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Women of the Religious Right: Feminine
Conservatism and Opposition to the Equal
Rights Amendment

By

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Abstract

The strategic denial of conservative women's leadership in the New Christian Right during the 1970's, enabled this group of women to develop unique rhetorical strategies and claim political marginality while exerting significant influence. The influence and strategies of conservative women are highlighted by their rhetoric opposing the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment after its passage through Congress in 1972, by emphasizing issues such as traditional gender roles, concerns about the military draft, and immorality. Research on gender ideologies shapes recruitment strategies, organizational structures, and political agendas. The patriarchal family is identified as a key organizing principle within conservative religious right movements, influencing gender and sexual politics. The opposition to the E.R.A. after 1972 was rooted in deep-seated moral principles emphasizing the nuclear family, predominantly expressed by White Evangelical women through extensive literature production, rallies, and letter writing campaigns. Concerns about abortion, motherhood, and the perceived threat to traditional gender roles feature prominently in opposition rhetoric. Women-led organizations exploited fears about the military draft, particularly among housewives, and amplify anxieties related to racial discrimination and desegregation. This research sheds light on the complexities of women's involvement in right-wing movements beginning in the 1970's and their impact on social and political discourse within the context of the ratification of the E.R.A. By tracking common threads and phrases used in printed forms of oppositional rhetoric from conservative women we can begin to understand the methods deployed in gaining supporters of the anti-E.R.A. movement and the amendments subsequent failure to meet its ratification requirements.

Keywords: Gender, Sexuality, Religion, Right-wing Movements, Gender Ideologies, Abortion, Equal Rights Amendment, Conservative Women

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Introduction

Opposition to the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (E.R.A.)¹ emerged in 1972 and garnered active participation from conservative women, many of whom aligned with the values commonly associated with the Religious Right (Brady & Tedin 1976), regardless of whether they explicitly identified as part of this political faction. The oppositional rhetoric produced by these women often centered around Christian/Evangelical beliefs and the fear of potential changes to the nuclear family and the rights of housewives resulting from the E.R.A. becoming ratified. This early opposition to the E.R.A. prominently focused on the recently decided Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade*². Religious organizations across the country emphasized the condemnation of abortion and the rights of the fetus, often referring to the "Human Life Amendment" as a direct counter to the E.R.A. (Westfall, 1982). Both men and women within religious circles expressed opposition to the E.R.A. and championed this alternative "amendment."

Conservative women in the late 1940s and 1950s employed a rhetoric known as "housewife populism," emphasizing women's marginalization in politics, selflessness,

¹ The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution, asserts that "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." Congress approved the ERA for state ratification in 1972, setting a non-constitutionally mandated deadline of seven years. From 1972 to 1977, 35 state legislatures voted in favor of ratifying the ERA, falling three states short of the required 38 for constitutional adoption. Despite a congressional extension of the deadline until 1982, no additional states ratified the amendment during the extended period, leading to its widely perceived expiration. (Congressional Research Service, 2019)

² In 1970, a lawsuit was initiated by a plaintiff using the pseudonym "Jane Roe" to protect her identity. She filed the lawsuit against Henry Wade, the district attorney of Dallas County, Texas, where she lived. The legal challenge was aimed at a Texas law that prohibited abortion unless it was deemed necessary by a doctor to save a woman's life. Roe argued that these state laws were unconstitutional due to their vague nature and their infringement upon her right to personal privacy. She claimed that her rights, as protected by the First, Fourth, Fifth, Ninth, and Fourteenth Amendments, were being violated. *Jane Roe, et al. v. Henry Wade*, District Attorney of Dallas County 410 U.S. 113 (1973)

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anonymity, and militancy to secure their place within conservative populist movements while maintaining political marginality (Johnson, 2018). However, conservative women over time developed specific rhetorical strategies to negotiate their political roles at the grassroots level, thereby introducing a gendered dimension to the New Christian Right's ambivalence regarding the relationship between Christian faith and political action. Studies of conservative women's leadership within the New Christian Right have been limited, partly due to strategic denial of their own importance. This lack of research predates the New Christian Right movement, reflecting earlier scholarship that overlooked women's participation in grassroots conservative movements (Benowitz, 2015). Despite claiming positions of national leadership in government, these women justified their authority by asserting that their work was not primarily political or detrimental to politics.

This research aims to understand the narratives employed by conservative women through the careful examination and interpretation of archival materials consisting of letters, flyers, pamphlets, and other rhetoric produced for the purpose of opposing the ratification of the E.R.A. Relevant archival collections were identified by their primary sources, being anti-E.R.A. literature, and the authors of these primary sources, white conservative women. The data collected suggests opposition to the E.R.A. among conservative women primarily stemmed from traditional gender roles, immorality, the nuclear family, and concerns about the military draft, particularly in relation to desegregation policies. White Evangelical women were found to be the most prolific in generating literature opposing the E.R.A., disseminating it through newsletters, magazines, editorials, and/or pamphlets distributed at rallies. The opposition was also intertwined with concerns surrounding abortion, sex education, and homosexuality, highlighting the intricate interplay between gender, religion, and political action within the E.R.A. context.

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Research suggests that some women, particularly housewives and mothers, expressed concerns that the E.R.A. would undermine their choice to pursue domestic roles (Webster, Baldwin, & Hughes, 1982). Conservative women viewed the E.R.A. as a potential threat to their womanhood and traditional family roles. Additionally, the contentious topic of abortion added to fears about the erosion of motherhood and the right to choose (Bachiochi, 2011). Traditional gender roles within the family and society were emphasized by anti-E.R.A. groups led by women. They strategically employed this approach in their literature. For instance, the Happiness of Womanhood (H.O.W.) organization notably organized the "Satin Pillow" Rally in San Diego, which featured a contest where men judged the attendees to identify the most feminine women as well as awards given to the women who were adept in sewing a satin pillowcase.

