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## **Conservative Women's Organizations in the United States in the 21st Century: The Language of Gendered Politics**

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# **Conservative Women's Organizations in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – The Language of Gendered Politics**

Master's Thesis

North American Studies

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## Introduction

“It’s difficult for me to call myself a feminist in a classic sense because it seems to be very anti-male, and it certainly is very pro-abortion, and I’m neither anti-male or pro-abortion.”<sup>1</sup> Kellyanne Conway

“[...] you no doubt don’t want to mess with moms who are rising up. [...] I always think of the mama grizzly bears that rise up on their hind legs when somebody’s coming to attack their cubs, to do something adverse toward their cubs. [...] you don’t want to mess with mama grizzlies...And that’s what we’re seeing with all these women who are banding together, rising up, saying no.”<sup>2</sup> Sarah Palin

There are fundamental differences in the interpretation on how to achieve female empowerment. The pictures most associated with feminism are of suffragists going to the streets, protesting, and collecting signatures. An image-search of the word feminism on Google immediately shows images and videos of the women’s rights marches of the 1960s and ‘70s, vocally fighting for equality regardless of sex and gender and more recently, the Women’s March in 2017, prompted by comments from then-president Donald J. Trump which were generally perceived to be inappropriate and misogynistic.<sup>3</sup> Among his supporters were countless, mostly white, women defending Trump’s words and actions. His female followers supported him and remained loyal despite his misogynistic comments and the detrimental effects his presidency had on many women’s issues.<sup>4</sup> One explanation for this seemingly counterintuitive political stance would be the diffuse definition and the various interpretations of what exactly feminism means. Feminism is not a static term - it must be interpreted in relation to time and space and can encompass disparate ideas to different people. One stream of feminist ideas relates to the fight for equality between men and women. This strand of feminism has identified itself as a feminist movement since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The other strand counters this view by saying that women are morally superior to men and should therefore have different roles in society. The latter, which will be the focal point of this thesis, relates back to the culture of domesticity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and assumes that women should occupy different societal roles than men. The notion of moral superiority of women is used by conservative women today

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<sup>1</sup> Ronnee Schreiber, “Is there Conservative Feminism? An Empirical Account” in *Politics & Gender*, 14, No. 1 (2018): 56-79.

<sup>2</sup> Melissa Deckman, *Tea Party Women - Mama Grizzlies, Grassroots Leaders, and the Changing Face of the American Right* (New York, N.Y: New York University Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>3</sup> David A. Fahrenthold, “Trump Recorded Having Extremely Lewd Conversation about Women in 2005,” *The Washington Post* (WP Company, October 8, 2016), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-recorded-having-extremely-lewd-conversation-about-women-in-2005/2016/10/07/3b9ce776-8cb4-11e6-bf8a-3d26847eed4\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-recorded-having-extremely-lewd-conversation-about-women-in-2005/2016/10/07/3b9ce776-8cb4-11e6-bf8a-3d26847eed4_story.html).

<sup>4</sup> Cynthia Miller-Idriss, “Triumph of the Women? The Female Face of Right-Wing Populism and Extremism,” *dc.fes.de* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, April 6, 2021), <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/dialog/17096.pdf>, 9-11.

to advance their agenda against liberal feminism, as this thesis will demonstrate. The fundamental differences in how liberals and conservatives interpret feminism and the resulting disparities are the central topics of this thesis. The question this thesis will answer is: How do conservative women's organizations utilize gendered rhetoric to further their ultra-conservative agenda?

Kellyanne Conway, as quoted above, does not label herself as a feminist, and yet she advocates for female empowerment. As the quote shows, the label feminism evokes a specific connotation in her mind. Firstly, that there is a classic sense which is the general association of a liberal progressive emancipatory movement usually linked to politically left-leaning movements. I would argue that this understanding of what feminism entails stems from the emergence of anti-feminist sentiments by conservatives during the 1960s. Especially the emergence of the Second New Right after the Goldwater campaign was heavily linked to the religious right, where the opposition to issues such as abortion and feminism had a prominent position in conservative politics.<sup>5</sup> The rise of the religious right coincided to a certain degree with the rise of second wave feminism. The metaphor of waves to describe feminism is debatable since it could be argued that the 'waves' are overlapping, nevertheless, it can be asserted that there was a distinct feminist movement during the 1960s and '70s in the US which distinguishes itself from so-called first wave feminism and the later third wave.<sup>6</sup> The second wave was primarily concerned with criticizing the patriarchal structures of society and this in turn was met with vehement backlash from conservatives who furthered the rhetoric that policies such as the Equal Right Amendment would take away women's privileges in society.<sup>7</sup> As the analysis of the rhetoric of the Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America will show, they interpret feminism within the terms of the anti-feminist stance of the 1960s and '70s directed at second wave feminism. And yet, there are right-wing politicians who would use the label feminist, if not in the classic sense. Furthermore, Conway's quote suggests that classic feminism is anti-male. The accusation of misandry is commonly used to denunciate feminism as a general movement.<sup>8</sup> It creates the imagery of aggressive man-hating females and promotes

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<sup>5</sup> Alf Tomas Tønnessen, "American Conservatism, the Republican Right, and Postwar U.S. Political History," *American Studies in Scandinavia* 45, no. 1-2 (2013): pp. 5-14, <https://doi.org/10.22439/asca.v45i1-2.4899>, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Victoria Browne, *Feminism, Time, and Nonlinear History* (New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Jason Pierceson, *Sexual Minorities and Politics: An Introduction* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2016), 49.

Angie Maxwell and Todd Shields, "Introduction: Toward a New Understanding of Second-Wave Feminism," in Angie Maxwell and Todd Shields, eds., *The Legacy of Second-Wave Feminism in American Politics* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 8.

<sup>8</sup>Sue L. Cataldi, "Reflections on 'Male Bashing,'" *NWSA Journal* 7, no. 2 (1995): pp. 76-85, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25164285>, 80.

negative stereotypes, which in turn negatively affect the public's perception of feminism. This stereotype suggests that feminist concerns are the "product of irrational or indiscriminate hatred."<sup>9</sup> By stating that "feminism seems to be anti-male," Conway plays into the idea of generalized male-bashing supposedly perpetrated by feminists.

Another connotation of feminism which Conway refers to in the above-mentioned quote is the connection between feminism and the right to abortion. The pro-life vs. pro-choice dispute is a prominent debate within American politics and Conway is right in saying that liberal feminist organizations are "pro-abortion." Nevertheless, her rhetoric is reminiscent of the trope that feminists would argue *in favor of* abortions, while the stress should be put on the *right to choose*. Feminist movements generally do not advocate for abortion, but rather for the right to choose. The equation of pro-choice with pro-abortion has semantical implications. It suggests that feminists, or anyone in favor of giving women agency over their reproductive choices, is advocating that woman get an abortion. By calling themselves pro-life they suggest that anyone who is not in line with their views is *anti-life*, which in turn attaches a negative rhetorical connotation to liberal pro-choice arguments. This is in line with the overall rhetoric of the pro-life movement. One look at the website [prolifeaction.org](https://prolifeaction.org), shows that the devaluing description for abortion clinics is "abortion facilities" or "abortion providers."<sup>10</sup> The stamp pro-abortion fits into the narrative of advertising abortions. Kellyanne Conway's understanding of feminism follows the stereotyped version of feminism, which many conservatives – men and women – share as this thesis will show.

After the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, the Tea Party entered the political stage. This conservative branch of the Republican Party garnered public attention with its highly conservative stance on limited government. In *Tea Party Women*, Melissa Deckman shows that "[the] Tea Party women have adopted a unique, gendered rhetoric to promote conservative policies [using] [...] the 'motherhood frame.'"<sup>11</sup> Gendered rhetoric is rhetoric that implicitly embraces stereotypical assumptions about gender. This paper will not specifically focus on the Tea Party Movement, but it nevertheless deserves attention based on the rhetoric it promoted and cemented in the Republican party. The brief analysis of their rhetoric will show that their language is the ideological continuation of the Culture of Domesticity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They cemented gendered language in the Republican party through their prominence and the influence they exerted on official party levels. Figureheads like Sarah Palin and Kellyanne

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<sup>9</sup> Cataldi. "Reflections on 'Male Bashing,'" 76-80.

<sup>10</sup> "Life Action League," [prolifeaction.org](https://prolifeaction.org), accessed January 10, 2022, <https://prolifeaction.org/>.

<sup>11</sup> Deckman, *Tea Party Women*, 3.

Conway still played a prominent role, especially during Donald J. Trump's presidency. Palin's idea of mama grizzlies serves as an interesting basis for most conservative women's rhetoric. Whereas most conservative women steer clear of the self-description "feminist," Palin referred to herself as such on multiple occasions.<sup>12</sup> Her use of the word, demonstrates that the definitions of feminism are ambiguous and open to debate. Rosalind Delmar asserts that despite the many variations, the basic understanding of what constitutes a feminist "is someone who holds that women suffer discrimination because of their sex [and] that they have specific needs which remain negated and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these needs would require a radical change (some would say a revolution even) in the social, economic and political order."<sup>13</sup> It is safe to say that Palin would not describe herself as a feminist in the liberal sense, and yet she still advocates for equality on the job market and equal pay, even though her desired road to achieve equality might differ from that of most liberal feminists.<sup>14</sup> In a way, Palin and Conway appropriate the term feminism and give it their own conservative meaning. But the reason the quote is significant, is the extent to which the metaphor of the mama grizzly serves as a surrogate for the idea of motherhood. While she does not advocate for mothers to be stay-at-home wives, she still uses gendered language, which naturalizes the role of women in the household, or private sphere, implying that the family is the natural cause on behalf of which women use their power. This aspect of the private sphere and the notion of female political engagement as primarily dominated by mothers is part of the common rhetoric reminiscent of the culture of domesticity, as the later chapters in this thesis will explore. For Palin, the main drive behind women's activism seems to be the protection of their cubs.

The quotes by Palin and Conway show multiple common tropes conservatives use to frame liberal feminism as supposedly harmful to women and how their brand of conservative feminism would be truly empowering for women. Especially Palin grounds her ideas in the culture of domesticity, which was the prevailing societal norm in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The culture of domesticity entails the notion that men and women are inherently different beings and should therefore fill different societal roles. Women were seen as morally superior, which would make them predestined for nurturing roles, such as childcare and education. This idea of moral differences between men and women cemented two separate spheres which men and women, supposedly grounded in biological differences, would have to

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<sup>12</sup>Meghan Daum, "Sarah Palin, Feminist," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times, May 20, 2010), <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2010-may-20-la-oe-0520-daum-fword-20100520-story.html>.

<sup>13</sup>Rosalind Delmar, "What Is Feminism?," in *Theorizing Feminism - Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ed. Anne C. Herrmann and Abigail J. Stewart (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>14</sup>Deckman, *Tea Party Women*, 21.

occupy. The formative period relevant for this thesis is the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It will be further explored in the first chapter. This culture of domesticity evolved and changed over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and adapted to specific circumstances. One example for a period of alteration of social structures would be wars. The first significant event to modify women's role in society was the Revolutionary War in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Lindley argues that the image of women during the Revolutionary War changed from dutiful wife and mother to the idea of Republican motherhood. The notion that citizens had a duty to their country manifested itself in gendered ways. Men occupied either governmental jobs, military service, or they fulfilled their national duty in the form of voting. Whereas men made an active contribution to the nation, women had indirect duties. Lindley differentiates between wartime and peacetime. During wartime, women would take over their husband's responsibilities so their men could join the military. Peacetime did not demand the same sacrifice. A woman's duty to her country was the fulfillment of the role of Republican motherhood. On the one hand she had to raise her sons to fill the roles of their fathers as direct contributors to the nation, and on the other hand, she was supposed to raise her daughters to become Republican mothers themselves. Education played a big role for women's responsibilities in society. In order to raise children within the gendered duties to the nation, she had to be educated herself. Lindley asserts, that the push for women's education should be viewed within the confines of her duties as a Republican mother. The main difference between the Puritan Good Wife ideal which dominated America before the Revolutionary war and the Republican mother which emerged during the War, was that the former was more tied to religious education whereas the latter gained knowledge in political matters and was of political importance to the nation.<sup>15</sup> Another more recent example for the alteration of the culture of domesticity was the Second World War. Women were needed in the war industry and the war campaign advertised war jobs specifically aimed at women. Jobs such as nursing and factory work were propagated as being supportive of the "boys" at war. After the war had ended the six million women formerly employed in the war industry were now asked to return home and take care of the men returning from war at home as a housewife.<sup>16</sup>

The culture of domesticity in the postwar years was further propagated by Barry Goldwater in his presidential campaign in 1964. The campaign heavily utilized gendered

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<sup>15</sup> Susan Hill Lindley, *You Have Stept Out of Your Place: A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 50-51.

<sup>16</sup> Maria Cristina Santana, "From Empowerment to Domesticity: The Case of Rosie the Riveter and the WWII Campaign," *Frontiers in Sociology* 1 (December 23, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2016.00016>.



rhetoric and the framework of the housewife to appeal to his conservative female voters.<sup>17</sup> Whereas the utilization of gendered rhetoric of conservative male politicians coupled with their traditionalist view of gender roles certainly is a topic worth analyzing, this thesis will examine the female side of anti-liberal feminist rhetoric within American right-wing politics. I specifically call their stance anti-liberal feminist since they oppose policies traditionally associated with liberal feminism such as abortion. The notion of a conservative feminism is contested. Conservative women's organizations often use a reversed feminist rhetoric, adapting feminist language of female empowerment and applying it to their conservative cause of, for example, limited government involvement especially regarding women's issues.<sup>18</sup> One of the key elements of the Goldwater campaign was female grassroots activism within ultra-conservative politics. While discussing the role of women within right-wing politics Catherine E. Rymph analyzes this dynamic through the distinction between party women, in other words party officials, and clubwomen. Clubwomen are women active in various party organizations.<sup>19</sup> This thesis will examine women's organizations which might be linked to the Republican Party simply because it caters to their political views or because they have Republican party officials as members. And yet, these movements are grassroots movements – movements which act on a local level via community engagement.

Grassroots activism is what mobilizes the voters and shapes the public debate. During the Goldwater campaign and the succeeding decades, right-wing female grassroots activism was heavily influenced by an anti-feminist stance and reactionary politics. This paper will continuously refer to the Goldwater campaign since it was the start of the rightward shift in American politics and the birth of the highly conservative New Right, which led to the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. This was also the context in which right-wing female activism grew into a serious force in the Republican party. Therefore, Barry Goldwater and his campaign give us the foundation of the ensuing female conservatism of the 1970s and the culture wars in the '80s. The still active Eagle Forum, founded by Phyllis Schlafly in 1972, was a major player in the 1970s, lobbying against the Equal Rights Amendment. This lobby must be understood as a conservative backlash against the Civil Rights Movement and second-wave feminism.

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<sup>17</sup> See more on Goldwater campaign in: Catherine E. Rymph, "To be Neutral or be Neutralized? Republican Women and the Goldwater Campaign," in *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 160-187.

<sup>18</sup> For more general information on the issue of conservative feminism see: Schreiber, "Is there a Conservative Feminism? An Empirical Account."

<sup>19</sup> Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 2.

