefs rather than egalitarian and liberation theological stances (Maxwell and Jelen 1995).

### **Perceptions of Feminist or Pro-life Power**

Collective action frames try to convince potential activists that they can force concessions from reluctant targets (this is sometimes called “agency” or a “sense of collective efficacy”). Women who dislike traditional gender roles often endure or cooperate with these practices when they think they cannot alter the status quo via feminist interventions (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Hinkle et al. 1996). Accordingly, an increased level of perceived efficacy seems to lead liberal women to pro-choice rallies (Kaysen and Stake 2001; Hinkle et al. 1996).

The role of efficacy in pro-life movements is much less certain. While one study noted that pro-life activists did have a greater sense of agency than politically inactive conservatives (Kaysen and Stake 2001), several other papers argued that perceptions of changing governmental policies is irrelevant to pro-life activism (Gross 1995; Norrander and Raymond 1998; Schussman and Soule 2005). While the mechanism behind this relationship is unclear, the issue of perceived power may be

less important to conservative movements that are interested in defending the broader status quo.

### **Pro-life Identities**

Perceptions of one's collective and personal identities can influence reactions to abortions. Abortion activism can be predicated on adhering to group expectations, setting a moral example to others, and living up to images of a moral self (Bobel 2007). Shunning the sinful world of politics can block pro-life activism among some religious fundamentalists, while feeling obligations to engage in politics increased pro-life advocacy (Norrander and Raymond 1998). Also, pro-life activists often expressed guilt over being politically apathetic while also touting the need to "unify with good Christians" and "sacrifice" or "suffer" when continuing their moral crusade (Gross 1995; Maxwell and Jelen 1995).

Abortion activism can also be contingent upon how people view pro-choice and pro-life organizations. Accordingly, the approval of pro-life groups like "Operation Rescue" corresponded with a willingness to engage in pro-life sit-ins and demonstrations (Norrander and Raymond 1998). Conversely, conservative male activists are often very hostile to profeminist men (Fox 2004) and negative interactions with abortion protesters often turn women away from pro-life causes (Foster et al. 2013).

### **"Nobody asked": Social Networks and Mobilizing Structures**

Social networks, which represent webs of recurring interactions between people and groups, always convey some sort of beliefs, values, norms, and identities. Different social networks can promote shared meanings that make people predisposed or receptive to abortion activism. Some authors contend that pro-life activists often confine their conversations to people who disdain abortions and approve of pro-life activism before they ever join the pro-life movement (Blanchard 1994; Gross 1995), while others suggest that pro-life social networks are even more important in maintaining a long term commitment to pro-life activism (Munson 2009).

While social networks often encourage the acceptance or rejection of traditional gender roles, they also serve as conduits of important information about political events. First, organizational bases have played a critical role in actual recruitment by creating and maintaining contact between the movements and individuals. Political parties, formal institutions, and movement activists often try to motivate participation through different persuasive techniques (e.g., face-to-face conversations, phone calls, email, direct mail, etc.). While each recruitment pitch has had some success in recruiting some sympathetic bystanders into activists, people were more likely to engage in political actions when they were encouraged or asked to be active by someone whom they personally knew (Schussman and Soule 2005). In fact, Kaysen and Stake (2001) argued that the best predictor of abortion activism was the befriending political veterans of earlier feminist or pro-life mobilizations.

The Catholic Church and Fundamentalist congregations often provide opportunities to hear anti-choice rhetoric and meet anti-abortion activists. Subsequently,

attending religious services and calling oneself a “Christian Fundamentalist” increased membership in pro-life organizations (Granberg 1982b; Maxwell and Jelen 1995; Munson 2009; Norrander and Raymond 1998; Scott and Schuman 1988). This link of religiosity to pro-life activism is probably due to the fact that members of conservative churches often base some of their political actions on the recommendations of their clergy or conservative political advocacy groups (McVeigh and Sikkink 2001).