It was not only women who embraced traditional gender roles in the home who opposed the Equal Rights Amendment. There were also working women who expressed concerns and felt threatened by the potential implications of the E.R.A. These working women who opposed the E.R.A. argued that gender-specific laws and protections were necessary to ensure equality and support women's advancement in the workplace (Woodyard & Cady, 2019). They believed that acknowledging and accommodating the unique circumstances faced by women in balancing work and family responsibilities was crucial for achieving true equality (Hunter, 2021). While the opposition to the E.R.A. among working women was not as prominent as among those who embraced motherhood and traditional wife status, their concerns and perspectives added complexity to the debates surrounding the amendment.

Concerns about the U.S. military also arose regarding the E.R.A. The possibility of drafting women into the military after the E.R.A.'s ratification was discussed, but it's debated whether this was a genuine consideration, or a scare tactic employed by women-led opposition

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groups (Marley, 2000). Literature from the Women Who Want to be Women (W.W.W.W.) organization questioned whether housewives would be comfortable with their husbands' sharing barracks with women who were drafted due to the E.R.A. The military implications of the E.R.A. sparked varied perspectives, with some advocating for equal opportunities while others expressed concerns about privacy, unit cohesion, and physical requirements. These discussions contributed to the wider discourse on gender roles and equality.

Literature Review

The Equal Rights Amendment is a proposed amendment to the Constitution which would ensure that all citizens have equal legal rights regardless of gender. Originally introduced in 1923, the amendment was finally passed by Congress in 1972. The E.R.A. also established constitutional safeguards for women's rights in addition to addressing gender inequality. Aside from eliminating discrimination in employment, education, and family law, the amendment would also guarantee equality for both genders (Stevens, 2005). The text of the amendment stated: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." (Equal Rights Amendment, 1972).

Despite initial support, the E.R.A. encountered significant challenges in gaining widespread acceptance. The amendment took nearly 50 years to pass both houses of Congress and be ratified by the states. As a result of Congress' approval, the Equal Rights Amendment was sent to state legislatures for ratification in 1972. While supporters claim that the E.R.A. is necessary to provide constitutional protection against gender-based discrimination, opponents maintain that it is unnecessary or could have unintended consequences (Poggioli, 1984).

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Opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment stemmed from various concerns and perspectives expressed by many groups, including conservative women. In the opinion of conservative women, the amendment would result in women losing certain privileges and protections specially designed for them, such as maternity leave. There was concern that the E.R.A. would undermine the legal provisions that recognize and address gender-based needs and differences (Yellin, 2009). Conservative women also emphasized the preservation of traditional gender roles and argued that the E.R.A. threatened the societal and familial structures they deemed crucial. These women believed that gender equality, as envisioned by the amendment, would erode the unique contributions of women as caregivers, wives, and mothers (Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2007). Additionally, there were concerns about the impact on the family unit, with opponents arguing that the E.R.A. would disrupt traditional family structures and values. They feared potential consequences for the roles of husbands, wives, and children within the family (O'Neill, 2015). Apprehension was also expressed about the potential consequences on women's rights and protections, suggesting that the amendment might unintentionally eliminate certain legal safeguards established to address historical gender inequalities (Offen, 2000). Lastly, opposition to the E.R.A. was influenced by conservative and religious beliefs, with some groups viewing the amendment as conflicting with their ideologies regarding gender roles and the sanctity of marriage (Miller, 2008). It is important to recognize that these perspectives represent a specific segment of women, as there were also diverse groups who supported the E.R.A., viewing it to address systemic discrimination and promote gender equality.

The theory of strategic denial or strategic invisibility a sociological framework to understand the limited studies of conservative women's leadership within the New Christian Right (Johnson, 2018). This theory suggests that conservative women within these religious and

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political movements may intentionally downplay or deny their own importance and influence for strategic reasons (Gill, 2017). In the context of conservative women's leadership within the New Christian Right, strategic denial serves several purposes.

First, it can be a defensive strategy to deflect criticism and opposition. By downplaying their own significance, conservative women leaders may seek to avoid being targeted or attacked by those who disagree with their ideologies or goals. This can help them navigate contentious political and cultural landscapes more effectively (Braungart & Braungart, 2008). Additionally, strategic denial can help maintain traditional gender roles and norms within the New Christian Right. By downplaying their leadership roles or emphasizing their submission to male authority, these women can reinforce and preserve traditional gender hierarchies and expectations. This aligns with the movement's broader ideological stance on gender and family values (Gill, 2017). Lastly, strategic denial allows conservative women leaders to avoid potential backlash or conflicts within their own religious or political communities. By presenting themselves as humble supporters or followers rather than assertive leaders, they may mitigate resistance from individuals or groups who may challenge their positions or authority. This strategy helps them maintain cohesion and harmony within their movement (DiLeonardo, 1998).

By strategically denying their own importance or influence, conservative women leaders within the New Christian Right can navigate the complexities of their social and political contexts. However, this also contributes to the limited visibility and study of their roles, as their own deliberate downplaying of their leadership positions makes it challenging for researchers to capture and analyze their experiences and impact. Overall, the theory of strategic denial or strategic invisibility sheds light on the complex dynamics at play within conservative women's

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leadership in the New Christian Right and provides a framework for understanding their motivations and behaviors.