Even though Goldwater ultimately lost the female vote and in the end, also the election, his campaign is exemplary for how female grassroots activism can be used to further a reactionary agenda. The Goldwater Gals were used to give Goldwater's harsh politics the soft look of female support and presented his traditionalist vision as a specifically female issue. The phenomenon of supposedly traditionalist women-specific issues was further developed under Reagan. Most issues were framed as being of specific concern for women because they occupied the private sphere, namely family policies and family safety. Female activism was and still is used to mobilize female voters. The advent of social media networks only accelerated grassroots activism and broadened the reach and influence even further. The most recent example for the scope of grassroots activism, and for this paper specifically conservative female grassroots activism, are the two presidential campaigns of Donald Trump.

To put the current rhetorical framework used by conservative women's organizations into historical perspective, it is vital to understand the origins of this highly gendered approach to female political engagement. Firstly, it is important to get an understanding of what the culture of domesticity entails and how it shaped political debates. The first chapter will give an overview of the ideological pillars of the culture of domesticity and further explore how ultra-conservative women in politics use that same mindset. As already briefly discussed above, the Tea Party Movement adopted a gendered approach to politics and this can be linked back to the anti-liberal feminist movement of the 1960s and '70s, especially regarding Phyllis Schlafly. The language conservative women (most notably Tea Party women) use to oppose policies such as the Pay Equity Bill or the Affordable Care Act are reminiscent of Schlafly's rhetorical campaign against the ERA in the 1970s.<sup>20</sup>

Catherine Rymph's *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage to the Rise of the New Right* (2006), gives a detailed historical overview of the relationship between feminism and conservative women within the Republican Party, primarily focused on Republican clubs and party officials. She asserts that club women exhibit a stronger gender consciousness than party women because women within official ranks and party politics would be tied to the overall party line. According to Rymph, club women are acting as "moral crusaders" as opposed to the more restrained party women.<sup>21</sup> In *Righting Feminism*, Ronnee Schreiber analyzes how Concerned Women for America (CWA) and the Independent Women's Forum (IWF) use feminist rhetoric to present themselves as organizations in favor of female empowerment. Both books are rather historical than contemporary in nature, and, therefore,

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<sup>20</sup> Deckman, *Tea Party Women*, 167.

<sup>21</sup> Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right*, 5.

constitute the historical foundation of this paper. A more recent study of conservative women and their stance on feminism is *Tea Party Women* (2016), by Melissa Deckman, as briefly mentioned before. One could argue that even though, the Tea Party is no longer a major force within the Republican Party, or rather the movement itself is dismantled, Tea Party women and their rhetoric are a precursor to general conservative feminism within the GOP. Most Tea Party women are still politically active. Their development and how they utilize, what I would call, a reversed feminist rhetoric, meaning that they employ feminist rhetoric to further conservative causes usually in contradiction to liberal feminist ideas, is vital for understanding the current political rhetoric of women within ultra-conservative women's organizations. The scholarly work, as discussed above, usually chronicles the history of conservative women's movements and connects it to anti-feminist stances in mainstream politics of the time or religious fervor, commonly dismissing conservative women as anti-feminist. In doing so, they miss how conservative women utilize and appropriate feminist language and how they change the narrative of what feminism means and who the 'real' feminist is. This issue is under-researched and therefore the major aim is to fill this gap within the field.

Much of this work will deal with discourse analysis. In the form of case studies, I will evaluate and compare the rhetoric on the social media platform Facebook by the Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America. Both organizations have a history starting in the 1960s and '70s. The Eagle Forum was closely connected to the emergence of the New Right with Schlafly being an outspoken supporter of Barry Goldwater. Concerned Women for America was founded by Beverly LaHaye and her husband and is connected to the social ideas of evangelical Christians, who also rose to prominence during the Goldwater campaign and gained further traction in the Reagan campaign and presidency.<sup>22</sup> Both socially conservative organizations have their biggest following on Facebook as compared to other social media platforms. I will analyze their stance on predominantly gendered issues such as feminism in general, abortion/reproductive rights (with a specific focus on pro-life sentiments), and their stance on policies concerning the family. While these issues by no means only concern women, conservative women's organizations still use gendered language to address these issues, as I will show. Especially since Trump's presidency, the issue of misogyny and anti-liberal feminist policies are a major concern in American politics.<sup>23</sup> The support from women for a man who openly brags of his sexual misconduct is striking. And yet, these women also express concern

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew Avery Sutton, "Was FDR the Antichrist? The Birth of Fundamentalist Antiliberalism in a Global Age," *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 4 (March 2012): pp. 1052-1074, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/41509575>, 1073-1074.

<sup>23</sup> Miller-Idriss. "Triumph of the Women? The Female Face of Right-wing Populism and Extremism," 9-11.

with women's advancement and female empowerment. They use gendered language to further their right-wing agenda. Understanding the political rhetoric is crucial to understanding populism and general political sentiments of the public. By understanding how conservative women frame their debates and how they fit within the larger framework of right-wing politics, we get a better understanding of the populist rightward shift in American politics. This paper aims to give a qualitative analysis of the rhetorical framework with a focus on social media of the women's organizations Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America.

## 1. The Culture of Domesticity and women's activism

When Sarah Palin references the mama grizzlies protecting their cubs, she makes use of gendered language, in other words, she specifically connects the protection of children with the motherly responsibility to take care of the family's safety. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, she addresses women and their domestic duties. This narrative of women's responsibilities in the domestic sphere has a long tradition in society. Women have long been relegated to the "private sphere" of the home, while men engage in the public sphere, be it with political engagement or with their work responsibilities. Historian Karin Hausen states that the idea of a gendered character was used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to cement the supposed psychological differences between men and women. These psychological differences were then generalized to the different societal responsibilities of the sexes.<sup>24</sup> Supposedly predestined, women with their demure, nurturing, and passive character would act predominantly within the domestic (private) sphere, while men, being the exact opposite, would be destined to occupy the public sphere. According to Hausen, this idea led to a polarization of the public vs. private. Harmony in life was grounded in the complementary nature of working life, or professional life, and family life. The sexes, therefore, occupying the two different spheres, were construed as inherently different. Their differences would lead to harmony. Historian Thomas Kühne identifies the role of women as occupying an "unpolitical-private role." According to Kühne, instead of participating in state politics, female politics happened outside of it, namely in the form of what might be called grassroots activism. Women were involved in unions, and even then, mostly women-specific sections of unions. When it comes to patriotism, women were mostly occupying supporting roles on the home front, for example with the practice of stitching flags.<sup>25</sup> One of the most cited essays on the topic of domesticity is the work of historian Barbara Welter. In her essay "The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860" she examines the socially ascribed role of women in the United States, mostly grounded in religion and represented in popular literature, religious literature, and women's magazines. Her central thesis is that there were four "cardinal virtues [by which a woman judged herself and was judged by others] – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Karin Hausen, "Die Polarisierung Der 'Geschlechtscharaktere' - Eine Spiegelung Der Dissoziation Von Erwerbs- Und Familienleben," in *Sozialgeschichte Der Familie in Der Neuzeit Europas*, ed. Werner Conze (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1976), 363-364.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Kühne, "Staatspolitik, Frauenpolitik, Männerpolitik: Politikgeschichte Als Geschlechtergeschichte," in *Geschlechtergeschichte Und Allgemeine Geschichte: Herausforderungen Und Perspektiven*, ed. Hans Medick and Anne-Charlott Trepp, vol. 5 (Göttingen, Germany: Wallstein Verlag, 1996), 180-182.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): pp. 151-174, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/2711179>, 151-152.

Since I will argue that the basic idea about the cult of the true womanhood is still highly relevant today, albeit reworded and slightly altered, it is paramount to understand the individual “cardinal virtues.” Religious piety was the quality that sets women apart from men. The pious woman who worked to “[bring] an erring man back to Christ” stood in contrast to the man constantly tempted by the “naughty world of men.”<sup>27</sup> Welter asserts that “[one] reason religion was valued was that it did not take a woman away from her ‘proper sphere,’ her home.”<sup>28</sup> A woman could practice and educate herself in religious ways without entering the male domain. This assertion alone demonstrates the clear distinction between female and male spheres. As the following chapters and the analysis of the rhetoric of the Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America will show, religion is still an important component of anti-liberal feminist rhetoric. The idea that women and men are inherently different, and that each have different roles to fill, becomes clear when talking about the necessity of pious women in society. Barbara Welter refers to American writer Thomas Branagan who asserted that while men are perpetual sinners and cannot help themselves, it is the women’s role, as the stronger and purer sex, to withstand sinful men.<sup>29</sup> Women were ascribed moral superiority over men.

One influential supporter of the hypothesis of the moral superiority of women was Catharine Beecher. Beecher, although an ardent supporter of female education, was a firm believer in a predestined order of the world. This order also incorporated the notion that women were naturally morally superior and powerful which in turn foreordained them to function as educators to the nation’s youth.<sup>30</sup> But exactly this supposed superiority was used to frame the narrative of women being predestined to stay in the domestic sphere as nation builders and saviors of the world against moral corruption. Female purity and piety go hand in hand and were seen as the world’s salvation. Women’s piety was endangered by social upheaval and changes. Something as simple as trousers were seen as a “[manifestation] of that wild spirit socialism.”<sup>31</sup> Welter asserts that the rapidly changing social and economic structures in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, led to the society’s desire for the preservation for the steadfast role of women.<sup>32</sup> Lindley elaborates on the clear split between men’s and women’s roles and asserts that urbanization and industrialization were the driving forces behind the allocation of two separate spheres. The

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<sup>27</sup> Welter, “The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” 152-153.

<sup>28</sup> Welter, “The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” 153.

<sup>29</sup> Welter, “The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” 155.

<sup>30</sup> Catherine Villanueva Gardner, “Heaven-Appointed Educators of Mind: Catharine Beecher and the Moral Power of Women,” *Hypatia* 19, no. 2 (2004), 1-2, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2004.tb01285.x>.

<sup>31</sup> Welter, “The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” 157.

<sup>32</sup> Welter, “The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” 151-152.

Welter argues that the steady role of women served as a balance to the ever-changing landscape of the United States.

economic changes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century opened work opportunities, such as office jobs or factory work, outside of the domestic realm. The physical separation from men and their homes further cemented men's roles in the public sphere. Another aspect which influenced women's role in society was the diminishing importance of productive activities within the home. Whereas women who previously worked on farms had a sense of autonomy, industrialization changed the dynamics. More and more work was allocated to big production sites and away from family farms. With the diminishing of the importance of productive work within the domestic sphere, came women's dependence on their husbands as breadwinners.<sup>33</sup>

The idea of the separate spheres also becomes apparent in another "cardinal virtue" – submissiveness. Welter argues that women's submissiveness was a means to keep the God-given order intact, with the man serving as protector of his subordinate wife. This, again, keeps the model of the two spheres intact where "[...] men were the movers, the doers, the actors [and women] were the passive, submissive responders."<sup>34</sup> Catharine Villanueva Gardner asserts not only that Beecher reinforced the idea, and as Welter's articles shows, the entire zeitgeist of that era, that women have a supposed moral superiority, but that the notion of submissiveness is connected to Calvinist ideals. Beecher, as already mentioned above, advocated for female education for women to serve as educators of the nation. But her insistence on the God-given order also asked for "[...] submission of women as the way to a greater good."<sup>35</sup> According to Beecher everyone had an allocated place in the world's order and the female place lay in the subordination to men.<sup>36</sup>

The virtues of piety, purity, and submissiveness are all encapsulated in the concept of domesticity. It was from their homes that women could serve as the salvation to men's sinful ways and were not tempted and potentially harmed by the harsh world outside and fulfill their duties as good homemakers. While being occupied with home making, she should "keep busy at morally uplifting tasks."<sup>37</sup> The ideal of home making was inseparably connected to marriage. Religious leaders such as Clergyman George Burnap contended that "[marriage is the] sphere for which woman was originally intended."<sup>38</sup> With marriage came the task of raising children.

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<sup>33</sup> Lindley, *You Have Stept Out of Your Place: A History of Women and Religion in America*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Welter, "The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 159.

<sup>35</sup> Gardner, "Heaven-Appointed Educators of Mind: Catharine Beecher and the Moral Power of Women," 3.

<sup>36</sup> Gardner, "Heaven-Appointed Educators of Mind: Catharine Beecher and the Moral Power of Women," 4.

Gardner argues that Beecher herself, since she heavily emphasized the importance of morality, elevated women over men, and yet her worldview trapped women within a sphere mostly separate from men. Beecher was opposed to suffrage since she argued that female power lay in the education of the public. (cf. Gardner, 9) While this might go against general feminist ideals, Beecher herself advocated for female education and persisted on the moral superiority of women which would give them the duty to educate the next generation of Americans.

<sup>37</sup> Welter, "The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 164.

<sup>38</sup> As qtd. in Welter, "The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 170.

In their parenting, women should use their specific female attributes and be a role model characterized by piety and purity. Welter affirms that “America depended upon her mothers to raise up a whole generation of Christian statesmen who could say ‘all that I am I owe to my angel mother.’”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, raising children became an issue of American female patriotism. By raising children who would become “good Americans,” women had their role in society in their homes.<sup>40</sup> Welter’s account can be further exemplified by Catharine Beecher’s book *The Duty of American Women to their Country* (1845).

The title alone – *The Duty of American Women to their Country* – suggests that Beecher saw inherent female duties as purely based on gender. Whereas the duty of men to the United States is often constituted within the context of military service or economic success, female duties take on another form. According to Beecher’s narrative, which, as Welter’s essay asserts is mostly representative of the zeitgeist, women live in a clearly distinguishable sphere. In Gardner’s analysis, however, Beecher does not support the subordination of women within the domestic sphere. In her line of argumentation, Gardner asserts that Beecher’s vision of female education and ultimately female educators, does not confine them to the domestic sphere and a traditional family, since “[...] Beecher argues that if women become economically self-sufficient, they can set up alternative households in which they can teach and adopt children.”<sup>41</sup> While it is true that Beecher’s position about women’s role in American society might be called feminist in the sense that it advocated for women’s education, it, nevertheless, followed a hierarchical world view. Beecher denounced the state of American schools, discussing issues such as the poor state of schoolhouses, cruel punishments perpetrated by teachers, moral injuries afflicted by immoral teachers, and ultimately the shortage of teachers. According to her, the salvation would take a female form. When she asked herself where the country would get enough teachers to properly educate American children, she concluded:

[not] from the sex which finds it so much more honourable, easy, and lucrative to enter the many roads to wealth and honour open in this land. [...] It is woman who is to come in at this emergency, and meet the demand; woman, whom experience and testimony has shown to be the best, as well as cheapest guardian and teacher of childhood.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, she states:

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<sup>39</sup> Welter, “The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” 171.

<sup>40</sup> Welter, “The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” 172-173.

<sup>41</sup> Gardner, “Heaven-Appointed Educators of Mind: Catharine Beecher and the Moral Power of Women,” 10

<sup>42</sup> Catharine Beecher, *The Duty of American Women to Their Country* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845), 63.