## Research Aims

Taking into account this complicated literature, several hypotheses were generated about pro-life activism: (1) People who saw themselves as activists and belonged to activist networks, would engage in more pro-life activism than people who lacked activist self-concepts or access to activists; (2) Pro-life activism would be higher among people who endorsed traditional gender roles, had authoritarian outlooks, respected pro-life activism, and were more religious; and (3) Being married would correspond with increased pro-life activism among both men and women.

## Method

### Recruitment

This study drew from the impressions of 820 college students who were part of a larger study on student activism (Swank and Fahs 2012). To locate adequate numbers of activists and nonactivists, this study selected respondents via two different avenues. To ensure a large pool of fully engaged student activists, the lead researcher distributed surveys at several college-based protests in the Midwest and South (Indiana University, Ohio State University, University of Kentucky). To maximize the likelihood of completed surveys, the researcher asked the protesters to complete the survey before they left the event (protests occurred from Winter 2001 through Spring of 2002). Although these protests mostly focused on antiwar or gay-lesbian rights, 22 of the 244 respondents at the university-based protests indicated that they engaged in any sort of pro-life political behaviors (we wanted to attend a protest on reproductive issues, but none of these campuses created such an event).

To expand our sample size this study also distributed surveys to 575 students who belonged to twelve colleges through the entire U.S. (Fall of 2000). In creating this second sample, we initially separated all public campuses into research, doctoral, masters, or baccalaureate clusters (using the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education). This creation of four clusters enabled access to students from many sorts of colleges, including large research campuses and smaller, state-run commuter colleges. Next, three schools were randomly selected from each of the four strata.

After selecting these twelve colleges, the lead author contacted faculty from each institution via email. Professors in the natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, and business were asked to administer surveys in their classrooms because student

social attitudes have previously differed by such majors (Astin 1993). With participation of faculty being voluntary, 28 of the 338 contacted professors decided to distribute and collect the surveys during one of their class sessions (8.2 %). Eleven percent of these 575 students engaged in some sort of pro-life activism ( $n = 64$ ).

## Participants

The sample characteristics had some unique qualities (see also Table 1). The total sample had a strong female presence, as 512 of the 820 respondents were women (62 %). The educational attainment was also slightly skewed toward upper-division students (39 % were seniors, 29 % juniors, 14 % sophomores, and 17 % first-year). The sample contained a high percentage of rural residents because several of the commuter schools were located far from any major cities (i.e., only 29 % of the students claimed to be from large metropolitan areas while 34 % came from small towns or rural backgrounds). However, the racial breakdown seemed to mirror that of many public institutions, as 86 % of the sample was Euro-American 7 % was African-American, 3 % was Latino (a) and 2 % was Asian-American. Likewise, the age pyramid conformed to familiar trends of college students in that the mean age was 23.2 years old and 70 % of the students were between 18 and 22 years-old ( $SD = 6.6$  and the mode was 20 years-old). Finally, this sample presented a very middle-class profile as only 8 % of students came from families with incomes under \$15,000, 22 % of the students came from families with incomes of \$50,000 to 80,000, and 14 % of student belonged to families with incomes of \$81,000 to 100,000.

## Measures

The survey collected information on general political attitudes. Almost every item recorded responses through a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). In the standard fashion, these responses were coded with scores of 1–5 (Strongly Agree generally equaled 5). The more idiosyncratic coding procedures are described below in more detail.

### *Pro-life Activism*

Citizens can do a wide range of activist behaviors to promote their stance on social issues. To address these practices, respondents were given a checklist of seventeen ways to be politically active (similar to Gross 1995; Kaysen and Stake 2001). Eleven of the behaviors dealt with electoral means of influencing governmental policies (e.g., voting, making financial contributions to elected officials, signing a petition) while six items dealt with more unconventional and protesting tactics (going to a legal demonstration, engaging in civil disobedience, boycotting products). Students were also asked about the political causes that motivated such actions. If the student indicated that they engaged in any of these political actions for pro-life reasons, they were deemed a person who had done pro-life activism (the