Contrary to the notion of strategic denial or passive participation, research has shed light on the active role of women within far-right movements. Rather than downplaying their significance, conservative women who participate in right-wing movements often play an active and deliberate role. They may employ gender stereotypes and essentialism as part of their rationale for involvement, indicating a complex relationship between women, gender, and right-wing ideologies (Blee, 2012). In this context, it is argued that women's engagement in far-right movements may serve to challenge traditional gender roles or seek empowerment within societies dominated by men (Blee, 1987). By aligning with right-wing ideologies that emphasize traditional values and gender norms, women may perceive this as an opportunity to assert their own agency and influence societal dynamics. Their involvement can be seen as a strategic choice to navigate the power dynamics and societal expectations surrounding gender (Blee, 2020). Some researchers suggest that women's active participation in far-right movements can be driven by a desire to reshape gender norms, challenge feminist movements, or seek recognition and influence within conservative circles. By employing gender stereotypes and essentialism, they may justify their participation as fulfilling their perceived roles as protectors of tradition, culture, or family values (Campion, 2020).

These studies demonstrate that women participate in women's rights movements and right-wing ideologies in a variety of ways. They underscore the intersectionality of gender, religion, and political action, revealing the complex dynamics that influence women's engagement in these movements. These scholars contribute to a deeper understanding of the broader societal implications of opposition to women's rights and the complex gender dynamics

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in right-wing movements by exploring the strategies, motivations, and limitations associated with women's involvement.

The Equal Rights Amendment was opposed by several women's organizations during the ratification process. These organizations believed that the E.R.A. would have negative consequences for women's rights and the traditional values they held. The organization Stop ERA, founded in 1972 by Phyllis Schlafly, was one of the most well-known opponents of the E.R.A. Women's Concerns for America (CWA), founded in 1979, also played a significant role in opposing the bill. CWA focused on preserving traditional family values and contended that the E.R.A. would harm women's rights by erasing legal distinctions between men and women. Eagle Forum, founded by Phyllis Schlafly in 1972, mobilized women to counter feminist agendas and emphasized the importance of women's roles as wives and mothers. In addition, Women Who Want to Be Women (WWWW) argued that the E.R.A. would undermine the distinct qualities and roles of women as caregivers, wives, and mothers.

The Equal Rights Amendment was introduced in 1923 and passed by the U.S. Congress in 1972, but it failed to secure the necessary ratification by 38 states before the deadline in 1982. Today, there are ongoing efforts to revive the E.R.A. and push for its ratification (Offen, 2000). The E.R.A. remains relevant in discussions about gender equality and women's rights. Supporters argue that it is needed to guarantee equal rights under the law and address persistent gender inequalities (Bullock, 2005). On the other hand, opponents express concerns about potential implications on various aspects, such as family structure, reproductive rights, and existing legal provisions (Lewis, 2017). As women's experiences are shaped by intersecting identities, intersectionality needs to be considered when discussing the E.R.A. The social context has evolved since the E.R.A.'s introduction, with subsequent legislation, court decisions, and

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social movements contributing to advances in women's rights. However, challenges and disparities persist, and the conversation around gender equality continues to evolve in response to changing societal dynamics.

Data and Methods

Several archives were consulted for this project, including those located at the Abakanowicz Research Center at the Chicago History Museum and the Iowa Women's Archives at the University of Iowa.

The Abakanowicz Research Center is the repository for the E.R.A. Central (Chicago, Ill.) records, created by the E.R.A. Central, Housewives for the E.R.A., and Men for the E.R.A. with material collected between 1970-1976.³ Among the E.R.A. Central records in the Abakanowicz Research Center are several correspondences, letters (supportive and critical), minutes, reports, news clippings, and other types of materials. This collection focuses on E.R.A. Central's efforts to secure Equal Rights Amendment ratification in Illinois. Topics include opposition analysis, building political support, and potential consequences of the E.R.A. The files are organized alphabetically by topic, covering both organizational and campaign-related subjects. News clippings are arranged chronologically, spanning 1971-1976, providing insights into the political struggles. Using the content list of the finding aid I was able to identify File Folders 11-13 in Box 1 containing Anti-E.R.A. materials produced by national groups from 1973-1976.

The Iowa Women's Archive of the University of Iowa houses several collections used for this research. The first collection identified was the Iowa Women Against the Equal Rights

³ E.R.A. Central (Chicago, Ill.) records, Abakanowicz Research Center, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL. 1970-1976

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Amendment records collected during 1972-1980⁴. Iowa Women Against the Equal Rights Amendment formed in 1972 to oppose Iowa's ratification of the E.R.A. They distributed literature, organized letter-writing campaigns, and fought against the state E.R.A. In 1975, a resolution to rescind ratification was filed but defeated. The group also successfully mobilized opposition to the state-level E.R.A., which received only around 44% of the popular vote in 1978 and 1979. Using the finding aid I was able to identify the first file folder as containing the most literature opposing the E.R.A. produced by national groups.

The second collection identified in the Iowa Women's Archive was the Iowa ERA Coalition records collected from 1916-1981, with the bulk of the collection containing material from the Iowa ERA campaign from 1972-1980⁵. The Iowa ERA Coalition formed in November 1978 to advocate for voter approval of the state Equal Rights Amendment. Comprising approximately fifty member organizations, the coalition disbanded in November 1980 after Iowa voters rejected the E.R.A. initiative by a 56 to 44 percent margin. Margaret "Peg" Anderson served as the state chairperson and main spokesperson for the Iowa ERA Coalition, working tirelessly to promote the amendment. Despite efforts to dispel concerns, voters remained apprehensive about potential implications for alternative lifestyles. Anderson, a long-time Iowa resident with a diverse political career, played a prominent role in advocating for the E.R.A. Using the finding aid I was able to identify Box 9 containing Topical Files with two file folders dedicated to Anti-ERA, 1972-1980, and Anti-ERA, undated.