It is woman who is the natural and appropriate guardian of childhood. It is woman who has those tender sympathies which can most readily feel for the wants and sufferings of the young. It is woman, who is especially interested in all efforts which tend to elevate and dignify her own sex. It is woman, too, who has that conscientiousness and religious devotion, which, in any worthy cause, are the surest pledges of success.<sup>43</sup>

Catharine Beecher's role in American feminism goes beyond the scope of this paper, but her general theory is still relevant to understand the position of women in American society today from a historical perspective. Even though she advocated for female education, her reasoning behind the role of women in teaching and education was based on the idea that women inherently have nurturing characteristics. In the first quote above, she clearly distinguished between men occupying the public sphere, or in her words "the many roads to wealth," and women who, as experience presumably showed her, were the best option for raising children. In the second quote she delves deeper into "the" female character. The "natural" order of things asserts women as the most suitable "guardian" of children. This assumes that women intrinsically have "tender sympathies" which are necessary for compassionately caring for others. The notion of the nurturing female character has been the basis of the prevalent social structure for centuries. Like Hausen and Kühne, Welter describes the culture of domesticity as entirely based on the assumption that women are characterized by a sensitive nature in contrast to the more emotionless (oftentimes understood as more rational) men.<sup>44</sup> This notion of mental and behavioral differences between men and women threads its way through history. The culture of domesticity constitutes the context for present-day conservative women's activism.

As for the further development leading up to present-day conservatism, the Goldwater campaign needs further examination. His run for the presidential office is relevant on multiple levels. In *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (2012), Michelle Nickerson asserts that his campaign, or more specifically his book *Conscience of a Conservative*, garnered attention from housewives. Furthermore, the emergence of female political activists forced an examination of gender identity, with female activists "[contributing] to the emerging gender

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Karin Hausen, "Die Polarisierung Der 'Geschlechtscharaktere' - Eine Spiegelung Der Dissoziation Von Erwebs- Und Familienleben," 366.

Hausen discusses the two complementary gender characters (Geschlechtscharakter); men are generally defined as the rational being while women are defined as having an emotional disposition (the difference between rationality and emotionality)

self-consciousness.”<sup>45</sup> It was during the 1960s when “[...] the middle-class maternal ideal [became] central to the conservative movement’s social reform goals. Women sought to balance feminine modesty with maternal warmth and activist zeal.”<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, when discussing women’s role in the campaign, Nickerson always refers to their political engagement as activism. If one takes Kühne’s political theory of female political engagement happening apart from or parallel to male-dominated state politics into account, Goldwater’s campaign is symptomatic for this issue. With Mothers for Moral America (MFMA), the campaign effectively channeled activism specifically aimed at women. He “incorporated the ‘conservative sex’ into his strategy for capturing the White House.”<sup>47</sup> The Campaign attempted to soften his tough law-and-order image.

The belief that they needed women to give the campaign a gentler face can be traced back to traditional characteristics commonly associated with gender. The very fact that the organization was aimed at moral mothers, shows the still existent link between the notion of morality and motherhood. Morality and religion in general were a considerable rallying point in his run for presidency.<sup>48</sup> It is noteworthy that he connected the supposed moral decline of the American public to the alleged breakdown of the traditional family structure. The desired way back to the status quo ante should be spearheaded by mothers. This seems reminiscent of Beecher’s assertion that women are morally superior beings who should come to the rescue of the American school system specifically and should be responsible for education more broadly. Nickerson contends that the “[calling] on mothers to restore moral order reformulated nineteenth-century social-uplift discourse that sanctioned the presence of religious middle-class women in the public sphere.”<sup>49</sup> Even though women were now occupying the political public sphere, they were still tied to their traditional role as the morally superior mother figure.

An interesting aspect is how the campaign used the media to portray female support and women in general. Campaign officials wanted to suggest that Goldwater’s conservative politics were regarded as necessary by most American mothers simply because they appealed to innate maternal instincts.<sup>50</sup> The specific targeting of mothers and supposed maternal instincts is grounded in the assumption that women are primarily defined by their duties as homemaker, wife, and mother as they were in the culture of domesticity. The conservative movement in

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<sup>45</sup> Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 137.

<sup>46</sup> Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*, 137-138.

<sup>47</sup> Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*, 157.

<sup>48</sup> Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right*, 161.

<sup>49</sup> Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*, 162.

<sup>50</sup> Nickerson calls it the “[invention of] a maternal pro-Goldwater discourse,” p.157

general propagated a specific image of women and effectively used the media to spread their vision. One example would be the media presence of vocalist Janet Greene. Oftentimes singing with her two daughters, she embodied the ideal conservative woman. Apart from the anti-communist rhetoric in her songs, her whole appearance was based on an imagined ideal. “In a formal dress or suit, the pretty, short-haired soprano modeled a polite, sweet, and friendly version of political womanhood that sharply contrasted with female protesters.”<sup>51</sup> Janet Greene had both – the image of a mother, and timid political engagement without interfering with formal politics.

While Janet Greene was a female symbol for the conservative movement in general, the Goldwater campaign had its own female representation. In the form of the Goldwater Gals and Goldwater Girls, the campaign created their own “quasi-cheerleading [...] squads.”<sup>52</sup> Not only did they serve as cheerleaders for Goldwater but:

By volunteering their time and carrying out necessary chores, Goldwater Gals and Girls carried on partisan female political traditions dating back to the 1920s. Adorned in matching uniforms, however, they fulfilled more than the typical duties. The Gals and Girls acted out the parts of the ‘conservative sex.’ Nicely groomed and always congenial, they presented a striking contrast to the civil rights protesters who picked outside the Cow Palace all week long. CORE activists who stood vigil wielding picket signs warning ‘Hitler was Sincere, Too – Defoliate Goldwater.’<sup>53</sup>

His campaign was grounded on the rhetoric of morality, and neatly dressed, smiling young women were the ideal representation of the conservative ideal of the perfect woman. Together with Mothers for Moral America, the utilization of public women such as Janet Greene, the Goldwater Girls fit neatly within the larger framework of the conservative movement regarding women. They were used to give the movement a gentler face and push it into American mainstream politics. Throughout the campaign, his female voters were targeted with gendered rhetoric which specifically ascribed importance to traditionally female issues such as morality, family, and children – women’s issues were family issues. Apart from the clearly gendered political rhetoric, the movement, and Goldwater’s campaign specifically, propagated the image of the well-dressed housewife supporting politics through women’s engagement in the campaign. During his campaign women’s engagement with the campaign gave off the impression of being grassroots activism. By the definition I gave in the introduction, grassroots activism means a bottom-up approach and implies locality. Since women’s involvement in

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<sup>51</sup> Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*, 152.

<sup>52</sup> Nickerson, 158

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Goldwater's campaign was orchestrated by Goldwater and his campaign manager, it is exemplary for a top-down approach. Instead of real grassroots activism, the women in his campaign acted as a cheering squad posing as a grassroots movement. This suggests that the women were ordinary people out of the midst of American society.

Regarding the Republican party in the 1960s and '70s, Rymph states that clubwomen exhibited a distinct gender consciousness which party women did not have. Female partisan politics for the Republican party took on the character of a moral crusade.<sup>54</sup> The image of the moral crusaders who emphasized women's unique strengths and contributions to society, however, was rather damaging to party women who tried to be treated as equal within the Republican party.<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, most party women during the 1970s supported the general aims of the feminist movement such as the Equal Rights Amendment, affirmative action, the Equal Pay Act, and advocated for the inclusion of these issues in the party's program.<sup>56</sup> While briefly feeling victorious, the pro-feminist forces within the Republican party began to dwindle in the mid-1970s. Nixon's "Southern Strategy" quickly merged multiple social issues and formed what came to be known as the "New Right." The socially conservative movement rejected most feminist issues.<sup>57</sup>

The ascendancy of the New Right reached new heights when Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980. Generally, the '80s were a time of, what Susan Faludi termed, backlash against feminism.<sup>58</sup> The highly religious Reagan ran on a socially conservative platform envisioning traditional gender roles. His campaign was characterized by an anti-feminist agenda and the opposition to most, if not all, feminist political agendas.<sup>59</sup> Like Goldwater's, Reagan's campaign emphasized the need for morality in American society. His continued emphasis on morality and religion can be linked, not only to his own religious convictions, but to powerful Christian lobbying efforts as well. Particularly the anti-feminist Evangelical Protestants and Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority were powerful forces in American politics. One issue which Reagan addressed during his campaign, and which was central to the Christian Right was abortion, or "infanticide" as Reagan labeled it. Reagan was famously

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<sup>54</sup> Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right*, 3-5.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-190.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-214

<sup>58</sup> Françoise Coste, "'Women, Ladies, Girls, Gals...': Ronald Reagan and the Evolution of Gender Roles in the United States," *Miranda*, no. 12 (March 2016): pp. 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.8602>, 1.

For more info on the term cf. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: Undeclared War against Women* (London: Vintage, 1992).

<sup>59</sup> Coste, "'Women, Ladies, Girls, Gals...': Ronald Reagan and the Evolution of Gender Roles in the United States," 2.

opposed to abortion and vowed to ban it throughout the whole country if he was elected president.<sup>60</sup>

One prominent concern for many anti-feminists was the 1972 ratified Equal Rights Amendment. Even though Reagan claimed that he was in favor of equality, he still argued that the ERA would harm women more than it helped them. According to Reagan it would ensure a military draft for women. Furthermore, it would threaten women's position in the domestic sphere.<sup>61</sup> Generally, his politics predominantly targeted and opposed policies which were aimed toward women, specifically low-income single mothers, and women from minority groups. His budget cuts were aimed at programs such as food stamps and Medicaid.<sup>62</sup> Reagan and other conservatives denounced allegations of wage disparities as false. Instead of a systemic problem, the pay gap, he claimed, was grounded in the difference in experience between men and women – men earned more because they were simply more experienced than women.<sup>63</sup> Reagan together with Evangelicals and the New Right, shaped one decade of American presidential and congressional politics. It is not surprising that his policies, as much as his rhetoric, had and still have a long-lasting effect on the American public.

Reagan's claims about the supposedly harmful effects of the ERA and his denial of a systemic wage disparity find renewed use in the Tea Party Movement. The conservative movement stepped onto the political stage after the election of Barack Obama in 2008. Although the Tea Party is not a women's organization per se, it, nevertheless, is dominated by women. As briefly stated in the introduction, the Tea Party Movement utilizes gendered rhetoric to address gendered issues. Their opposition to "big government" is based on the assumption that federal programs would "[...] promote women's dependence on government rather than empowering them."<sup>64</sup> Like the Goldwater campaign, Tea Party women and their figurehead Sarah Palin highlight the role of women as protectors of the family. Melissa Deckman contends that the Movement is in line with the long history of conservative activism, which is predominantly occupied with the "motherhood frame."<sup>65</sup> Some women within the movement, including Palin, use the label feminist to describe themselves and their politics, while denouncing progressive/liberal feminism as "antiwomen."<sup>66</sup> Conservatives, including Tea Party women, reject governmental interference and, similar to Reagan, they claim that federal

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 2, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>63</sup> Coste, "'Women, Ladies, Girls, Gals...': Ronald Reagan and the Evolution of Gender Roles in the United States," 6.

<sup>64</sup> Deckman, *Tea Party Women*, 3-4

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 20.

programs would lead to dependence on the government instead of empowering women – in other words, federal program would undermine women’s autonomy.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the free market would regulate any sex discrimination that might be present.<sup>68</sup> Amy Jo Clark, owner of an online blog called Chicks on the Right, sums up the reasoning behind this idea: “I think feminism is when you are accountable to yourself. You are only empowered when you are actually responsible, accountable, and you are able to take care of yourself.”<sup>69</sup> This idea refers to the American notion of self-reliance. The later analysis of the rhetoric of the Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America will demonstrate that governmental help (or intervention) is framed as a hurdle for female self-realization. The term feminism in general seems to be contested within the Tea Party Movement. Some openly embrace it, occupying it, while distancing themselves from the liberal understanding of the term, others denounce it altogether. Women, like Palin, occupy the concept of being feminist, and reverse the language of liberal feminists. Some conservative women who embrace the label ‘feminist,’ take words such as empowerment, which are linked to progressive/liberal feminism, and project it onto their conservative agenda. Liberal feminists oftentimes call conservatives anti-women. Conservative women reverse this narrative by accusing liberal policies as harmful to women which in turn would make supporters of liberal policies anti-women. They blur the definitions of feminism by claiming the moniker for themselves.

While the Tea Party Movement is not exclusively aimed at mothers, a lot of Tea Party activism is still within the realm of motherhood and family issues. Grassroots organizations such as Concerned Women for America, Smart Girl Politics, and As a Mom...a Sisterhood of Mommy Patriots, which can be linked to the Tea Party Movement, emphasize gendered political issues related to motherhood, as the catchphrase of the Movement “Mama Grizzlies” already suggests.<sup>70</sup> Deckman asserts that the rhetoric of many Tea Party women, and organizations associated with the broader movement, use their status as a mother to criticize the government based on their fear of their children’s future. “Big Government” would constitute a threat to their children’s otherwise prosperous future.<sup>71</sup> Another aspect, which is connected to the importance of the “motherhood frame,” is the invocation of the “Founding Mothers.” The organization As a Mom and conservative magazines, such as *MinuteMom Magazine*, emphasize

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Deckman, *Tea Party Women*, 33

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 42, 46, 53.

The organization *As a Mom...a Sisterhood of Mommy Patriots* advocate for public policies celebrating the traditional, nuclear family

the importance of the women during the founding of the United States, proclaiming that women were just as important. They highlight the supportive role wives played. Through their grassroots activism, they “[allowed] their husbands to devote their time fully to the cause of the Revolutionary War” and this in turn helped “to ensure that their children [...] ‘would live free.’”<sup>72</sup> The use of the motherhood-frame to further conservative goals is a recurring theme in the Tea Party Movement. Deckman distinguishes three motherhood frames, which make up most of the Tea Party rhetoric. Firstly, the assumption that the experience of balancing the family’s household budget provides mothers (or women in general) with the needed skill and knowledge to manage the federal budget. Secondly, the issue of “generational theft,” reducing the debt for future generations, is of specific importance to mothers. Thirdly, women should fight any expansion of the government, since it would diminish the role of the family.<sup>73</sup> These three principles make the reliance on motherhood as a political strategy apparent. While mainstream parties and organizations might not advocate for women to stay home and stay away from state politics, their political approach still relies on the traditional gendered assumption that motherhood is the primary focus and political drive of women.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 99

For details on mother’s aptitude in balancing the federal budget see p. 118-121.

For details on Generational theft see p. 121-123.

For details on the threat of big government for future generations see p. 123-126.

## 2. The Eagle Forum

*Our Mission* is to enable conservative and pro-family men and women to participate in the process of self-government and public policy-making so that America will continue to be a land of individual liberty, with respect for the nuclear family, public and private virtue, and private enterprise [...] Join the most effective national organization of men and women who share conservative and pro-family values.<sup>74</sup>

The interest group Eagle Forum has made steady lobbying efforts and monetary contributions to members of Congress and the Senate.<sup>75</sup> A look at their lobbying efforts through monetary contributions reveals their investment in current as well as former members of Congress and the Senate, such as Lindsey Graham, Kelly Loeffler, David Purdue, and Donald Trump.<sup>76</sup> The organization started out under the name STOP ERA in 1972 and was born out of Phyllis Schlafly's fervent fight against the Equal Rights Amendment which, she argued, would destabilize the position of women in American society. Schlafly argued that women would lose their claim to social benefits specifically geared toward women. Additionally, the ERA would allow women to be drafted into the military. In her words the Equal Rights Amendment is "anti-family, anti-children, and pro-abortion." According to Schlafly, liberal feminists saw the role of the housewife as something negative, whereas most American women wanted to be homemakers.<sup>77</sup> Schlafly, and with her the Eagle Forum mobilized women to support antifeminist politics and, in their understanding, antifeminist equaled pro-family, since feminism was tied to fears surrounding gender and abortion.<sup>78</sup>

Long before the inception of STOP ERA, Schlafly gained prominence during the Goldwater campaign as one of his most outspoken supporters who featured prominently in the official campaign. The campaign kickstarted Schlafly's career as a political figure. While she never successfully ran for any office, her mobilization efforts still gave a voice to socially conservative American women. After Goldwater lost the election in 1964, the moderates in the party tried and succeeded in ousting her from the GOP. And yet, her break with official party

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<sup>74</sup> "Eagle Forum Brochure," eagleforum.org (Eagle Forum, 2018), <https://eagleforum.org/about/brochure.html>.