**Table 1** Descriptive statistics for the total sample and gender subsamples

Variable	Range	Total sample	Men	Women
Pro-life activism	0–1	86 (11 %)	26 (9 %)	60 (12 %)
Married	0–1	61 (7 %)	10 (3 %)	51 (10 %)
Biblical literalist	0–1	85 (10 %)	22 (7 %)	63 (12 %)
Recruitment network	0–1	365 (45 %)	140 (45 %)	275 (44 %)
Educational attainment	1–4	2.90 (1.10)	2.79 (1.16)	2.97 (1.05)
Family income	1–10	6.05 (2.28)	6.45 (2.17)	5.80 (2.31)
Religious attendance	1–4	2.28 (.91)	2.20 (.84)	2.33 (.95)
Authoritarianism	2–10	6.18 (1.86)	6.25 (2.01)	6.14 (1.77)
Liberal feminist beliefs	1–5	8.23 (1.58)	7.50 (1.52)	8.67 (1.44)
Respect pro-life activists	1–5	3.33 (1.04)	3.28 (.99)	3.37 (1.07)
Activist self concept	5–25	16.11 (3.58)	15.97 (3.66)	16.20 (3.53)
Perceived personal efficacy	1–5	3.50 (1.08)	3.71 (1.02)	3.37 (1.09)
N				

The political action, marriage, recruitment, and literalism variables are reported as frequency and percent of respondents within that category ( $n = 820$ ). Scores for the continuous variables are revealed as means and standard deviations

dependent variable was coded as a dummy variable). With this coding procedure 86 of the 820 students indicated they had engaged in pro-life activism at least once in their lifetime.

### *Demographics*

Some of the demographic variables were measured through dichotomous dummy variables. For gender, respondents were asked “what is your sex” (Female = 1, Male = 0). Being married was determined by their response to the question: “What is your current marital status?” Because the literature predicted that being married would have the greatest effects on our dependent variables, and few students were divorced or widowed, we decided upon the binary coding of married = 1 and other = 0.

Some of the other demographic factors were measured through close-ended scales. Social class was determined through a family income scale (there were 10 categories that started at under \$10,000 and ended with above \$151,000). For educational attainment, students were asked “Please indicate your highest level of education.” Undergraduates who said they were first-year students received a 1 while seniors were given a 4.

### *Mobilizing Networks*

Activism studies typically choose to operationalize mobilization networks in many different ways. Most often, the studies have explored the value expressed by other people, the way a person was recruited to activism, and types of group affiliations (Lim 2008). Being embedded in a religious institution was asked via the following question: “How often do you attend religious services?” (Weekly = 4, Never = 1). The variable, “recruitment networks,” dealt with issues of access to peers who shared relevant information about ongoing or future political campaigns. To address cases of explicit face-to-face requests for participation, we asked: “Have any friends ever asked you to go to a political event?” To code the dichotomous responses, yes equaled 1 and no equaled 0.

### *Collective Action Frames*

All of the collective action frames were measured through Likert scales. We had two variables that addressed gender specific perceptions. The first injustice frame, liberal feminist beliefs, was a multi-item additive scale dealt with feminist interpretations of proper gender roles in families along with workplace options for women (Levonian Morgan 1996). The two items from the Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale stated: “A women should have the same job opportunities as a man” and “It is a man’s duty to maintain order in his family” (coded in the liberal direction with Cronbach  $\alpha = .76$ ). A second injustice frame focused on an authoritarian orientation to power structures. Two items from the Right-Wing Authoritarian scale (Altemeyer 1988) concentrated on the need to submit to authority figures and anger toward people who challenge the expectations of authority figures: “Law and order ought to be strengthened in our society” and “I get angry when I hear people criticizing the United States” (Cronbach  $\alpha = .70$ ). This additive scale was coded toward greater authoritarianism.