⁴ Iowa Women Against the Equal Rights Amendment records, Iowa Women's Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA. 1972-1980

⁵ Iowa ERA Coalition records, Iowa Women's Archives, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA. 1916-1981

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The Central E.R.A. records, Iowa Women Against the ERA, and Iowa ERA Coalition archival collections hold significant importance for multiple reasons. Firstly, these collections offer a historical documentation of the Equal Rights Amendment movements in Iowa and Illinois and its broader impact on women's rights in the United States. Within these archives, one can find a plethora of documents, photographs, and other materials that shed light on the strategies, challenges, and achievements of various organizations and individuals involved in advocating for or against the E.R.A. As such, these collections serve as invaluable resources for researchers, scholars, and students seeking to delve into the E.R.A. movement and its historical context.

The Equal Rights Amendment has had a significant impact on the states of Iowa and Illinois. In Iowa, the E.R.A. movement gained momentum in the 1970s with the formation of the Iowa ERA Coalition. They worked diligently to raise awareness, mobilize support, and lobby legislators for the ratification of the E.R.A. in the state. In 1972, Iowa became the 35th state to ratify the amendment, closely following the lead of Illinois. However, due to a controversy surrounding the extension of the ratification deadline, Iowa, along with several other states, rescinded its ratification in 1979 (Iowa ERA Coalition). Despite this setback, activists in Iowa have continued their efforts to reintroduce and ratify the ERA, emphasizing its importance for achieving gender equality.

In Illinois, the state holds a historic place in the E.R.A. movement. It was the first state to ratify the amendment in 1972, just months after it was approved by Congress. Illinois' early support played a pivotal role in setting the stage for other states to follow suit. The state became a key battleground for E.R.A. advocacy, with passionate supporters and opponents engaging in active campaigns (E.R.A. Central). However, despite broad support, the E.R.A. fell short of the required ratification by three-fourths of the states by the original deadline in 1982.

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Thirty-one pieces of literature were meticulously curated for this project, encompassing a diverse range of mediums such as flyers, newsletters, brochures, letters, and more. The selection process adhered to two key criteria. Firstly, each piece of literature had to be authored by a woman who expressed opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment. In cases where an author was not explicitly mentioned, consideration was given to the organization or group responsible for producing the literature. Notably, literature from organizations established by women to champion women's and wives' rights was also included. A prime example is the voluminous collection of literature from Stop ERA, a conservative political organization spearheaded by Phyllis Schlafly. Through her leadership, Stop ERA galvanized women and politicians alike in their resolute opposition to the E.R.A. Secondly, the selected materials were required to prominently convey their opposition to the E.R.A. within the chosen format of literature.

After literature was identified as meeting both criteria, I proceeded to memo reflective notes about what I was learning from the data. This process involved pulling out themes, arguments, and/or main points within the literature being produced. I chose to record direct quotations where relevant, at my discretion, but otherwise notated summaries of the themes, arguments, and/or main points of each piece of literature. The notations and direct quotes were collected into a master excel spreadsheet and were organized into sections according to archival location and collection.

My memos withing this spreadsheet were organized by the title of the piece, author, organization, date, and location of organization. Not all this information was available for every piece of literature but was recorded when available. I uploaded my notes as transcripts into an online coding system, to enable me to organize the themes that came up during my analyses. My

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preferred method of qualitative analyzing data for this project was in vivo coding in which I derived my coding labels and sublabels from the data I initially collected.

By following my in vivo coding and letting the data lead the coding I ended up with eight different primary codes from my data consisting of Sex/Gender, Immorality, Family Unit, Opponents/Enemies, Laws, Financial, Church/Religion, and Education. Under the primary code of Sex/Gender, three secondary codes consisting of the Separation of Sex, Sex Crimes/Violence, and the Military Draft were created. The secondary code of Separation of Sex has two additional labels consisting of Desegregation and Gender Neutral. Under the primary code of Immorality, four secondary codes including Abortion, Sex/Sexuality, Homosexuality, and Pornography. Under the primary code of Family Unit, three secondary codes consisting of Childcare, Divorce/Alimony/Child support, and spouses were created. The secondary code of Marriage under Family Unit was broken down into five more additional coded categories. Under the primary code of Opponents/Enemies, three secondary codes titled Women's Lib, Federal Government, and Other were created. For the primary code Law, secondary codes consisting of Existing Legislation and Labor Laws were created. Under the primary code for Financial, the secondary codes Social Security and Insurance were created. The final two primary codes Church/Religion and Education did not require secondary codes.

Results

Sex/Gender

While analyzing the occurring themes, main points, and arguments in my data the most common codes that appeared were those that deal with the separation and recognition of the male and female sex. The first secondary code identified within Sex/Gender was the Separation of

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Sexes. This category consists of issues surrounding the separation of male and female which concerned conservative women opposing the E.R.A. The first label under the Separation of Sexes is titled Desegregation and is comprised of twenty-five quotes and notations from the data made up of concerns for the integration of the male and female sex in various places such as restrooms, physical education classes in high school, prisons, college dorms and sports. While most literature suggests that the integration of sexes would be detrimental to women's safety and privacy, other literature suggests integrating the sexes is like the desegregation of race. For example, a flipbook published by the Eagle Forum titled *The Equal Rights Amendment, A Trojan Horse* (Alton, IL. 1976) states, "Do you want the sexes fully integrated like the races?"