<sup>75</sup> "Eagle Forum Profile: Summary," OpenSecrets, accessed January 10, 2022, <https://www.opensecrets.org/orgs/eagle-forum/summary?id=D000000586>.

"Eagle Forum Lobbying Profile," OpenSecrets, accessed January 10, 2022, <https://www.opensecrets.org/federal-lobbying/clients/summary?cycle=2018&id=D000000586>.

<sup>76</sup> "Eagle Forum Profile: Recipients," OpenSecrets, accessed January 10, 2022, <https://www.opensecrets.org/orgs/eagle-forum/recipients?id=D000000586>.

<sup>77</sup> Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), 218.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



politics put her on the path to become one of the most influential voices in the social-conservative movement and allowed her to shape the American New Right.<sup>79</sup>

Schlafly's reasoning for fighting liberal feminism seems reminiscent of Catharine Beecher's idea of a natural order in which men and women have distinct roles and duties. Like Beecher, Schlafly emphasized that "a moral order based on family values [...] is what America needed to keep women and their children safe, secure and spiritually strong."<sup>80</sup> According to her, women would have the guardianship over children's virtue, and this would be grounded in the supposed natural differences between the sexes. Liberal feminism would fail to see and acknowledge these differences and because of this oversight, their political ideas would hurt women by ignoring their special role in protecting American children's morality.<sup>81</sup> It is interesting to note that Schlafly's political career seems to contradict the gender norms of her time. Especially her endeavor to run for Congress, although unsuccessful, clashes with the notion of homemaker. Farber argues, however, that the critique by her contemporary liberal feminist counterparts of her contradicting her own moral convictions is shortsighted. He traces her involvement in national politics while still advocating for traditional gender ideals back to the tradition of "republican motherhood." This notion assumes that women, by their very nature of being less selfish and less driven by personal ambition than men, have special competency to nurture the nation's virtue. Farber also makes the connection to Beecher and asserts that her fight against the Suffrage was supposed to ensure that women would keep their special roles as the nurturers of the nation's virtue rather than being swallowed up in the morally corrupt world of male politics.<sup>82</sup> The rejection of the ERA was framed with the same logic. Women would supposedly lose their special place in society by an Act that was viewed as blurring gender lines by making them equal.

The quote mentioned at the beginning of this chapter has been taken from the official brochure of the Eagle Forum, published in 2018, and can be seen as the organization's self-definition. It becomes immediately clear that the Eagle Forum uses the banner of family-friendliness and protecting traditional family values – like Schlafly has done from the beginning of her political career. It is noteworthy that they repeatedly highlight the word "pro-family." This highlights their supposed commitment to preserving traditional American family structures and their sanctity. Furthermore, the reference to the nuclear family has historical

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<sup>79</sup> David R. Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism: A Short History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 119-120.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 126-127.

implications. As Elaine Tyler May asserts, the nuclear family was a central concept in the fight against communism during the Cold War. The nuclear family follows heteronormative traditional gender concepts.<sup>83</sup> With this in mind, the brochure seems reminiscent of Cold War rhetoric concerning the promotion of a strong family unit without outside interference. Given that the founder Phyllis Schlafly started her political career as a “communist crusader,” the anti-liberal rhetoric is not surprising.<sup>84</sup> This is even further elucidated under the heading “Eagle Forum opposes Feminist Goals.” Here, the Eagle Forum clearly states that they are against governmental involvement in issues they view as the parents’ obligation. To illustrate their objection to governmental involvement, they disapprovingly refer to the saying “It takes a village to raise a child,” and equate the government with the village. Governmental involvement (in other words public school curricula) should not have the power to “override parents” in their parental authority. Here the concept of the limited government is vindicated by the argument of parental jurisdiction. There is lots to uncover in the official brochure and how it frames certain debates and issues, but for this study it is more expedient to look at the Eagle Forum’s stance on feminism and how they frame their political convictions. Under the heading of their opposition to feminist goals their view on feminism becomes adamantly clear:

We support constitutional amendments and legislation to protect the institution of marriage and the important roles of father and mother. We honor the fulltime homemaker and her rights in social security and the joint income tax.

We oppose government-financed incentives that result in fatherless children, divorce, illegitimacy, and stereotyping men as abusers of women.

We oppose same-sex marriages, tax-funded abortions and drafting our daughters into military combat.

We oppose the concept that the “village” (the government) should raise the child.

We oppose public schools overriding parents on moral issues.<sup>85</sup>

First, it is noteworthy that the Eagle Forum does not specify who or what exactly they are referring to when they say feminism. As stated in the previous chapter, the word feminism itself is rather diffuse and, therefore, it can encompass a multitude of political convictions. Generally speaking, conservatives oppose liberal feminism. Second, they equate feminism with being harmful to American families. According to the Eagle Forum, the attainment of feminist goals

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<sup>83</sup> Elaine Tyler May, “Introduction: The Bunker Mentality,” in *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear and Abandoned Democracy* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2016), 1-12.

And Elaine Tyler May, “Chapter 1: Gimme Shelter: Security in the Atomic Age,” in *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear and Abandoned Democracy* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2016), 13-56.

<sup>84</sup> Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade*, 3-4.

<sup>85</sup> “Eagle Forum Brochure,” eagleforum.org (Eagle Forum, 2018), <https://eagleforum.org/about/brochure.html>.

would supposedly result in the complete dissolution of the family in the sense that it would endanger the institution of marriage, incentivize divorce, and fund abortion through taxes. By saying that they value the fulltime homemaker, referred to as being a woman, they indicate that feminism would endanger female homemakers. Furthermore, they imply that women's liberty, granted through governmental assistance, would lead to higher divorce rates and fatherless children. The issue of abortion is central to most conservative organizations and will be further explored in the analysis of their rhetoric later. The Eagle Forum also consistently uses the trope of feminism being anti-male to vilify it. According to the Eagle Forum, feminism would "[stereotype] men as abusers of women." Not only does this assertion paint men as the victims, but it also evokes the image of an irrational crusade which supposedly generalizes men as inherently abusive. This rhetoric puts the Eagle Forum in line with the common discourse of conservative politicians/organizations, even women's organizations.

The Eagle Forum is not only involved in politics through monetary contributions, but it also actively tries to rally the American public for their conservative cause. One of the easiest ways to reach a broad audience quickly are social media channels. Even though the self-described grassroots movement accuses Facebook, Twitter, and Google of trying to cancel or "erase" the Forum, they still utilize the various social media platforms to garner support.<sup>86</sup> All of their social media platforms, be it Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook serve as sources for output rather than actual community engagement. Most of the posts are links to articles on their website [eagleforum.org](http://eagleforum.org). Given the strained relationship between "liberal media" and conservative politics, the lack of community engagement on 'liberal' social media platforms is not surprising.<sup>87</sup>

The following paragraphs will give a detailed analysis of the rhetoric of the Eagle Forum and show how they frame debates surrounding the topics of gender and abortion. I conducted this study by categorizing the Forum's posts on its official Facebook account by topic. I searched for the specific keywords, "gender" and "abortion", on the Facebook page of the Eagle Forum and then read through the posts and articles to put them in either category. The selected posts and articles are the ones which are the most illustrative of their rhetoric. Most of the posts concerning abortion and gender are repetitive, so I chose posts which encapsulate their primary concerns and utilize the most expressive language. Since most of the posts refer to a link

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<sup>86</sup> "Eagle Forum Brochure," [eagleforum.org](http://eagleforum.org) (Eagle Forum, 2018), <https://eagleforum.org/about/brochure.html>.

<sup>87</sup> for a more detailed explanation for the phenomenon of "fake news" and how Trump and with him his fellow Republicans used the term to discredit the media, see: "How President Trump Took 'Fake News' into the Mainstream," *Bbc.com*, November 12, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-46175024>.

redirecting the users to their website, I will also analyze the individual articles. The homepage [eagleforum.org](https://eagleforum.org) serves as the ideal source since it is crucial for the organization's campaigning and lobbying efforts and allows us to get a good insight into their rhetorical framing as well as imagery.

## 2.1. Gender

Parenting and especially its influence in children's education takes up a central role in the repertoire of the Eagle Forum. The imagery of the helpless child is a powerful concept for the mobilization of concerned parents. The Eagle Forum utilizes this image to further its agenda against liberal politics. The following articles illustrate that the issue of gender, and anything touching upon that subject, seems to be one of the main concerns of the Eagle Forum.

On December 3, 2021, The Eagle Forum posted a link to an article on their website titled "Our Children Are Surrounded: Countering Pop Culture's Negative Influences."<sup>88</sup> In the caption of the post they proclaim "Parent Power" referring to the defeat of former Democratic Governor Terry McAuliffe by Republican Glenn Youngkin. The Eagle Forum argues (same as the Federalist article they use as a source), that McAuliffe's defeat can be ascribed to his stance on critical race theory, his support of school closures amidst the COVID pandemic, and a comment he made saying that the number of white school teachers in Virginia is disproportional to the racial proportions of pupils.<sup>89</sup> According to the Eagle Forum this electoral defeat is a sign that parents joined together can be a powerful political force. The Eagle Forum uses this as a springboard for their argument that parents need to join the fight against the liberal media. The title of the article itself sounds sensational. It suggests a war against children with them being "surrounded" by "extremist ideologies such as Critical Race Theory's 'oppressed vs. oppressor' dynamics [...], transgender ideologies, [and] 'woke' pop culture messages, including a new,

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<sup>88</sup> Facebook Post: Eagle Forum. 2021. "Parent Power!" Facebook, December 3, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064567276742/search/?q=our%20children%20are%20surrounded> Linked Article: "Our Children Are Surrounded: Countering Pop Culture's Negative Influences," [eagleforum.org](https://eagleforum.org/publications/focus/our-children-are-surrounded-countering-pop-cultures-negative-influences.html?fbclid=IwAR12S423NXoCN345ZsODcMd7fsiAGMJME64UhwbdJBdOh-dpfU3dDUS_gU) (Eagle Forum, November 2021), [https://eagleforum.org/publications/focus/our-children-are-surrounded-countering-pop-cultures-negative-influences.html?fbclid=IwAR12S423NXoCN345ZsODcMd7fsiAGMJME64UhwbdJBdOh-dpfU3dDUS\\_gU](https://eagleforum.org/publications/focus/our-children-are-surrounded-countering-pop-cultures-negative-influences.html?fbclid=IwAR12S423NXoCN345ZsODcMd7fsiAGMJME64UhwbdJBdOh-dpfU3dDUS_gU).

The following quotes and references will all be taken from the online article on [eagleforum.org](https://eagleforum.org) cited above, unless specified otherwise

<sup>89</sup> John Daniel Davidson, "Terry McAuliffe's Defeat Is a Cautionary Tale: Don't Mess with Parents," *The Federalist*, November 3, 2021, <https://thefederalist.com/2021/11/03/terry-mcauliffes-defeat-in-virginia-is-a-cautionary-tale-dont-mess-with-parents/>.

bisexual Superman.”<sup>90</sup> The fact they specifically mention the sexuality of a fictional superhero as having a harmful influence on children is telling of their binary view on sexuality and gender. As stated in the article, the Eagle Forum, and more broadly the supposed “statewide elections” are generally opposed to candidates supposedly advocating for the politicization of education. The issue of education will be further examined in the succeeding sections.

Apart from the discourse of the allegedly politicized curricula of America’s public schools, the article goes on to present parents with resources to combat the, what The Eagle Forum calls, negative influences of pop culture. They refer to former Hollywood actress Tina Griffin, who forsook her Hollywood lifestyle to become a fulltime Mom-Activist, with her program *Counter Culture Mom*. Her TV program specifically focuses on her and mothers in general and their supposed duties to protect their children from the alleged harm of media consumption. The name of her program itself elevates motherhood as a rhetorical strategy, that can be traced back to the culture of domesticity. What is interesting, however, is that Griffin, who is an actress, and now has a tv show in which she is presented as a fulltime mother, travels globally and speaks at school assemblies, colleges, festivals, church services, and even prisons. Doing all these things cannot leave her much time to be the fulltime mother she makes herself out to be. The paradox between being a fulltime mother and a fulltime media personality, which can already be observed regarding female politicians such as Schlafly, extends to Griffin as well.<sup>91</sup> According to the movement, its mission is to “[reveal] how pop culture is eroding the foundational development of today’s youth and the importance of having a healthy media diet.”<sup>92</sup> The line of argumentation of the article by the Eagle Forum frames the debate in a way that suggests an attack on the American family and youth specifically. While the questioning of the safety of online chat rooms and bullying in school seem like concerns spanning the whole political spectrum, the article puts these dangers in line with the supposed “anti-Christian worldviews,” such as sexuality which does not conform to binary gender norms, and “extremist ideologies such as Critical Race Theory’s ‘oppressed vs. oppressor’ dynamics in the classroom.” It is also interesting to note, that the article uses the word indoctrination to refer to school libraries’ portfolio. Although *Counter Culture Mom* is not exclusively geared toward

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<sup>90</sup> The comment about Superman’s sexuality refers to the announcement by DC Comics that the new Superman, starting from the comic book series “Superman: Son of Kal-El,” will be bisexual. They announced this by sharing image depicting Jon Kent kissing his Jay Nakamura.

For more information see: David Betancourt, “The Story of How Superman Came out as Bisexual: It ‘Makes Perfect Sense’,” The Washington Post (WP Company, November 16, 2021), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2021/11/16/superman-bisexual-comic-jon-kent/>.

<sup>91</sup> “Biography,” Counter Culture Mom (Counter Culture Mom LLC. and Tina Marie Griffin), accessed January 10, 2022, <https://counterculturemom.com/biography/>.

<sup>92</sup> “Counter Culture Mom,” Counter Culture Mom (Counter Culture Mom LLC. and Tina Marie Griffin), accessed January 10, 2022, <https://counterculturemom.com/>.

women, the moniker suggests the elevation of the label “mom” and the importance of mothers for the Counter Culture. The descriptor Counter Culture assumes that Griffin would act against the mainstream, which supposedly negatively influences the nation’s youth with liberal indoctrination. Counterculture is commonly associated with the left-leaning social movements of the 1960s acting against the establishment – also fighting against traditional gender roles and advocating for women’s equality. Griffin appropriates the terminology of this emancipatory movement and applies it to her conservative agenda. This is reminiscent of the conservative’s appropriated use of the word feminism.