Approval of Christian orthodoxy was addressed through doctrinal conservatism and biblical literalism. In addressing the belief that the bible was written only by God and contains inerrant truths, we asked: “What is your opinion about the bible?” (Davis and Smith 1992). Participants who checked the answer “The Bible is the word of God and should be taken literally word for word” were coded as literalists, while other answers were coded as non-literalists (e.g., “The bible was inspired by god, but must be interpreted by humans” or “The bible was written by humans and does not have important ideas”). Personal political efficacy dealt with participants’ confidence in their own understanding of political matters: “I have a pretty good grasp of today’s political issues” (Strongly Agree = 5).

Activist identities were detected through a five-item composite scale on politicized self-concepts (Cronbach  $\alpha = .700$ ). The first two questions dealt with the internalization of protest norms, or the extent that people felt obliged to protest: “I see myself as someone who is involved in promoting social justice” and “I feel guilty when I am politically active” (Strongly Agree = 5). Another item dealt with support for collective efforts to assuage injustice: “If we leave well enough alone, eventually men and women will be treated equally” (Strongly Agree = 1). Finally, activist identities included rejoinders to the “free-rider” dilemma of people benefitting from activism even if they remain politically disengaged (Oliver 1984). To address the belief that people should be active in order to compensate for the political apathy of others, we posed: “I must be politically active because most people are politically inactive” (Strongly Agree = 5).

## Results

### Sample Characteristics and Bivariate Gender Differences

To begin our analysis, we ran simple descriptive calculations and conducted a number of tests of group differences by gender. Table 1 displayed the means, standard deviations, and frequencies for every variable in the study. When exploring the demographic factors in the total sample, some unique patterns occurred. In the framing factors, the students had inconsistent trends; the means leaned toward more liberal gender roles as well as greater authoritarianism, and respecting pro-life activists. In the network factors, roughly half of the students had been asked to a political event by a peer.

Chi squares ( $\chi^2$ ) were also performed to examine for gender differences among the variables. When exploring the between gender discrepancies, eight Chi squares displayed significance. For the dependent variable, gendered showed no significant differences for pro-life activism. Among demographic factors, women were statistically more likely to marry  $\chi^2(1, 820) = 12.59, p < .01$ , achieve educationally  $\chi^2(1, 820) = 10.47, p < .05$ , and have less income than men  $\chi^2(1, 820) = 21.78, p < .01$ . Among framing factors, women had significantly higher scores for liberal feminist beliefs  $\chi^2(1, 820) = 127.99, p < .001$ , respecting pro-life activists  $\chi^2(1, 820) = 18.33$ , and perceived personal political activity.  $\chi^2(1, 820) = 23.63, p < .001$ . Among religious factors women attended more religious services  $\chi^2(1, 820) = 10.41, p < .05$  and were more inclined to literal stances on the bible  $\chi^2(1, 820) = 8.73, p < .05$ . Finally gender offered no significant bivariate associations in belonging to an activist recruitment network, having an authoritarian orientation, and retaining activist self-concepts.

### Binary Logistic Regressions for Pro-life and Women’s Rights Activism

The explanatory analysis of our variables was derived from several binary logistic regression analyses. Logistic regressions were well suited at analyzing dichotomous dependent variables as they calculated a likelihood estimation of a certain event

occurring (Hosmer and Lemeshow 1989). In our case, there were two categories in the dependent or outcome variable: respondents either participated or did not participate in pro-life activism (nonparticipation is the reference). Logistic regressions are also well suited for our data because their use is not confined by many of the strict requirements other sorts of regressions (e.g., a normal distribution in the dependent variable or no problems of homoscedasticity). As expected, the data met all the conditions for a logistic regression, in that the outcome variable was coded in categorical binary fashion, linear relationships were assumed between the independent variables and the logit of the dependent variables, and there was an absence of outliers or high multicollinearity. Multicollinearity diagnostics suggested low variance inflation factors (VIF) in each regression because the VIF was below 1.78 for every independent variable.