The next category under the secondary code of Separation of Sex and Sex/Gender is Gender Neutral. With only four notations from the data, this category consisted of statements concerning the E.R.A. wiping out distinctions between male and females by changing the language of laws and legislation and promoting a genderless society. Literature produced by Eileen Vogel, associated with the People Concerned for the Unborn Child, (Pittsburgh, PA. 1978) opposed the E.R.A.'s aim to create a genderless society by outlawing sexual discrimination via outlawing sexual distinction.

The next secondary code under Sex/Gender is Military/Draft, which was compiled of quotes and notations concerned with the draft and service of women in the United States Military. Eighteen pieces of data were analyzed and the main concern with conservative women opposing the E.R.A. was that women now could be forced into the military draft and thus serve in active combat. In a flyer titled *Equal Rights in Action – The Effect on Women* produced by Women Who Want To Be Women (WWWW) (Fort Worth, TX. 1974) was concerned with not

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only women serving in the military but that also other women's husbands would have to share a barrack with women.

Sex Crimes/Violence is the smallest and final secondary code under Sex/Gender. Four notations were made from data and were concerned with the E.R.A. eliminating the legal protection of women against sexual violence and crimes. Women opposing the E.R.A. were concerned that sodomy, adultery, rape, and prostitution would increase with the ratification of the amendment.

Immorality

The next largest primary code, Immorality, is comprised of themes relating to Abortion, Homosexuality, Sex/Sexuality, and Pornography. These secondary codes are considered by conservative women opposing the E.R.A. as being unwanted consequences of the ratification of the amendment. Abortion, the largest secondary code for Immorality, consists of seventeen notations from the data collected. Conservative women opposing the E.R.A. were concerned with "abortion on demand" becoming more prevalent. Aside from the fear of increasing numbers of women choosing abortion over raising a child, literature also suggested that abortions would become funded via Medicaid once the E.R.A. became ratified. The Iowa Women Against The ERA took out a newspaper advertisement with the tagline *Did you know a vote for the ERA is a vote for abortion.* (n.d.) and further cites legislation in Massachusetts where in which a portion of taxpayer money funded abortion through Medicaid.

Homosexuality is the next secondary code under Immorality with seventeen notations reflecting conservative women's condemnation of gay and lesbian rights created under the E.R.A. The largest concern about homosexuality in relation to the E.R.A. was the legalization of

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homosexual marriage by extension child adoption by homosexual couples. Aside from this concern, according to The Iowa Women Against The ERA, women also felt that homosexuals hired to teach in public school would “interfere with parents rights to have their children taught by teachers who respect the moral law.” (n.d.).

The next secondary code under Immorality, is Sex/Sexuality. This secondary code is similar to Sex/Gender and Homosexuality, however it was coded on the basis of the act of sex and heteronormative sexual practices. Sex/Sexuality has ten notations dealing with various topics such as sex education in schools, free contraception given out from Planned Parenthood, and the fight to keep sex moral between husband and wife. In a newsletter sent out from the Happiness of Womanhood organization (San Diego, CA. 1973), the aim of this women's organization was to restore morality and return dignity to “morally clean” sex.

The final secondary code for Immorality, is Pornography. This code is the smallest with only four notations but deals with access to “pornography”. In some instances it is suggested by the literature that school libraries distribute “smut” and “filth” to children. While this might not be traditionally thought of as pornography, according to conservative women anything that explains sex, sexuality, or sex education is considered to be pornographic material.

Family Unit

The primary code Family Unit includes three secondary codes consisting of Marriage, Divorce/Alimony/Child Support, and Child Care. Marriage is broken down even further to include categories labeled Traditional Family Roles, Wives Rights, Shared Spouse Responsibilities, Husbands Duties, and Husbands Last Name. The category of Traditional Family Roles consists of sixteen notations derived from the data dealing with concerns over the traditional nuclear family, the sanctity of the home, and protecting children. The category of

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Wives Rights consists of twelve notations derived from the data concerned with rights that married women are entitled to as housewives. This includes the right to be supported by their husband, the right not to work outside the home, and the financial/legal benefits they receive. The category of Shared Spouse Responsibilities is a compilation of eight notations in which opposition to the E.R.A. from women was concerned with the "potential" legal enforcement of women/wives of contributing fifty percent of the financial support to the family. The category of Husband's Duties is a compilation of responsibilities a husband has to his wife and family that is in place because of federal and state laws. These laws were seen to be in danger if the E.R.A. was ratified.

The final and smallest category is Husband's Last Name. This category only has four notations which deal with the E.R.A. allowing women to keep their own last name rather than be obligated and obliged to take their husbands last name after marriage.

The next secondary code in the Family Unit is Divorce/Alimony/Child Support. This code consists of thirteen notations addressing the elimination of women's rights if they become divorced. According to some literature by Stop ERA (Alton, IL. n.d) if a woman gets divorced, she will receive no support from her ex-husband, whether it is alimony and/or child support. Additionally, concerns mounted in regard to husbands/fathers obtaining child custody in the event of a divorce and wives/mothers being solely responsible for child support.

The final secondary code in the Family Unit is Child Care and consists of six notations derived from the data. There was a distinct fear that if women would be required to split the financial responsibility of the family, then they would not be able to care for their children. This would then lead to children being placed in state funded childcare centers. In some instances, some organizations such as the W.W.W.W. believed that by enforcing women to work they

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would rely on federal day care centers, which was an extension of the National Organization of Women's agenda. NOW was perceived to be a threat to conservative women's fight for the rejection of the E.R.A.