Another aspect which is worth discussing is the surrounding content displayed next to the article on the website since it also influences the reader, even though they might just give it a cursory glance. The idyllic scene shown in illustration 1 of a seemingly happy family enjoying



Illustration 1

their time in the countryside is accompanied by an advertisement for *Faithfully, Phyllis in the Kitchen: The Phyllis Schlafly Cookbook*.

Illustration 2 shows a cropped screenshot of the article’s website. On the right-hand side, the website shows

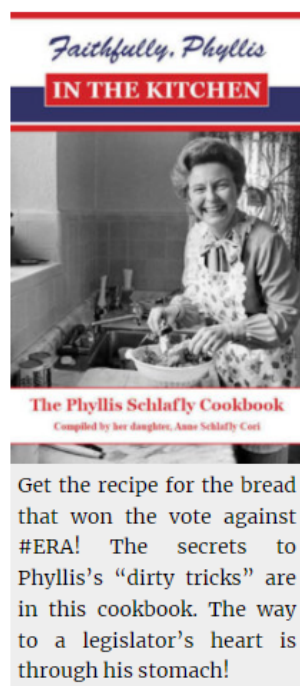


Illustration 2

the cover of Schlafly’s cookbook. Apart from the comment facetiously proclaiming that a bread recipe won the fight against the ERA, it also uses the saying “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach” and politicizes it by exchanging “man” with “legislator.” This message clearly has a gendered connotation. It promotes the traditional image of the apron-clad model housewife baking bread in the kitchen and exerting political influence in doing so. The article itself already emphasizes the importance of parents (focusing on the mother). Coupled with the image of Schlafly embodying the stereotypical housewife, it further creates the image of the ideal family in the 1950s and promotes traditional gender roles. This is only further solidified when you scroll down and under the article you can see a video titled “Dads on Duty: Dads help curb violence at Louisiana high school.” While the video is based on a true occurrence, the combination of the article, Schlafly’s cookbook paving the way to a

politician's heart, and the dutiful Dad heavily promotes stereotypical gender norms with the notion of serene domesticity.

The next two articles were posted by the Facebook account called Eagle Forum – Focus on Education, which is an official account by the Eagle Forum specially concerned with children's education.<sup>93</sup> The first post is titled "A bombshell article on how teachers are grooming their middle school students."<sup>94</sup> It links an article on the website by Abigail Shrier, who is most well-known for books such as *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*, in which she argues that transgender people are merely confused in their sexuality and advocates against gender-affirming surgery.<sup>95</sup> The self-titled Truth Fairy published the article "How Activist Teachers Recruit Kids: Leaked Documents and Audio from the California Teachers Association Conference Reveal Efforts to Subvert Parents on Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation" on November 18, 2021.<sup>96</sup> The article harshly criticizes LGBTQ school clubs, also known as GSA, or Gay-Straight Alliance. Shrier argues that because LGBTQ school clubs are not officially recognized as school clubs, they would have lacking records - in other words, no one can keep track of their members. She allegedly has verified audio recordings of teachers running the LGBTQ clubs admitting they knowingly tamper with the records to circumvent parents who otherwise might not allow their children to attend the clubs. Additionally, the clubs would simply lack membership and active participation. She accuses the teachers of "recruiting" children to participate in clubs they do not want to participate in. She states: "If you want to bring a new world into existence, it seems—a good place to start is with other people's kids." First, this sentence suggests that there is no need for LGBTQ clubs in school. Second, it implies that children would be the ideal way to start a new liberal world order. While she says in the article that gay Americans were subject to bigotry based on the assumption that inclusion in society would lead to the recruitment of America's youth, her accusations seem reminiscent of exactly this harmful rhetoric. She is referring to the issue of homophobia and transphobia of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the common conviction that

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<sup>93</sup> Eagle Forum – Focus on Education Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/EFFocus>  
Facebook Handle: @EFFocus

<sup>94</sup> Abigail Shrier, "How Activist Teachers Recruit Kids," The Truth Fairy (Abigail Shrier, November 18, 2021), [https://abigailshrier.substack.com/p/how-activist-teachers-recruit-kids?fbclid=IwAR2Fm1U\\_wN5cgi2euKnh63sE0fmV1HSHtS0IGZ5OKbt7FpyOSiVNPtJ-Too](https://abigailshrier.substack.com/p/how-activist-teachers-recruit-kids?fbclid=IwAR2Fm1U_wN5cgi2euKnh63sE0fmV1HSHtS0IGZ5OKbt7FpyOSiVNPtJ-Too).

<sup>95</sup> Jack Turban, "New Book 'Irreversible Damage' Is Full of Misinformation ...," *psychologytoday.com* (Psychology Today, December 6, 2020), <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/political-minds/202012/new-book-irreversible-damage-is-full-misinformation>.

The above cited article, among other things, notes that the book was temporarily removed from Target's website due to concerns of transphobia

<sup>96</sup> The following quotes were taken from the article cited in footnote 92

everyone falling out of the binary norm is a pervert with the intention of corrupting the nation.<sup>97</sup> She supposedly distances herself from this homophobic idea of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by saying that the historical connection between inclusion and the recruitment of children “is, and remains, a lie,” but her line of argumentation of teachers mischievously recruiting children into LGBTQ clubs seems evocative of the idea of gay recruitment.



Illustration 3

The imagery of the article is also noteworthy. Illustration 3 is the title image of the article as well as of the Facebook post made by the Eagle Forum. I specifically mention that it is the image used in the Facebook link, because this means that users will see the image before they might even read the article. Regardless of whether the

users indeed read the article, they, nevertheless, see the image. Just by seeing the image with the caption referring to the practice of grooming middle school students, the users are influenced by a narrative the Eagle Forum created. Especially in the context of grooming, the image, which is not accompanied by any information of the source, seems striking. The teacher looks like she is dancing around the class with the Pride Flag while the children are looking her way. The two boys, whose faces are readily visible look rather puzzled or concerned by the teacher. It even looks like the teacher is trying to drape the flag around one of the children, as if she were catching them with it. If you connect the word grooming with the very enthusiastic looking teacher, the image gives off an eerie feeling. The open display of the Pride Flag inevitably connects sinister grooming practices with the LGBTQ community.

While the article was not crafted by the Eagle Forum, they, nevertheless, chose to publish it on their Facebook page, spreading the message. They, through Shrier’s article, refer to the supposed moral downfall of the public school system and they do so by propagating anti-LGBTQ sentiments. The issue of gender and the supposed harm it would cause in public schools to the nation’s youth seems to be a recurring theme. Another post which further cements this narrative is a post from November 18, 2021.<sup>98</sup> The post is a link to an article called “Parents

<sup>97</sup> Margot Canaday, “Immigration - ‘A New Species of Undesirable Immigrant’: Perverse Aliens and the Limits of the Law, 1900-1924,” in *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, 19-54.

<sup>98</sup> Eagle Forum – Focus on Education. 2021. “Parents are Key to Saving Western Civilization.” Facebook, November 18, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/EFFocus/posts/925585881422807>



Are the Key to Saving Western Civilization,” on the website of the Eagle Forum.<sup>99</sup> The article proclaims that:

The woke assault on core American principles such as freedom of speech and individual merit germinated in the 60s, matured in the American academy in the late 80s and 90s, achieved dominance on campus in the early decades of the millennium, then spread in just the past few years out of the quad and into the leading institutions of the country at large.

The first sentence clearly refers to the supposed liberal subversion of the 1960s which Goldwater and Schlafly set out to combat. Feminism was one big part of this alleged liberal subversion. The quote makes it sound as though “wokeness” has been spreading around the country like a pandemic, gaining a stronghold in America’s leading institutions, be it universities or the government. Furthermore, the article uses words such as “alternative beliefs,” “(mis)education,” “acolytes [of an alternative faith],” “woke dogma,” “woke ideology,” “assault on so-called whiteness,” and “woke higher-education establishment.” These expressions are highly propagandistic and push the narrative of a leftist Kraken taking on cult-like forms. The article’s solution to this alleged leftist indoctrination in the school system is parental authority and parent’s activism. It calls on parents to push back against the supposed leftist establishment indoctrinating their children. This indoctrination seemingly includes the simple mentioning of gender in public schools.

It is interesting to note that gender seems to be a recurring problem for the Eagle Forum and the sources they reference. The inclusion of sexualities or genders outside of the binary norm seem to be of special concern to them – especially regarding the mention of gender in their children’s classroom. Liberal feminism challenged traditional gender norms in the 1960s and ‘70s and countered, for example, the culture of domesticity which has been, and arguably still is in some ways, the norm. It seems that gender inclusivity is replacing feminism as the main objective of conservative opposition.

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<sup>99</sup> The following discussion and the quotes were taken from: “Parents Are the Key to Saving Western Civilization,” eagleforum.org (Eagle Forum, November 17, 2021), [https://eagleforum.org/publications/insights/parents-are-the-key-to-saving-western-civilization.html?fbclid=IwAR381JBQG4IFCp4mjaM-IqMuYA9ceCDWymmgfwC8WoV9S3KI1VqQ\\_fIEAyg](https://eagleforum.org/publications/insights/parents-are-the-key-to-saving-western-civilization.html?fbclid=IwAR381JBQG4IFCp4mjaM-IqMuYA9ceCDWymmgfwC8WoV9S3KI1VqQ_fIEAyg).

## 2.2. Abortion

At the Eagle Forum's Facebook page and website, abortion and the fight to overturn *Roe v. Wade* take a central role. The gendered language they use in their articles is highly accusatory and polemic. On September 17, 2021, The Eagle Forum posted a link to an article on their website titled "Ask your Rep to Vote NO on Radical Abortion Bill."<sup>100</sup> The subheading of the article, which is also the heading of the Facebook post, reads: "Take it From the Dems, 'Roe v. Wade is on Life Support'." In the Facebook post they added #TakeAction after the subheading.



Illustration 4

The image of the article shows a couple holding two ultrasounds depicting an almost fully developed fetus. The woman has a visible bump. Combined with the heading of a supposed radical abortion bill, the image is misleading in so far as it suggests that the bill, which the Eagle Forum is denouncing, would enable women to terminate the

pregnancy at any given time even if the fetus is almost fully developed.

However, the bill would merely counter the so-called Texas Heartbeat Bill, which would outlaw any termination of pregnancy after a doctor can identify a heartbeat. This can be as early as six weeks. Furthermore, this might happen in a stage before women are even aware of the pregnancy. Heartbeat Bills would amount to an almost complete ban on legal abortions.<sup>101</sup> This has been criticized by, for example, the president of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Dr. Ted Anderson. He said that "[what] is interpreted as a heartbeat in these bills is actually electrically induced flickering of a portion of the heart as the embryo develops" and the terminology 'heartbeat' is, therefore, misleading.<sup>102</sup>

When considering how it uses gendered language, the article gives an interesting take on anti-abortion sentiments, which I would classify as reversed feminist language. The article refers to the incident of Google removing advertisements by Live Action promoting the highly

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<sup>100</sup> Facebook Post: Eagle Forum. 2021. "Take it From the Dems, 'Roe v. Wade is on Life Support' #TakeAction." Facebook, September 17, 2021. [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=4580974818651391&id=1213320232083550](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=4580974818651391&id=1213320232083550)  
The following discussion and quotes refer to the article:

"Ask Your Rep to Vote NO on Radical Abortion Bill," eagleforum.org (Eagle Forum, September 17, 2021), <https://eagleforum.org/publications/alerts/2021-archives/ask-your-rep-to-vote-no-on-radical-abortion-bill.html?fbclid=IwAR3Hcd7UBLvvP6eFk0p933wmNpXnfBYP9D1H3R0h9JWC3VguioowZnzUJmg>.

<sup>101</sup> Anna North and Catherine Kim, "The 'Heartbeat' Bills That Could Ban Almost All Abortions, Explained," vox.com (Vox, June 28, 2019), <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/4/19/18412384/abortion-heartbeat-bill-georgia-louisiana-ohio-2019>.

<sup>102</sup> Jessica Glenza, "Doctors' Organization: Calling Abortion Bans 'Fetal Heartbeat Bills' Is Misleading," theguardian.com (Guardian News and Media, June 5, 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/05/abortion-doctors-fetal-heartbeat-bills-language-misleading>.

controversial reversal of medication-based abortion.<sup>103</sup> The abortion-reversal treatment suggests that a woman, after taking an abortion pill, can still change her mind within a certain timeframe and take a pill which reverses the effects of the abortion-pill. The article claims that the ads were empowering women by giving them all the information necessary before proceeding with an abortion. Therefore, by removing the ads, which would supposedly “empower a woman to know the full scope of her rights after an abortion [...]”, Google would hinder female empowerment. Furthermore, the article claims that abortions would hurt women. It makes this claim without any further elaboration as to how exactly an abortion would be hurtful. Towards the end of the article, the article embeds a Tweet by founder of Live Action, Lila Rose. In the Tweet, Rose accuses Google of removing ads for a resource “that has saved 2500 children to date.” This cements the notion that abortion would be killing children. However, the most significant aspect of this article is the reversed rhetoric. By stressing their supposed desire for female empowerment through giving women information, which liberals and the abortion industry hide, they reverse feminist language. The article uses the feminist rhetoric of empowerment to further their anti-abortion stance. By reversing the narrative, saying that the ads for “abortion reversal” pills are empowering women, the Eagle Forum makes use of feminist language and code it within the concept of women’s rights.

Another post from June 26, 2020, furthers this narrative. It links an article by onenewsnosnow.com titled “Abortion apologists push pill loved by criminals.”<sup>104</sup> In the caption of the post, the Eagle Forum claims that easy access to abortion pills without any medical supervision would enable abusers to easily continue to sexually assault women. A quote mentioned in the post by Kirsten Hasler states that because women do not have to be examined by a doctor in order to take these pills, they would lose a safe space to possibly inform the doctor that they have been victims of sexual abuse or are “stuck in human trafficking.” The Facebook post and the article are using the issue of abuse of women to express their dismay about abortion.

I would classify the Eagle Forum’s rhetoric as reversed feminist language. They use words commonly associated with liberal feminism such as the vague terminology of “female

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<sup>103</sup> The idea of reversing medication-based abortions by immediately taking injected progesterone is controversial and there are serious doubts about the effectiveness.

Mara Gordon, “Controversial 'Abortion Reversal' Regimen Is Put to the Test,” npr.com (NPR, March 22, 2019), <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/03/22/688783130/controversial-abortion-reversal-regimen-is-put-to-the-test?t=1639153342168>.

<sup>104</sup> The following quotes will be taken from the following source until specified otherwise: Eagle Forum. 2020. “Have you heard of the chemical abortion pill RU-486?” Facebook, June 26, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064567276742/search/?q=abortion%20apologists>

As of December 11, 2021, the link to the article is not working and the website seems to have been taken down

empowerment,” and repurpose it to fit their conservative anti-liberal feminist agenda. This language suggests to the public and their followers that the Eagle Forum is pro-women and would argue in favor of policies which uplift women. Another telling example of this reversed feminist language is a post from January 6, 2020, which links to an open letter to Members of Congress and Virginia’s legislature. The article is titled “Protect Women: Reject ERA.”<sup>105</sup> In their open letter, the Eagle Forum is accusing the Equal Rights Amendment, or generally its advocates, of abusing the language of equal opportunity to hide their extremist agenda. The Equal Rights Amendment would destroy the protection of women’s “[...] unique place in the law [and] women’s unique interests.” They claim that, in contrast to the ERA, the Eagle Forum would continue to support policies which meet women’s actual needs. This is reminiscent of Beecher’s notion that women have a special place within the natural order. Moreover, the Eagle Forum claims that the ERA would harm policies which are specifically aimed at supporting women, such as the Equal Pay Act, the Civil Rights Act, and the Pregnancy Nondiscrimination Act. According to the Eagle Forum, instead of focusing on real equality, the ERA should be called the “Everything Related to Abortion Act.” Instead of protecting women’s rights, it would serve as a loophole for the “abortion industry” to cement its influence in the Constitution.