Table 2 presented the logistic regressions for pro-life activism among college students. With three regressions in the table, the statistical columns display the results of the total sample and gender specific sub-samples. This “separate group analysis” highlights the salience of resource, network, and framing factors across gender categories (Landry 2007) and means were inserted for missing data. When addressing the combined strength of the demographic, framing, and network factors in Table 2, the full model was able to account for between 59 and 45 % of the variance in pro-life actions with model being the strong for male pro-lifers (Pseudo  $R^2$ ).

**Table 2** Logistic regression estimates of pro-life activism for total sample and by gender

Independent variable	Total sample			Men			Women		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Odd</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Odd</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Odd</i>
Female	.46	(.34)	1.58						
Married	.75	(.43)	2.12	−.39	(.33)	.67	1.12	(.48)	3.07**
Educational attainment	−.25	(.13)	.77*	−.60	(.29)	.54*	−.19	(.12)	.82
Family income	−.14	(.06)	.86	−.78	(.18)	.45**	.05	(.08)	1.05
Religious attendance	−.12	(.15)	.88	−.72	(.38)	.48*	−.19	(.19)	.83
Biblical literalist	.29	(.22)	1.34	.03	(.48)	1.04	.71	(.30)	2.05*
Recruitment network	1.04	(.30)	2.83**	1.08	(.69)	6.10***	.97	(.39)	2.66*
Authoritarianism	.16	(.08)	1.18	.82	(.23)	2.28*	.01	(.11)	1.01
Liberal feminist beliefs	−.65	(.17)	.52***	−1.36	(.39)	.25**	−.53	(.21)	.58*
Respect pro-life activists	1.34	(.18)	3.84***	1.55	(.42)	4.74***	1.42	(.23)	4.17***
Activist self concept	.59	(.20)	1.80*	.75	(.45)	2.13*	.67	(.26)	1.96*
Perceived personal efficacy	.21	(.14)	1.24	.14	(.32)	1.15	.29	(.18)	1.34
Pseudo $R^2$		0.47			0.59			0.45	
N		820			308			512	

Cell scores include the coefficient, standard errors, and adjusted odd ratio (OAR). The pseudo  $R^2$  is Nagelkerke's

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

When addressing pro-life activism, specific framing and network variables performed as expected. Marriage was associated with greater pro-life activism among female college students (odds of 3.07,  $p < .01$ ). Pro-life activism was also more common for men and women who rejected liberal feminist beliefs, internalized activist self-concepts, respected pro-life activists, and belonged to activist recruitment networks (even after controlling for the other resource, framing, and network covariates). Among these significant factors, respecting pro-life activists had the strongest and most consistent associations (odds of 4.74–3.84,  $p < .001$ ) and activist self-images routinely had the weakest significant relationships (odds of 2.13–1.80,  $p < .05$ ). Interestingly, the importance of activist networks and disapproving of liberal gender roles fluctuated between the genders as both variables were more critical for men than women. The odds for activist networks increased to 6.10 from 2.66 for men, and liberal feminist beliefs decreased in odds from .58 to .25.

Other factors displayed some unique and conditional findings. Gender did not inherently predict pro-life activism, but the strength of variables often wavered between the genders. In rebuking the resource model, pro-life activism was less common among males who were more highly educated and more affluent (odds of .45 and .54,  $p < .01$ ,  $p < .05$ ). On the other hand, education level and income failed to predict pro-life activism among women. Religious factors also had gender distinctive associations. Being a biblical literalist was significantly connected to pro-life activism among females (odds of 2.05,  $p < .05$ ) while religious attendance actually shrunk pro-life activism among males (odds of .48,  $p < .05$ ). This probably suggests that religious activities in themselves did not automatically increase pro-life activism, but religion could nevertheless be important when women adopt an orthodox or fundamentalist approach to Christianity. Finally, authoritarian orientations led only men to pro-life activism (odds of 2.28,  $p < .05$ ) while pro-life activism was never related to praising one's personal efficacy.