Opponents/Enemies

The Opponents/Enemies primary code was created to represent the perceived threats to the conservative women's opposition movement to the E.R.A. The first secondary code is labeled as the Women's Lib. Fifteen notations were recorded in which the data suggested the "women's lib", or "libbers" were attacking the stability of family, perpetuating abortion and distorting the message of conservative women. Eileen Vogel (Pittsburgh, PA. 1978) stated that the E.R.A. was an extension of the "neo feminist" revolution which was concerned with "new feminists" rejecting their biological femineity.

Another secondary code in Opponents/Enemies is the Federal Government. Ten notations were recorded in which government involvement because of the E.R.A. would be detrimental to many aspects of women's rights and family life. If the E.R.A was ratified conservative women's organizations were concerned that the federal government would have the power to make decisions for the family and the family's right to privacy would be dissolved. Additionally, it was also noted that the E.R.A. would mean more bureaucracy and it would benefit federal politicians and judges.

The final secondary code in Opponents/Enemies is labeled as Other. This label is a catch all to describe other notable opponents to the movement to oppose the E.R.A. Six notations list NOW, Playboy, Humanists, Socialists, and Communists as other opponents of the conservative women's movement.

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Law

A primary code labeled Law was created to record any sentiments opposing the E.R.A. that relates to laws and legislation. The secondary code labeled Labor Laws is comprised of notations where literature suggests that the E.R.A. will compromise protective labor laws that give women certain privileges in the workplace. Sixteen notations contain various reasons for opposition to the E.R.A. to protect women's labor laws such as eliminating extra breaks for women, placing weight limits on items that women lift, forcing women to do the physical labor of men, and firing women at arbitrary ages. A flyer produced by the Women Don't Need the ERA organization (Moline, IL, 1974) accused the E.R.A. has aiming to repeal the protective labor laws already established by the government.

The next secondary coded labeled under Law is Existing Legislation. This label consists of literature that mentions various existing legislation which promotes women's equality. The argument that legislation such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, the Education Amendment of 1972, and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974 was employed by several women's organizations. Therefore, according to some opponents such as Jean Baldwin (Grundy Center, IA. 1979) since these rights were already guaranteed, the E.R.A. was not necessary. Additionally, Kathryn Hoffman (Alton, IL. 1973) also argued that the E.R.A. would not guarantee better pay, jobs, promotions, and working conditions for women compared to prior legislation.

Financial

A primary code label Financial was created with three secondary codes entitled Social Security, Insurance, and Other. This code was created to record when the financial benefits afforded to women and wives was perceived to be in danger by the E.R.A. The secondary code

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Social Security contains six notations in which the elimination of the Social Security benefits of wives and widows could potentially be removed by the E.R.A. In a letter the Catholic Daughters of America (New York, NY. 1975) mentioned the potential removal of a wife's social security benefits mirroring the sentiments of other conservative women's organizations at the time.

Another secondary code under Financial was labeled as Insurance. This was a smaller code with only four notations, but it appears that to some organizations they were concerned by the potential increase in life and automobile insurance rates for women. For instance, the Eagle Forum (Harlan, IA. N.d.) stated in a brochure *You Can't Fool Mother Nature*, that the E.R.A. will eliminate lower life insurance rates and automobile insurance rates for women, however there is no evidence that would be result from the ratification of the E.R.A.

Church/Religion

The primary code Church/Religion consists of twelve notations where the church as an institution and/or religion was mentioned in the literature as a reason for opposing the E.R.A. In some instances, literature mentions how the E.R.A. would directly place an attack on churches by forcing them to ordain women or admit them into seminaries, otherwise churches would lose their tax-exempt status. Other organizations state that the privilege of being a woman, who is protected by a man, is a right given by God.

Education

The final primary code created through this data is Education. This code has eight notations where education or public schools are mentioned. There is some overlap with this primary code and the secondary code of Sex/Sexuality. Sex education in public schools in an example of this overlap. However, in another case, Phyliss Schlafly writing an article of *Trial Magazine* (1973) states that the E.R.A. will not do anything to further the education of women.

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Discussion

The Equal Rights Amendment, introduced in 1972, evoked mixed responses across the United States. Its failure to be ratified can be attributed to various factors, including significant opposition from women led anti-E.R.A. organizations like Phyllis Schlafly's group. Other groups and individuals, such as The Right to Life Coalition and the Ku Klux Klan, also played influential roles in opposing the ERA (Blee, 1987). The E.R.A. aimed to ensure equal rights under the law without discrimination based on sex. Although it received congressional approval in 1972, it required ratification by 38 state legislatures to become law (Congressional Research Service, 2019). By January 1975, the E.R.A. had been ratified by 33 states, with Illinois being the only northern, industrial state that did not ratify it. Illinois faced obstacles due to the requirement for a 3/5 majority in both the House and the Senate to pass constitutional amendments. Phyllis Schlafly's Stop ERA groups exerted significant influence in the Illinois legislature, further impeding the E.R.A.'s ratification (Johnson, 2022).

Phyllis Schlafly, a prominent opponent of the E.R.A., argued against it by emphasizing inherent biological differences between men and women. She believed that women should embrace their traditional roles and expressed concerns that the E.R.A. would undermine the advantages and fulfillment found in those roles. However, Schlafly also acknowledged that women had opportunities to pursue additional careers and interests alongside their primary roles because of existing legislature already in place at the time, therefore making the Equal Rights Amendment obsolete (Bellafonte, 2006).