Furthermore, they claim that “[the] issue today is not the absence of laws protecting women; the issue is a radical agenda of empowering abortionists with new, constitutional cover to replace the crumbling legal foundation of *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*.” In this quote, they utilize the idea that women’s equality is not the true agenda of the ERA: instead of female empowerment, it would help “abortionists” gain constitutional influence. The Eagle Forum equates people in favor of pro-choice with “abortionists,” which implies that pro-choice arguments would be part of the supposed liberal advocacy for abortions. Instead of highlighting the right to choose, the Eagle Forum puts the emphasis on abortion. This article demonstrates that the Eagle Forum uses the gendered language of female empowerment and reverses the narrative as to serve their political views. In conclusion, the Eagle Forum accuses the ERA of utilizing feminist rhetoric as a guise.

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<sup>105</sup> Facebook Post: Eagle Forum. 2020. “The Everything Related to Abortion Act.” Facebook, January 06, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064567276742/search/?q=protect%20women>  
The following quotes will be taken from the following source until specified otherwise:  
“Protect Women: Reject Era,” eagleforum.org (Eagle Forum, January 6, 2020), <https://eagleforum.org/protect-women-reject-era.html?fbclid=IwAR3RLm8oH22bAiSbAWd9TZ-0L0zCoXtsUeNuTlurDKN5mjxi5o-4-Qk0mo8#.XhN92ASxBQ8.facebook>.

Another article which demonstrates the reversal of liberal feminist language was posted on Facebook on June 9, 2021.<sup>106</sup> The caption reads “Hyde’s Not Enough: Dems Use Paycheck Fairness Act to Line Pockets of Abortion Lobby.” The article itself is headed “Ask Your



Illustration 5

Senators to Vote NO on Paycheck Fairness Act.”<sup>107</sup> The Facebook post is accompanied by an image of a fetus. The Eagle Forum mostly uses almost fully developed fetuses in their images concerning abortions. Since the fetus now looks like a baby, the reader can

easily form an emotional attachment. If the image would depict an undeveloped embryo, this emotional connection might not happen. By using images like this, the Eagle Forum gives the issue a real face of a baby, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of abortions happen in far earlier stages of gestation. The caption of the post connects the words lobby and abortion. Since the article is discussing the aim of abolishing the Hyde Amendment by Democrats, the headline outright calls Democrats abortion lobbyists. The Paycheck Fairness Act would be adding pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical condition to the definition of sex in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. According to the Eagle Forum, this could be used to force employers to cover “elective [abortions] under the guise of fairness.” This uses liberal feminist rhetoric against liberal policies. The Eagle Forum accuses liberals of merely using the moniker of fairness to advance their “abortionist” agenda.

The last two paragraphs are especially revealing as to how the Eagle Forum uses reversed feminist language. They cite a study conducted by the PaysSale Research Center which asserts that “[American] women make 82 cents to the dollar compared to men.” However, the article does not equate this to inequality but to different demands women have from a job. Women would value a more flexible schedule and security over the actual earnings, and they are more likely to work part-time or leave work to raise a family. While this might be true, women are in many ways still expected to raise their children and this is based on still existent gender norms. Nevertheless, the Eagle Forum argues that mandating equal pay would hurt women because it would forbid businesses to give women the flexibility they desire. In their

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<sup>106</sup> Eagle Forum. 2021. “Hyde’s Not Enough: Dems Use Paycheck Fairness Act to Line Pockets of Abortion Lobby.” Facebook, June 9, 2021. [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=4290221344393408&id=1213320232083550](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=4290221344393408&id=1213320232083550)

<sup>107</sup>The following quotes will be taken from the following source until specified otherwise: “Ask Your Senators to Vote No on Paycheck Fairness Act,” eagleforum.org (Eagle Forum, June 8, 2021), [https://eagleforum.org/publications/alerts/2021-archives/ask-your-senators-to-vote-no-on-paycheck-fairness-act.html?fbclid=IwAR1bDqX2OB1tIG\\_BR0JhFeOX\\_gliQtxrJkI9tvr-XZqlBmM0c4X-yiC04Q0](https://eagleforum.org/publications/alerts/2021-archives/ask-your-senators-to-vote-no-on-paycheck-fairness-act.html?fbclid=IwAR1bDqX2OB1tIG_BR0JhFeOX_gliQtxrJkI9tvr-XZqlBmM0c4X-yiC04Q0).

words, this “one-size-fits-all approach [would eliminate] choice.” The article concludes that this mandate would hurt women. This line of argumentation fits well within their larger rhetoric. The Eagle Forum takes liberal policies and claims they hurt women and merely use the word fairness as a guise. The Eagle Forum implies that liberal politicians and people supporting those policies are just part of a sinister agenda of advancing causes harmful to women. The Eagle Forum continuously emphasizes women’s supposed unique position in society, and argues that equality would be disadvantageous for women. I would argue that the Eagle Forum is in line with Beecher’s understanding of the culture of domesticity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Where Beecher argued against Suffrage because it would hinder women’s special duties, the Eagle Forum, like Phyllis Schlafly, argues against equality before the law based on the assumption that it would hurt women’s particular needs.

### 3. Concerned Women for America

Like the Eagle Forum, which started out as an anti-Equal Rights Amendment group, Concerned Women for America (CWA) was founded to oppose the ERA in 1979. Over the course of its existence, it became a multi-issue interest group matching the feminist group National Organization for Women (NOW) in size and scope.<sup>108</sup> Before founding CWA, Beverly LaHaye and her husband published *The Act of Marriage* (1976). The book can be described as a sex manual in which the LaHayes give a strict definition of “‘natural’ sexual behaviors.”<sup>109</sup> They closely link the supposed natural behaviors to a Christian definition of intercourse between a man and a woman. They do not shy away from explicitly describing sexual intercourse. DeRogatis traces this back to the tradition of evangelical sex manuals which encourage precise knowledge of the human anatomy to lead a fulfilling sex life which in turn would lead to a healthy marriage. The LaHayes go a step further than the average evangelical manual, giving a detailed script as to how the couple should feel and what normal responses should look like. The emphasis is clearly on the man. He is described as the instigator while the woman is merely the receiver.<sup>110</sup> A man’s supposed natural predisposition to aggression and a high sex drive should be met and approved by his wife.<sup>111</sup> Beverly LaHaye’s husband Tim LaHaye, was an evangelical minister and, therefore, it is not surprising that their book makes connections between marital sexuality and religion. According to them, devoted Christians have a better sex life because their love for God enables them to also express greater love for others.<sup>112</sup>

CWA claims that Beverly LaHaye founded the organization after watching an interview with NOW founder Betty Friedan. According to CWA’s pamphlet, send out to new members, “[LaHaye] knew the feminists’ anti-God, anti-family rhetoric did not represent her beliefs, or those of the vast majority of women.”<sup>113</sup> In contrast to the Eagle Forum, CWA embraces the label feminism and appropriates it by changing the narrative and implying that their policies would be feminist as opposed to the liberal version of feminism which supposedly hurts women and American families in general. CWA’s language appears more radical than the Eagle Forum’s rhetoric. Schreiber connects LaHaye’s fight against liberal feminism to the rise of the Christian Right in American politics in the 1970s. She references Falwell’s successful

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<sup>108</sup> Ronnee Schreiber, *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>109</sup> Amy DeRogatis, “What Would Jesus Do? Sexuality and Salvation in Protestant Evangelical Sex Manuals, 1950s to the Present,” *Church History* 74, no. 1 (2005): pp. 97-137, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0009640700109679>, 107-108.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-110.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-126.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>113</sup> Schreiber, *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics*, 30.

undertaking to mobilize socially conservative evangelicals for the broader conservative movement. Smith asserts that LaHaye's main fight was against secular humanism. According to Smith, LaHaye follows a strict doctrine in which God created men and women with special roles in mind. The supposed natural order would be threatened by feminism, abortion, and gay rights. The family should be "male-headed and female-nurtured."<sup>114</sup>

This idea of a supposed natural order is reminiscent of Beecher's idea discussed in previous chapters. Given the religious nature of both their convictions, this correlation is not surprising. While LaHaye herself was a successful businesswoman and politically active, she equated career-oriented women with neglectful mothers. And in her view, parental neglect would be the cause "for [...] children to become radical feminists and mass murderers [...]."<sup>115</sup> This rhetoric conveys that radical feminists and mass murderers are equally despicable. Parental neglect and liberal feminism, or also radical feminism from a conservative's perspective, would eventually lead to the downfall of American society. Smith asserts that this rhetoric and generally this approach of equating liberal feminism with America's downfall is not explicitly confined to CWA or LaHaye, it is a reflection of the philosophy of the Christian Right.<sup>116</sup> More so than the Eagle Forum, CWA emphasizes supposed Christian traditional values as their moral ground on which they build their social ideals. In their activism, they focus predominantly on sexual and reproductive issues. This "gendered morality," as Smith states, is in line with a long tradition of religious campaigning in the United States, which has been connecting gendered issues such as suffrage and feminism to social demise.<sup>117</sup> Regarding their current political focus, Smith asserts: "Still today, CWA argues that sexual ethics, heterosexual marriage, and traditional gender roles are in constant threat of attack from liberal forces."<sup>118</sup>

The current CEO of Concerned Women for America, Penny Young Nance encompasses these supposed Christian values, which have guided CWA's activism since its founding. Apart from her managerial duties, Nance also partakes in rallies and serves as a spokesperson for CWA. Concernedwomen.org provides a brief introduction and overview of Penny Nance. The website claims that Nance "is a recognized national authority on cultural, children's and women's issues."<sup>119</sup> Her links to religious organizations becomes apparent in the second

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<sup>114</sup> Leslie Dorrough Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women for America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women for America*, 2 -3.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Every reference and all the information in this paragraph are taken from:

"Penny Young Nance," concernedwomen.org (Concerned Women for America), accessed January 10, 2022, <https://concernedwomen.org/about/our-experts-staff-and-board-of-trustees/penny-young-nance/>.



paragraph, when the article references *Christian Post* and *Newsmax* who named her one of the most influential pro-life female voices and one of the most influential evangelicals in America, especially concerned with rallying for pro-life policies. She also serves as the Senior Advisor for the *Christian Post*. Furthermore, she was a member of Trump's Life Advisory Council, and the article calls her a "modern-day Esther," advising Trump and former Vice-President Mike Pence, who would function as the voice of Christian conservative women. The article generalizes Christian women and boldly claims that Nance and her pro-life, anti-LGBTQ, sentiments would be shared by all Christian women. The reference to the biblical figure of Esther is noteworthy. In the Book of Esther, Esther rescues the Jews after the Persian King is persuaded to kill every Jew in his kingdom. Esther was part of King Xerxes' harem. After falling in love with her, he crowns her as his queen. After learning about the plot against the Jews, Esther, through her charm and influence with the king, stops the planned pogrom. By referencing this biblical story, CWA, again, emphasizes its religiosity.

Additionally, comparing Nance with Esther also has implications for the female role in politics. Esther is described as an obedient woman.<sup>120</sup> Through her romantic relationship with the king, she gets a certain level of political power. She still takes on a subordinate role. Never actually exerting power herself, she must go through a man to achieve her political goals. I would argue that as a result of suppression and exclusion of women from the public sphere throughout most of history, women had to find other ways to exert power and build spaces of their own. But to compare Nance to Esther seems retrogressive from a liberal feminist perspective. Furthermore, Esther saved the Jews from an existential threat. By referencing this biblical story, CWA draws a comparison between pogroms against the Jews and the supposed threat against conservatives. Instead of saving Jews, Nance would act as a savior to conservative women. The analysis of their rhetoric will show that the rhetoric of a supposed threat to conservative women seems to be an issue revolving around gender and abortion.

In 2008, Schreiber called CWA one of the largest grassroots women's organizations in the US mostly concerned with morality, opposing abortion and LGBTQ rights, and the integration of prayer in public schools.<sup>121</sup> It should be noted that their monetary contributions spiked in 2012 and reached their peak in 2016. Nevertheless, their presence on social media remains strong and they are still active in mobilizing American women for conservative issues. Their website serves as an educational news forum where CWA tries to inform the public about

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<sup>120</sup> Sidnie White Crawford, "Esther: Bible," Jewish Women's Archive, June 23, 2021, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/esther-bible>.

<sup>121</sup> Schreiber, *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics*, 4-5.

current political issues from a socially conservative standpoint. While the organization has different chapters across various states, the main website is tied to the overarching organization which is subtitled as “Legislative Action Committee”. Acting against or for certain legislations seems to be the focus of the website. In the drop-down menu of their homepage, the user can click on the heading “Action Center.”<sup>122</sup> The headline reads “Taking Action on CWA’s Trending Issues.” On that page, CWA provides a short description of the various topics they are engaging in and offer to take action. If clicked, the user is forwarded to a page which gives a more detailed description of their views on the certain issue. Apart from the information, they offer the option to contact US Senators and US Representatives, send out a Tweet, or call politicians. With all these options, they provide a script. The messages, while they can be edited, are prewritten and the person only needs fill in their contact details. The Tweets are also prewritten and provide a hashtag. The phone call apparently also has a script which will appear on screen after the user fills in their contact details. The readily available hashtag is especially interesting. If enough users use a certain hashtag, it could create a trending topic. Pushing a topic to the forefront on Twitter can be an effective tool to mobilize supporters. CWA is implementing this tactic by making it readily available on their website. Apart from their online presence, CWA is also active in organizing and participating in rallies.<sup>123</sup> CWA also tries to engage young women for their socially conservative cause through their Young Women for America sub-organization. YWA is mainly concerned with promoting biblical values across college campuses. The goal is not only to educate young women on political issues from a conservative Christian perspective, but to “grow their faith.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> “CWA Action Center,” Concerned Women for America, accessed January 10, 2022, <https://concernedwomen.org/cwa-action-center/>.

<sup>123</sup> Example 1: a rally called ‘I Stand With Brett,’ supporting Brett Kavanaugh who was accused of sexual misconduct by multiple women on Capitol Hill: “Concerned Women for America Legislative Action Committee and Coalition Groups HOLD Women for Kavanaugh -- ‘I Stand with Brett’ Rally,” Concerned Women for America, September 26, 2018, <https://concernedwomen.org/concerned-women-for-america-legislative-action-committee-and-coalition-groups-hold-women-for-kavanaugh-i-stand-with-brett-rally/>.

Example 2: prayer rally for Americans, Afghans working with Americans, and Afghan women and children, who are stuck in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of American forces out of Afghanistan. The rally took place outside the White House: “Afghanistan Prayer Rally,” Concerned Women for America, August 2021, <https://concernedwomen.org/afghanistan-prayer-rally>.