## Discussion

By exploring pro-life activism among college students, this analysis offered a unique look into a retrospective sample of political engagement. This study analyzed the ways gender, marriage, and financial resources, as well as framing and social network processes, were connected to pro-life activism among college students. This investigation used logistic regressions to locate important factors within the total sample and also determined if the possible correlates worked the same way for men and women. The split sample analyses tested the assumptions that the gendered practices in the U.S. would establish a distinct set of predictor variables for men and women.

This study demonstrates the value of combining demographic, framing, and network factors into an integrative theoretical model. All of the three regressions found significant  $\chi^2$  for the model and the combination of variables routinely explained between 59 and 45 % of the variance in the activism outcomes (even though the sample size was not equivalent for the gender subsamples). Using a

broad range of predictor variables also discovered a multitude of crucial predictors, as 10 of the 12 independent variables reached the minimal threshold for significance at least once in the regressions.

In general the resource model did not fare well in this study. In general, access to money and education never increased pro-life activism for either gender. In fact, resources correlated with less pro-life activism among men as greater income and schooling were associated with lower pro-life tendencies for the male subsample. Finding greater pro-life activism among poorer and less educated men countered previous studies that found greater educational attainment among pro-life activists (Granberg 1982a; Kaysen and Stake 2001; Maxwell and Jelen 1995; Norrander and Raymond 1998). This unique result could be an artifact of sampling college students as compared to all adults but this finding also echoes Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) theories that working-class men embraced a gender conservatism that is more "domineering" or "hegemonic" (e.g., poorer males feel that they are entitled to prove their manhood by deciding what is best for women).

Issues of gender and marital status worked in unique ways. There was no gender gap in the amount of pro-life activism among college students. While women clearly carry more of the health and social burdens of unwanted pregnancies, we did not see any signs of women being more or less engaged in pro-life activism than men. This study also addressed the role of marriage in women's political participation. Although most earlier research suggests that marriage is correlated with lower activism for women (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Conway et al. 1997; Fahs 2007), this study revealed that being married was correlated with women engaging in more pro-life activism (similar to Kaysen and Stake 2001). The importance of marriage could be amplified for this sample because only the most conservative of female college students typically get married while enrolled in college. Our measure for marital status did not address the qualities of marriage life, so future studies should explore of the aspects of an inequitable division of household labor, the lack of employment outside of the family, having children, or marrying a conservative husband would make the marriage effects even stronger.

The study clearly confirms the importance of social networks in abortion activism (Gross 1995; Kaysen and Stake 2001; Nelson et al. 2008). Pro-life activists were likely to belong to activist social networks that invited them to political events. Still, these associations were not free from temporal ordering problems, such that well-known conservative students may be invited to more pro-life events. Nevertheless, these results point to the importance of *contexts* in abortion activism for pro-life activists.

Religious contexts were occasionally significant in this study, as attending religious services was related to pro-life activism among men but failed to do so for women. Perhaps men acquire more of their abortion attitudes from religious leaders than women, just as conservative religious denominations may be better at motivating political activism for men than for women. Clearly, future research must explore these possibilities in greater depth.

In general, this study also confirmed most of our hypotheses about specific collective action frames. Regardless of gender, this study revealed that gender role expectations and activist self-concepts were core predictors of abortion activism

(Kelly and Breilinger 1995; Nelson et al. 2008; Scott and Schuman 1988). With the rejection of liberal gender roles correlating with fewer pro-life political behaviors, abortion activism was linked to gender expectations in the family and in the formal workplace. Future research might try to discern if different gender, sexuality, and abortion attitudes also predict pro-life activism (e.g., modern sexism, benevolent sexism, hegemonic masculinity, endorsement of chastity beliefs for men and women, support of birth control, and the importance or approval of abortion). Likewise, analyses of events that push women to adopt a critical consciousness about gender norms are also crucial to studies on abortion activism.