One prominent organization founded by Phyllis Schlafly was the Eagle Forum. The Eagle Forum argued that the E.R.A. would jeopardize laws and policies that protected women,

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including alimony, child custody, and workplace safety regulations. They contended that the amendment would erode traditional family values by advocating for a gender-neutral society where men and women had interchangeable roles (James, 2020). Other organizations, such as Women Who Want to Be Women and Concerned Women for America, also opposed the E.R.A., asserting that it would be detrimental to women by eliminating the distinctions between men and women and undermining women's unique societal role. The Eagle Forum actively opposed what they perceived as radical feminist agendas and advocated for constitutional amendments and legislation to protect traditional marriage and the roles of fathers and mothers. They are against stereotyping men as constant dangers to women and oppose women being pushed into military combat (Time, 1978). The Phyllis Schlafly Eagles takes pride in their successful fight against the Equal Rights Amendment, which they believed had hidden agendas like tax-funded abortions and same-sex marriages (Schwed, 1983).

The literature collected opposing the E.R.A. by conservative women's groups reflects a broader debate about gender roles, societal expectations, and the perceived implications of gender equality. Many of these opponents feared that the E.R.A. would lead to the breakdown of families, male abandonment, women's military draft, and the promotion of abortion and homosexual rights. While many groups comprised of both men and women opposed the E.R.A., Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum and Stop ERA movement proved to be the most influential adversaries.

The largest theme employed by women opposing the Equal Rights Amendment that I discovered through this research, emphasized the inherent biological, psychological, and emotional differences between men and women and held the view that these differences should be acknowledged and celebrated rather than seeking complete legal equality that disregards such

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distinctions. They argued that men and women have unique strengths and roles that contribute to the richness and diversity of human experience. Conservative women believed that their natural strengths in nurturing, empathy, and emotional intelligence make them well-suited for caregiving and nurturing roles, while men's inherent strengths in assertiveness, problem-solving, and physical prowess equipped them for provider and protector roles. They contended that these differences are complementary and vital for the functioning of society, and preserving traditional gender roles is necessary for maintaining societal order and ensuring the well-being of individuals and families. They expressed concerns that the E.R.A., by blurring or erasing these distinctions, could lead to unintended consequences such as the loss of certain protections and benefits that women currently enjoy.

Another prominent theme identified in the data suggested women who opposed the Equal Rights Amendment expressed concerns that its passage could lead to societal immorality. Grounding their objections in conservative values and moral beliefs, these women feared that the E.R.A. would undermine traditional moral standards and societal norms they considered crucial for a righteous and orderly society. They argued that the amendment posed a threat to family values by potentially weakening the institution of marriage and the stability of family structures. Some opponents raised concerns about potential shifts in gender and sexual morality, worrying that the E.R.A. might lead to broader acceptance of non-traditional gender identities, alternative family structures, or lifestyles they viewed as contrary to their moral and religious beliefs. These women believed the E.R.A. could contribute to an erosion of societal standards, blurring distinctions between right and wrong and promoting a relativistic view of morality. For many opponents, their opposition was rooted in a defense of religious principles, as they believed the

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E.R.A. could infringe upon religious freedoms and practices by conflicting with their religious teachings on gender roles, marriage, and sexual morality.

In addition, another theme appeared in the data that highlighted how women who opposed the Equal Rights Amendment expressed apprehension that it could disrupt the traditional dynamics within marriage. They emphasized the importance of traditional gender roles in marital relationships and believed that husbands and wives have distinct roles and responsibilities that contribute to a harmonious partnership. These women feared that the E.R.A., by promoting gender equality without considering these roles, might introduce tensions and conflicts within marriages, disrupting the balance necessary for marital harmony. They also voiced concerns about the impact on the traditional family structure, arguing that the E.R.A. could undermine the stability of families by blurring the distinctions between husbands and wives. In their view, preserving the roles and responsibilities within marriage was essential for maintaining the integrity of the family unit. Conservative women aligned their views within a broader defense of family values, seeing marriage as a foundational pillar of society that could be weakened if traditional gender roles were eroded. Overall, these women opposed the Equal Rights Amendment based on their belief that it could interfere with the institution of marriage and the preservation of traditional family values.

More data from this research showed that women who opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, along with other critics, argued that the amendment was unnecessary because they believed that existing laws, particularly the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution, already provided equal rights and protections for women. The 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868,

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addresses citizenship rights and equal protection under the law⁶. Conservative women argued that this clause, which broadly addresses equal protection, could be interpreted to cover gender-based discrimination as well. They contended that courts had already used the Equal Protection Clause to strike down laws that discriminated based on sex, and therefore, the E.R.A. was redundant.

Less prominent themes occurred in this data such as conservative women expressing concerns that ratifying the amendment could result in the loss of certain financial benefits and privileges that women enjoyed under existing laws. Specifically, they worried about preferential treatment in areas like alimony and child custody cases. In divorce proceedings, traditional family norms often dictated that women might receive alimony payments and primary custody of children, particularly in cases where they were considered the primary caregivers. Conservative women believed that if the E.R.A. were ratified, courts might be less inclined to consider gender when making decisions about alimony and child custody, potentially leading to women losing these benefits.

While limited data was found in this research concerning the education of children was feared to be impacted by the ERA due to its challenge of traditional family values and roles, it was still an import matter to conservative women. These women believed that if the amendment

⁶ The Equal Protection Clause, a pivotal component of the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution, serves as a cornerstone in the fight for equality and civil rights. By declaring that no state shall "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws," this clause has become a powerful tool in combating discrimination and promoting fairness. Its broad language has enabled the Supreme Court to apply the principle of equal protection to a wide range of cases, including those concerning racial segregation, voting rights, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights. Through the years, landmark cases have relied on the Equal Protection Clause to strike down discriminatory practices and uphold the rights and liberties of all individuals, regardless of their race, gender, or other protected characteristics. This constitutional provision continues to be a guiding force in the ongoing struggle for a more just and equitable society (Cornell Legal Institute).