<sup>124</sup> “Young Women for America,” Concerned Women for America, accessed January 10, 2022, <https://concernedwomen.org/special-projects/ywa/>.

### 3.1. Gender

The opposition to LGBTQ rights is one of the driving forces behind the political activism of CWA. The following analyses are based on Facebook posts which all deal with the issue of gender. Policies which would supposedly shift gender dynamics and change traditional gender roles seem to be the focus of their criticism. Their focus ranges from the role of women in society to the supposed disruption that the existence and acceptance of transgender people would cause. CWA claims to be a feminist organization. It is apparent that they do not align themselves with liberal feminism. While the inclusion of transgender women in feminist debates is disputed, CWA clearly excludes transgender women in their call for female empowerment. Instead, CWA calls policies which would strengthen trans rights a “Trans War on Women.”<sup>125</sup> Their line of argumentation concerning transwomen is line with the rhetoric of TERFS. The term TERF is an acronym for trans-exclusionary radical feminist.<sup>126</sup> The classification of CWA as a feminist group is debatable, but they, nevertheless, advocate for female empowerment according to their own ideals. As the following Facebook posts and articles will show, the opposition to trans rights and trans inclusion in policies is a major topic in CWA’s rallying effort. Their fervent exclusion of transwomen leads them to work together with radical feminist organizations, meeting on the grounds of their trans exclusionism.

One of the most expressive Facebook posts was posted July 2, 2020. The caption reads “The serious ramifications of forcing the military to falsify official records of sex doesn’t only open all branches of the service to civil rights liability, it creates immediate risks for the brave women who volunteer to serve our country.”<sup>127</sup> It links to an article titled “Transgenderism’s War On Women Betrays Left’s Claims To Champion Our Rights.”<sup>128</sup> The article itself was

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<sup>125</sup> A Facebook post from July 2, 2020, cites an article from *The Federalist*. The article discusses the debate about military personnel being allowed officially change their gender in military documents. According to the article, this would lead to a myriad of problems for female service members, such as sleeping in the same facility with male colleagues who would simply identify as being female. Furthermore, the article claims that this policy would eventually lead to the invasion of safe spaces for women such as women’s shelters by biological men: Penny Young Nance and Natasha Chart, “Transgenderism’s War On Women Betrays Left’s Claims To Champion Our Rights,” *The Federalist*, July 2, 2020, <https://thefederalist.com/2020/07/02/transgenderisms-war-on-women-betrays-lefts-claims-to-champion-our-rights/?fbclid=IwAR0zrI6n6a4gw4CmoLL-PQyXEzHiBxgBZr58bthRXoyeA5h0PwSHRLQWlsI>.

<sup>126</sup> For more on TERFs see: Ben Vincent, Sonja Erikainen, and Ruth Pearce, *Terf Wars: Feminism and the Fight for Transgender Futures* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2020).

<sup>127</sup> Concerned Women for America LAC. 2020. “The serious ramifications of forcing the military to falsify official records of sex doesn’t only open all branches of the service to civil rights liability, it creates immediate risks for the brave women who volunteer to serve our country.” Facebook, July 2, 2020. [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=10158248777080993&id=77903485992](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10158248777080993&id=77903485992)

<sup>128</sup> The following discussion and quotes are taken from: Penny Young Nance and Natasha Chart, “Transgenderism’s War On Women Betrays Left’s Claims To Champion Our Rights,” *The Federalist*, July 2, 2020, <https://thefederalist.com/2020/07/02/transgenderisms-war-on-women-betrays-lefts-claims-to-champion-our-rights/?fbclid=IwAR0zrI6n6a4gw4CmoLL-PQyXEzHiBxgBZr58bthRXoyeA5h0PwSHRLQWlsI>. Unless specified otherwise.

written by Penny Nance and Natasha Chart, the Chairwoman of Women's Liberation Front (WoLF). WoLF calls itself a radical feminist organization and gender abolitionists. This means that they try to obliterate the mere notion of different genders because "it is a tool of the patriarchy to oppress women."<sup>129</sup> Moreover, they are in favor of women's reproductive rights, meaning that WoLF is pro-choice. The article starts with saying that CWA and WoLF are very different in their views regarding abortion and same-sex marriage and yet their hate of transgenders seems to unite them. Supposedly, it is the political left's policies which would disadvantage women. In this article they refer to lawsuits which would press the Department of Defense to let service members identify as transgender and change their gender markers in their medical documents. Apart from the minor concern that a different gender marker might pose a serious risk for the service members themselves in case they need treatment, much of the article deals with the ramification of such policies for women, excluding transgender women.

When referring to women Nance and Natasha Chart solely refer to biological women who were assigned a female gender marker at birth. It is noteworthy that they never mention *transgender* women. The word transgender is completely missing as if to insinuate that transgender does not even exist. Instead, the article uses circumlocutions such as "service members [who] identify [...] as a member of the opposite sex," or when discussing women's shelters that the policy would "[allow] men to identify into being allowed to stay with women, instead of other men, on the basis of gender identity." Both statements reject trans people wholesale. The article never acknowledges trans as a valid gender identity. The last quote is indicative of this repudiation. Instead of acknowledging that trans women are women who might need protection from a partner, the article proclaims that they should stay with other men instead of occupying spaces which are specifically designed to protect women. By stating that trans women should stay "with other men," they refuse to accept trans gender identity. In their eyes, women should have certain rights specifically aimed at protecting them from abuse by men, trans women would infringe upon those rights.

Apart from their concerns over trans inclusion, they further critique the left and its supposedly harmful policies towards women. Nance and Chart call out the American Civil Liberties Union and accuse it of opposing bans on female genital mutilation and child marriage, their support for prostitution, and their desire to end women-only scholarships. But more importantly Nance and Chart accuse the ACLU of wanting to end the recognition of sex under law. This means that the liberal organization wants to abolish the distinction between the female

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<sup>129</sup> "FAQ: Why Does Wolf Work with Conservatives?," Women's Liberation Front, December 2, 2020, <https://www.womensliberationfront.org/news/faq-wolf-work-with-conservatives.s>

and male sex and instead consolidate gender identity. They ask the reader and the ACLU, if they want to completely abolish women's autonomy and tie their agency to men or take away women's right to vote next. The article makes the rather drastic connection between trans inclusion and the destruction of women's rights. While the supposed connection between allowing transgender women to identify as such and the revoking of women's right to vote is never made clear, the rhetoric is effective since it creates a narrative which imagines a threat against women. The article tries to create a new issue which would weaken women's already precarious standing in society. They propagate the idea that trans rights would ultimately lead to the elimination of women's rights.

The next article also propagates the narrative that there is a liberal war on women. The Facebook post from February 24, 2021, quotes Nance and is captioned: "This bill is not about equality; it is about imposing a new form of discrimination against women and all who believe in the basic truth and dignity of our creation as male and female."<sup>130</sup> It links an article on CWA's website titled "'Equality Act' Exposed: Democrats Ram Vote to Avoid Scrutiny," written by Nance herself.<sup>131</sup> The article's imagery matches its ominous message. The image shows a

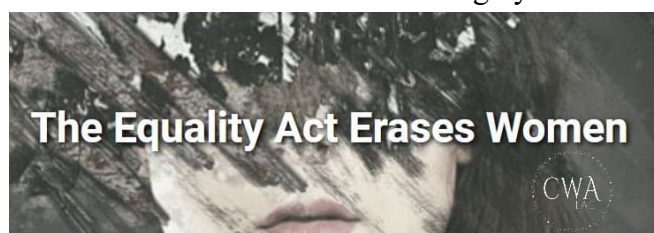


Illustration 6

woman's face in black and white. Only her lips and her hair are visible. Her eyes are hidden behind a smudge which matches the sense of eradication. It looks like a

portrait where someone used an eraser and is trying to erase the woman. The image is behind a sizable lettering stating: "The Equality Act Erases Women."

Even without reading the article, the Facebook user can immediately see this bold and provocative statement. Without stating what exactly the Equality Bill is or how it would purportedly discriminate against women, the only message a user would get is that the bill is discriminatory. Coupled with the gloomy image and the ominous message, the post is polarizing. Additionally, their binary worldview is accentuated in the last part of the sentence in the caption. Not only is the Act allegedly discriminating against women, but also everyone who believes in "the basic-truth of the distinction between male and female." CWA's opposition to gender performativity outside of, what they consider the norm, is used as a tool to cement their own conviction of the supposed inherent difference between the two sexes.

<sup>130</sup> Concerned Women for America LAC. 2021. "Penny Young Nance on the Equality Act." Facebook, February 24, 2021. [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=10158881740470993&id=77903485992](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10158881740470993&id=77903485992)

<sup>131</sup> "'Equality Act' Exposed: Democrats Ram Vote to Avoid Scrutiny," Concerned Women for America, February 24, 2021, [https://concernedwomen.org/equality-act-exposed-democrats-ram-vote-to-avoid-scrutiny/?fbclid=IwAR2ar\\_PlrIT1XhN3v4eRz9TnV-tVDAfiDmP88jnoZjfjle5D2Lr\\_CavHpzw](https://concernedwomen.org/equality-act-exposed-democrats-ram-vote-to-avoid-scrutiny/?fbclid=IwAR2ar_PlrIT1XhN3v4eRz9TnV-tVDAfiDmP88jnoZjfjle5D2Lr_CavHpzw).

Furthermore, the sensational phrasing (“erases”) suggests that there is a war on women who would be disadvantaged by the Equality Act. CWA uses the issue of discrimination against women, and the historical value that comes with it, and rephrase the narrative as to fuel their agenda against liberal policies such as the Equality Act.

The article itself consists of a short introduction and a statement by Nance. The introduction asserts that CWA would work together with multiple Republicans, as well as organizations from the left and the right to rally against the Equality Act. The Act wants “[to] prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation, and for other purposes.”<sup>132</sup> The supposed dangers are elaborated in Nance’s statement.<sup>133</sup> First of all, she claims that the Equality Act has been named deceptively as such and that it would be a product of the Democrats’ radical gender ideology. According to her, “the gender ideology of the elitist left erases the ability to differentiate between men and women.” This would ultimately harm women because it denies their special needs. Therefore, the Act would not result in Equality but a disadvantaging of women’s special needs. Furthermore, “Big Tech” and the media would aid Democrats. The rhetoric suggests that there is a gender craze within the liberal politics and that Big Tech and the media would be part of this conspiracy against Americans in general and American women in particular. The elitist left would work towards the eradication of gender without taking the supposed risk into account. Nance goes on to say that, under this bill, “[vulnerable] women in prisons and violence shelters have nowhere to be safe when any male claiming identity as a woman can occupy our spaces [and] women will lose female protected status in bathrooms, dressing rooms, locker rooms, and women’s shelters.” Same as in the previous article, her statement disavows the very existence of trans women. She solely refers to them as male. The supposed war on women is also highlighted in another post, posted October 19, 2021. The post is captioned with “The first female Four-Star Officer is a man. This is the ‘progress’ the Left aims for, erasing women one step at a time. #WarOnWomen.”<sup>134</sup> Yet again, CWA denounces the existence of trans women and refuses to acknowledge them as women, instead referring to them as men. The quotation marks around the word ‘progress,’ indicate that CWA apparently does not agree with that word in combination with trans inclusivity. The hashtag suggests that trans rights are part of a larger war on women waged by liberal politicians.

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<sup>132</sup> “Text - H.R.5 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): Equality Act ...,” congress.gov, March 2, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/5/text>.

<sup>133</sup> The following discussion and quotes are taken from until specified otherwise: “‘Equality Act’ Exposed: Democrats Ram Vote to Avoid Scrutiny,” Concerned Women for America, February 24, 2021, [https://concernedwomen.org/equality-act-exposed-democrats-ram-vote-to-avoid-scrutiny/?fbclid=IwAR2ar\\_PlrIT1XhN3v4eRz9TnV-tVDAfiDmP88jnoZjfjle5D2Lr\\_CavHpzw](https://concernedwomen.org/equality-act-exposed-democrats-ram-vote-to-avoid-scrutiny/?fbclid=IwAR2ar_PlrIT1XhN3v4eRz9TnV-tVDAfiDmP88jnoZjfjle5D2Lr_CavHpzw).

<sup>134</sup> Concerned Women for America LAC. 2021. “The first female Four-Star Officer is a man.” Facebook, October 19, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/ConcernedWomenforAmerica/posts/246278307527228>

Another issue highlighted in Nance's statement is the supposed danger the "gender-ideology" would pose for children. As previously discussed in the Eagle Forum's rhetoric regarding gender, the purported indoctrination in schools is of special concern. Nance asserts that the Equality Act would result in children being interrogated by teachers and doctors alike about their "gender identity." The statement uses quotation marks when using the word gender identity. This indicates that Nance, and more broadly CWA, see gender as something purely defined by biological sex. According to Nance, if the Equality Act is ratified by the Senate and House of Representatives, children would be subject to this supposed misconduct by teachers and doctors and might even be given hormonal treatment without parental consent. The statement closes with the assertion that the majority of Americans would oppose the Equality Act and the "government-coerced gender ideology." This assertion is significant on multiple levels. First, it suggests that CWA views gender norms as untouchable and almost sacred because they are supposedly grounded in biological facts. Secondly, it alleges that the government is trying to interfere in people's lives by forbidding them from living in their 'natural' state characterized by distinct spheres.

The rhetoric of the statement creates the narrative of a wider conspiracy which would dismantle binary gender models. The remark that teachers and doctors would question children's gender and potentially give them hormones, is trying to elicit fear in parents. Especially in connection with the accusation of a gender ideology coerced by the government, this creates the image of a portentous force which would prey on children. Same as the Eagle Forum, CWA uses the classroom as a potential site of danger for American children and creates the narrative of parental powerlessness. The suggestion is that varying gender identities are something which can be imposed on people. In order to discredit trans inclusion bills, the statement uses the supposed danger trans inclusion would pose for women's rights, an alleged conspiracy by leftist elites, and the alleged preying on children. It seems that for CWA, trans inclusivity or visibility is a threat against persistent gender ideals grounded in religion.