While this list is not exhaustive, future studies should also examine whether having an abortion or experiencing sexual harassment, partner violence, and sexist parental modeling are related to pro-life activism. With activist self-concepts being significant, having strong opinions of gender relations and feeling a need to solve social problems are covariates for abortion activism. To corroborate earlier studies, pro-life activists routinely see themselves as social justice advocates who would feel guilty if they failed to act on their moral commitments (Gross 1995; Kelly and Breilinger 1995; Maxwell and Jelen 1995; Nelson et al. 2008; Norrander and Raymond 1998). Moreover, abortion activism might also increase in tandem with a belief that people's actions are necessary in order to compensate for all of the people who are "politically apathetic."

Seeing pro-life activists as virtuous people also moved men and women to engage in pro-life activism. Respecting like-minded or similar groups of people can result from social learning because close referents in families, schools, churches, or work might be pro-life activists. This study also found that authoritarian orientations only affected male pro-life activism, and that biblical literalism was connected solely to pro-life activism among women. These findings suggest that respecting conventional authority figures were somewhat related to pro-life activism, but women drew more from traditional religious and Christian beliefs while men drew more from deference to authority in general. Moreover, with the correlation between men attending religious events and pro-life activism, this reveals that intrinsic religious beliefs were less important to male pro-life activism than being around religious people who probably condemned abortions.

There were some surprises with other framing factors as well. Having a sense of personal political efficacy never drove pro-life activism. This suggests that abortion activism was most likely contingent upon participants' stances on gender norms and their felt political obligations rather than a sense that they were personally powerful or informed about politics. This may also help to explain why pro-life activism was not correlated with educational backgrounds or incomes.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study offers some theoretical and methodological rigor. Studies of pro-life activists often have small samples and are mostly descriptive in nature. By using the "resource model" of political participation, this study was able to examine a wide range of demographic, network, and framing factors that were often ignored by earlier research. Our creation of a sample from many sorts of college campuses was

unique because pro-life and college activism studies are often confined to a single campus or a specific region of the United States. Moreover, the sampling of ongoing protests guarantees a large enough sample of activists to properly run logistic regressions.

With regard to limitations, the findings may not apply to all Americans because college students have less variation in age, education, race, and class than the general U.S. population. Moreover, our findings may not totally generalize to people who have not attended college or people that are older than typical college students. Issues of selection bias can be lurking because we did not use the same sampling techniques to find the activist and comparison groups. Issues of temporal ordering can be a problem with cross-sectional data (e.g., students may consider themselves more of an activist after engaging in activism). Cross-sectional data also fails to capture the role of history and protest cycles in political engagements, so we cannot be certain as to how these findings apply to pro-life activism in other decades (see Staggenborg and Taylor 2005). Measurement errors are also possible, as the dichotomized measure of pro-life behaviors overlooks the extent and types of activism done throughout a person's lifetime. The binary distinction of pro-life behaviors also incorporates electoral and protest activities, but the predictors of passionate and disruptive pro-life activism may differ from more passive or electoral-minded pro-life activism. Different measures of religious orthodoxies could have yielded different results and perceived efficacy may have been higher if we had asked about the estimated potency of political tactics (e.g. petition singing, doing a protest, or blocking an abortion clinic). Regarding activist networks, our measures did not specify if they were asked to attend a political event on abortion or the context in which they were asked (e.g., a college women's studies class or a collegiate bible study group). Problems of over-demanding recall could lead to unreliable results for family incomes or participants' recall of timelines surrounding activism or attendance at political events.

While this paper delineated much of the antecedents to student involvement in pro-life activism, more work is clearly needed in this area. Longitudinal studies are needed to address issues of causation and researchers may want to apply our theoretical model to pro-life activism among different populations. Scholars may also want to explore the ways that pro-life activism is related to membership in certain religious denominations, as well as perceptions of "when life begins," the psychological cost of having an abortion, or the health risks of making abortion illegal. Ultimately, sexuality, gender, and movement scholars must keep refining our understanding of the processes and mechanisms connected to abortion activism as it serves as a hotbed of political engagement in the U.S., drastically impacts women's access to abortion, and so profoundly affects the lives of so many who struggle for social justice.

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