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were ratified, it could influence how gender roles and relationships were taught to children in schools. They were concerned that traditional notions of motherhood and fatherhood could be challenged, leading to what they perceived as an erosion of societal norms. Opponents also worried that school curricula might be influenced by a more progressive view of gender, potentially emphasizing gender equality to a degree that some found uncomfortable or inappropriate. These concerns were often linked to broader debates about the role of schools in shaping cultural values and the influence of the feminist movement on educational institutions.

Conclusion

The Equal Rights Amendment is a proposed constitutional amendment aimed at ensuring equal legal rights for all citizens, irrespective of gender. First introduced in 1923 and passed by Congress in 1972, the E.R.A. not only addresses gender inequality but also establishes constitutional safeguards for women's rights (Stevens, 2005). The amendment seeks to eliminate discrimination in various areas such as employment, education, and family law, guaranteeing equal treatment for both genders. Despite initial support, the E.R.A. faced challenges and took nearly five decades to pass both houses of Congress and gain state ratification. While proponents argue that the amendment is essential to provide constitutional protection against gender-based discrimination, opponents raise concerns about its necessity and potential unintended consequences (Poggioli, 1984). The Equal Rights Amendment stands as a symbolic representation of the ongoing struggle for gender equality in the United States.

Research has shown that conservative women, especially housewives and mothers, expressed concerns that the Equal Rights Amendment could undermine their choice to pursue traditional domestic roles (Webster, Baldwin, & Hughes, 1982). Anti-E.R.A. groups led by

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women emphasized traditional gender roles within the family and society, strategically employing this approach in their literature. Working women also voiced opposition to the E.R.A., arguing that gender-specific laws and protections were necessary to ensure equality and support women's advancement in the workplace (Woodyard & Cady, 2019). They believed accommodating the unique circumstances faced by women in balancing work and family responsibilities was crucial for true equality (Hunter, 2021). Concerns about the E.R.A.'s impact on the U.S. military were also discussed, with varying perspectives on whether drafting women would become a reality, or a scare tactic used by opposition groups (Marley, 2000). These discussions contributed to broader debates on gender roles and equality in society.

The theory of strategic denial or strategic invisibility is a sociological framework used to explain the limited research on conservative women's leadership within the New Christian Right (Johnson, 2018). According to this theory, conservative women intentionally downplay or deny their importance and influence for strategic reasons (Gill, 2017). Strategic denial serves several purposes in this context. Firstly, it acts as a defensive strategy to avoid criticism and opposition, allowing them to navigate contentious political and cultural landscapes more effectively (Braungart & Braungart, 2008). Secondly, it helps maintain traditional gender roles and norms within the New Christian Right by reinforcing gender hierarchies and expectations (Gill, 2017). Lastly, strategic denial enables conservative women leaders to avoid conflicts within their own communities and maintain harmony (DiLeonardo, 1998). However, this deliberate downplaying also contributes to the limited visibility and study of their roles, making it challenging for researchers to analyze their experiences and impact. In essence, the theory of strategic denial sheds light on the complex dynamics in conservative women's leadership within the New Christian Right and provides insights into their motivations and behaviors.

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Studying the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment holds significant importance for several reasons. Firstly, it provides valuable insights into the dynamics of social and political movements, allowing us to understand the historical context, ideological conflicts, and societal attitudes that influenced the amendment's outcome. By delving into the reasons behind its failure, we gain a deeper understanding of the progress and challenges of women's rights movements in different time periods. Secondly, analyzing the E.R.A.'s failure offers lessons for contemporary activism and policy advocacy. By examining the strategies, successes, and shortcomings of past efforts to achieve gender equality, activists and advocates can refine their approaches, develop effective messaging, and build stronger coalitions to advance their goals. The failure of the E.R.A. prompts reflection on alternative strategies and legal frameworks to promote gender equality, informing discussions on the limitations and potential effectiveness of constitutional approaches. Moreover, studying the E.R.A.'s failure allows for a deeper exploration of the diverse voices and perspectives within the women's rights movement. Recognizing the intersectional nature of gender inequality, it highlights that experiences and challenges vary across different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. This understanding fosters more inclusive and comprehensive approaches to social justice. Additionally, the E.R.A.'s failure raises important questions about the impact of constitutional amendments and their role in shaping public policy. It prompts policymakers to reflect on the lessons learned and to develop alternative strategies to address gender inequality effectively. Lastly, studying the E.R.A.'s failures contributes to public discourse and education. By engaging with its history and analyzing the arguments for and against its ratification, we can promote informed public debates and foster a more nuanced understanding of gender equality issues. Furthermore, it provides educational opportunities to explore the history of women's rights movements, constitutional law, and the

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democratic process. In summary, studying the failure of the E.R.A. is relevant for historical analysis, informing activism, guiding policy discussions, promoting inclusivity, and contributing to public discourse. It allows us to learn from the past and work towards a more equitable future.

More recently, there has been renewed interest in the E.R.A. In 2017, Illinois made headlines by becoming the 37th state to ratify the E.R.A., decades after its initial ratification. This milestone reignited the national conversation and sparked debates about the viability and legal implications of the E.R.A. Subsequently, in 2020, Virginia became the 38th state to ratify the amendment. Nevertheless, legal challenges and questions remain regarding the ratification process and the E.R.A.'s potential inclusion in the United States Constitution.

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