Another post, posted March 10, 2021, specifically targets trans women. The caption reads: "We salute Tucker Carlson Tonight for exposing the extreme President Joe Biden agenda to overrule sex-based rights for women and impose 'gender identity' on children. Concerned Women for America wants to know: Why the left's obsession with having males steal female identity and promoting gender transition of kids?"<sup>135</sup> Like Nance's statement before, the caption

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<sup>135</sup> Concerned Women for America LAC, 2021. "We salute Tucker Carlson Tonight for exposing the extreme President Joe Biden agenda to overrule sex-based rights for women and impose "gender identity" on children." Facebook, March 10, 2021. [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=10158916654330993&id=77903485992](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10158916654330993&id=77903485992)

puts gender identity in quotation marks indicating CWA's rejection of the word. Again, they propagate the narrative that an unspecified broader agenda would impose gender identity on vulnerable children. Furthermore, the Biden administration would try and abolish rights specifically designed to protect women. The policies CWA is referring to are mentioned and described in the Fox News article which is linked in the Facebook post.<sup>136</sup> The discussed policies include an executive order issued by Joe Biden which encourages schools to allow children to participate in athletic teams based on their gender identity regardless of their biological sex. The article is headed: "Biden order on gender identity harms women and girls, warns women's rights group," with the subheading "US moving toward 'obliteration of biological sex', warns Kara Dansky." Kara Dansky, a self-proclaimed feminist, is the Chair on the Committee of Law and Legislation at the Women's Human Rights Campaign, who advocated for the promotion of sex-based rights for women.<sup>137</sup>

Dansky, like CWA, distances herself from the word gender identity by using air quotes when talking about "so-called gender identity."<sup>138</sup> She claims that the Equality Act and Biden's executive orders "seek to erase women and girls in the law as a category."<sup>139</sup> Carlson then goes on using an example to illustrate the possible abuse of the Equality act saying that he could potentially pose as a woman to get sex-based governmental support for his hypothetical business.<sup>140</sup> Dansky affirms this example as a possible way for men to simply identify as female and taking advantage of women's special protection and support under the law. Furthermore, the Biden administration would work towards the obliteration of distinction based on sex and redefine sex as including gender identity.<sup>141</sup> In the Fox News article, Dansky is quoted calling gender identity a "nebulous, ill-defined, un-understood, made-up lie." While she advocates for special protection of women under the law and promotes women's issues, she rejects the mere notion of gender identity and masks transphobia as a concern for women's issues. Her rhetoric fits the broader transphobic rhetoric of CWA, which praises the interview as exposing Biden's extreme agenda.

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<sup>136</sup>The following discussion and quotes are taken from until specified otherwise: Yael Halon, "Biden Order on Gender Identity Harms Women and Girls, Warns Women's Rights Group," Fox News (FOX News Network, March 9, 2021), [https://www.foxnews.com/politics/biden-gender-identity-order-women-girls?fbclid=IwAR1\\_I2bLbjmZjlMdsIICDkqR6qmhtfSU--NIRnCtd07AiA4RqUXVrw6jxwE](https://www.foxnews.com/politics/biden-gender-identity-order-women-girls?fbclid=IwAR1_I2bLbjmZjlMdsIICDkqR6qmhtfSU--NIRnCtd07AiA4RqUXVrw6jxwE).

<sup>137</sup> The following quotes are taken from a video on foxnews.com until specified otherwise: Tucker Carlson Tonight, "Kara Dansky: Biden's Order on Gender Identity Harms Women and Girls," foxnews.com (FOX News Network, March 10, 2021), video, 03:53, 00:02 – 00:07, 00:35 – 00:42. <https://video.foxnews.com/v/6238392632001#sp=show-clips>.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 00:52 – 00:57.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 00:13 – 00:17.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 01:30 – 00:42.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 03:03 – 03:13.



As the analysis of the Facebook posts and their linked articles show, the issue of gender is mostly framed around trans women. While the Eagle Forum concerns itself with sexuality in general, Concerned Women for America is particularly focused on transgender women. As opposed to the Eagle Forum, CWA emphasizes their self-description as a feminist organization and appropriates feminism as a vehicle for their trans-exclusive ideals. Throughout multiple articles, Nance, and the CWA assert that they are feminists and use that to frame the debate around trans-inclusivity as being harmful to women. By denying trans women the label ‘women,’ CWA creates an ideal version of what constitutes as a woman, namely being biologically female. It is noteworthy that they connect to the women’s rights movements of the 1960s and ‘70s with the conviction that women are a vulnerable group in society that needs special protection. They praise statutes such as Title IX which states that “[no] person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”<sup>142</sup> These policies were aimed at strengthening women within American society and ensuring a level of equality. CWA fully supports these statutes, referring to themselves as true feminists, even though the policies were once regarded as liberal. The outright exclusion and narrative of a supposed threat posed by trans women indicates that CWA is fully in line with traditional gender norms.

### 3.2. Abortion

The following section will analyze CWA’s stance on abortion, and it will demonstrate that their rhetoric is similar to the one by the Eagle Forum. Their main argument is that of abortion hindering female empowerment and that it would hurt women rather than aid them in their autonomy. The first selected Facebook post was posted November 2, 2021. It was a response to the Supreme Court hearing for the possible overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in December 2021. The post is captioned “On December 1<sup>st</sup> the Supreme Court of the United States will hear oral arguments on the biggest abortion case of our lifetime. We will be standing outside on the steps of the court praying. Will you join us?”<sup>143</sup> The caption is then followed by a link to [concernedwomen.org](https://concernedwomen.org) with more information on the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* which deals with a Mississippi state law which bans abortion after 15 weeks of

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<sup>142</sup> “Title IX and Sex Discrimination,” ed. (US Department of Education (ED), accessed January 10, 2022, [https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix\\_dis.html](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix_dis.html).

<sup>143</sup> Concerned Women for America LAC. 2021. “On December 1st the Supreme Court of the United States will hear oral arguments in the biggest abortion case of our lifetime.” Facebook, video, November 2, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/ConcernedWomenforAmerica/videos/1622147141450805/>

pregnancy, which is in violation of *Roe v. Wade*. The court case could potentially overturn *Roe v. Wade* almost fifty years after its inception.<sup>144</sup>

The post is accompanied by a video produced by CWA. It starts with hopeful music and a clip of an ultrasound. You can hear Ronald Reagan as a voiceover throughout the video. It is an audio file of his remarks during the March for Life Rally January 1988.<sup>145</sup> The March for life is an annual rally as well as an anti-abortion organization. A group of anti-abortionists spearheaded by Nellie Gray initiated the first of the annual marches one year after the court decision *Roe v. Wade*. Gray vowed to march annually until the decision is overturned. Apart from their marches, March for Life is trying to end abortion through their advocacy through their blog, press statements, and lectures.<sup>146</sup> The rally, same as every year, was in Washington D.C.. In 1988, Reagan joined the march and addressed the protesters via loudspeaker. Parts of the speech can be heard in the video accompanied by clips of newborns with their parents. The names of the newborns are faded in in the video. This makes the video more personal and creates an immediate connection between the viewer and the children in the video. While Reagan is decrying the supposedly disastrous effects of *Roe v. Wade* which allegedly “claimed the lives of more than 20 million infants,” the video cuts from clips of newborns to a black screen with the white lettering “64 million lives lost.” Another black screen proclaims that “this is the moment we have been fighting for.” It then shows images of rallies by CWA with signs such as #EndInfanticide, “No Baby Left to Die,” and “Voice for the Voiceless,” “She is not your body. She is in your body.”<sup>147</sup> Reagan’s voiceover says “We’re told about a woman’s right to control her own body. But doesn’t the unborn child have a higher right, and that is to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?” The video ends with a call to join the protest outside the Supreme Court and provides a phone number which gives updates on the case and the protest itself while you can hear a heartbeat in the background.

The video operates on an emotional level. Rather than using an argumentative approach and providing proof for their claims, it tries to convey an emotional message, which tries to

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<sup>144</sup> Dan Berman and Ariane de Vogue, “What to Watch for as the Supreme Court Reconsiders *Roe v. Wade*,” *cnn.com* (Cable News Network, November 30, 2021), <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/30/politics/dobbs-v-jackson-womens-health-organization-what-to-watch/index.html>.


<sup>145</sup> Audio file: Reagan Foundation. “President Reagan’s Remarks to Participants in the March for Life Rally - 1/22/88.” YouTube video, 08:38. July 02, 2010. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaMcvF5gFLg&list=WL&index=14&ab\\_channel=ReaganFoundation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaMcvF5gFLg&list=WL&index=14&ab_channel=ReaganFoundation)

<sup>146</sup> “About the March for Life,” *marchforlife.org* (March for Life), accessed January 10, 2022, <https://marchforlife.org/about-the-march-for-life/>.

<sup>147</sup> Concerned Women for America LAC. 2021. “On December 1st the Supreme Court of the United States will hear oral arguments in the biggest abortion case of our lifetime.” Facebook, video, 01:42, November 2, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/ConcernedWomenforAmerica/videos/1622147141450805/> Signs mentioned in the text: “#EndInfanticide,” 0:38. “No Baby Left to Die,” 0:39. “Voices for the Voiceless,” 0:48. “She is not your body. She is in your body,” 1:08.

influence the viewer. The video clips and images of the rallies offer a deeper insight into CWA's rhetoric. Abortion is equaled with infanticide, meaning the willful killing of infants. As the further analysis of CWA's rhetoric will show, the narrative of supposed killing of unborn children is common regarding abortion.

On another level, the issue of a woman's right over her own body is shown on a protest sign and discussed during Reagan's speech. CWA does not disagree with the general sentiment of the right to one's own body, but for them the physical integrity of the fetus supersedes this right. One sign shown in the video claims that the baby is not part of a woman's body and therefore should not fall under the category of self-determination by a pregnant woman. Reagan outrightly claims that the fetus's rights are "higher" than the woman's. By using a voiceover of Reagan, CWA clearly positions itself within conservative anti-abortion politics. Reagan was a staunch anti-abortionist and, same as CWA, used religious rhetoric to substantiate his stance on abortion.

The next post is from November 10, 2021. The post is captioned: "Ms. Magazine had created a new website called 'Abortion is Essential to Democracy.' Penny Young Nance responds to Breitbart below: 'If the goal of this initiative is really 'Justice for all,' as they stated, then that should include the unborn baby.' Full story .

<sup>148</sup> The post links to an article on [breitbart.com](https://www.breitbart.com).<sup>149</sup> Breitbart News can be regarded as a far-right news outlet, which made headlines with, for example, xenophobic rhetoric and the spreading of conspiracy theories. The founder, Andrew Breitbart, supported the idea that there was a leftist undertaking to destroy the United States via multiculturalism.<sup>150</sup> The fact that CWA and Nance are spreading an article from a far-right magazine is telling in itself. Breitbart quotes Nance as a credible source regarding the abortion debate. The article not only quotes Nance but also Abby Johnson, founder of And Then There Were None, a nonprofit which seeks to help workers in abortion clinics leave their job. Abby Johnson is a pro-lifer, although she distances herself from radical and oftentimes violent pro-lifers who regularly attack abortion clinics or doctors working in such clinics. Johnson, the former manager of Planned Parenthood, seems to be a moderate pro-

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<sup>148</sup> Concerned Women for America LAC. 2021. "Ms. Magazine has created a new website called "Abortion Is Essential to Democracy." Penny Young Nance responds in Breitbart below." Facebook, November 10, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064351826766/search/?q=justice%20for%20all>

<sup>149</sup> The following quotes reference the following source, unless specified otherwise: Susan Berry, "Ms. Magazine: 'Abortion Is Essential to Democracy'," [breitbart.com](https://www.breitbart.com/health/2021/11/10/ms-magazine-abortion-essential-democracy/?fbclid=IwAR3iiv-hpOQeA9W2IHCDUBPEuEqNYvhyHA-ZYfgRhBVP2pOkMwg4ol6AbKA) (Breitbart News, November 10, 2021), <https://www.breitbart.com/health/2021/11/10/ms-magazine-abortion-essential-democracy/?fbclid=IwAR3iiv-hpOQeA9W2IHCDUBPEuEqNYvhyHA-ZYfgRhBVP2pOkMwg4ol6AbKA>.

<sup>150</sup> Zack Beauchamp, "Breitbart, Explained: The Conservative Media Giant That Wants Trump to Burn down the GOP," [vox.com](https://www.vox.com) (Vox, August 24, 2016), <https://www.vox.com/2016/8/24/12552602/breitbart-trump-explained>.

lifer who, nevertheless, argues that there is an abortion industry which is supposedly engaged in a smear campaign against pro-lifers.<sup>151</sup>

The article briefly summarizes the arguments of the microsite Abortion is Essential to Democracy. The microsite contains essays from the Brennan Center for Justice which is connected to the New York University School of Law. The essays discuss topics such as how the pseudoscience used to justify abortion bans is part of a larger anti-science cultural trend within the state and federal policy, how a dysfunctional electoral system led to an unrepresentative judiciary, and how the criminalization of abortion affects communities of color.<sup>152</sup> The article on Breitbart embeds a Tweet by Ms. Magazine titled "Appeals to pseudoscience have undermined true reproductive rights and another Tweet by media outlet NowThis which posted a video about the consequences of the possible overturning of Roe v. Wade. After briefly summarizing the campaign, the Breitbart article continues by quoting Johnson and Nance. One quote by Johnson asserts that "[Ms.] left out discussions about the failure of the entire abortion industry to protect and care for women." Furthermore, she mentions the supposed dire conditions in some abortion clinics which would have cost the lives of many women and if Ms. Would truly want to empower women, they should provide all information regarding abortion which also includes the possible dangers to women.<sup>153</sup> The article then quotes Nance saying that the pro-abortion movement would have been built on lies and that the decision Roe v. Wade was made with incomplete or faulty science in mind. These wrong beliefs would have finally "caught up to the left's lies." Moreover, if the initiative would truly want justice for all then that should also include justice for the unborn child.

The Breitbart article never makes any commentary itself. Instead, it simply presents two opinions of anti-abortionists. Their rhetoric is again using the premise that liberal feminists and their policies are rather hurting women than empowering them. According to Johnson and Nance, the pro-choice movement would keep vital information from women which could possibly endanger them. Johnson seems to be more moderate by simply saying that Ms. should provide information on the dangers of abortion, while Nance claims that Roe v. Wade and the ensuing pro-choice movement would be based on leftist lies and that they would act with an

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<sup>151</sup> Abby Johnson, "And Then There Were None," abbyj.com, November 21, 2011, <https://abbyj.com/and-then-there-were-none/>.

<sup>152</sup> Susan Berry, "Ms. Magazine: 'Abortion Is Essential to Democracy'," breitbart.com (Breitbart News, November 10, 2021), <https://www.breitbart.com/health/2021/11/10/ms-magazine-abortion-essential-democracy/?fbclid=IwAR3iiw-hpOQeA9W2IHCDUBPEuEqNYvhyHA-ZYfgRhBVP2pOkMwg4ol6AbKA>.

<sup>153</sup> Susan Berry, "Ms. Magazine: 'Abortion Is Essential to Democracy'," breitbart.com (Breitbart News, November 10, 2021), <https://www.breitbart.com/health/2021/11/10/ms-magazine-abortion-essential-democracy/?fbclid=IwAR3iiw-hpOQeA9W2IHCDUBPEuEqNYvhyHA-ZYfgRhBVP2pOkMwg4ol6AbKA>.

utter disregard for the fetus. Same as with the previous article, this article claims that the pro-choice movement would not be truly feminist in the sense that it endangers women while knowingly withholding information which would enable women to make a sound decision.



Illustration 7

The imagery of the article and the Facebook post is also worth analyzing. The picture headlining the article and, therefore, also the Facebook post was taken by Dutch photographer Robin van Lonkhuijsen in 2013. It depicts the protest of the Dutch Christian, anti-abortion, organization Schreeuw om Leven (engl. Scream for Life). The

organization protested a clinic based in Rotterdam which also provides medical abortions. The group displayed hundreds of fetuses made of plastic. The little fetuses can be seen as depicting the fetuses which would supposedly fall victim to abortions. Similar protests using plastic fetuses can be observed in multiple countries. Schreeuw om Leven declares itself a Christian organization which supposedly uses the bible as a fundamental truth. Furthermore, they equate abortion and euthanasia.<sup>154</sup> Like the organization March for Life, which was also promoted by CWA, Schreeuw om Leven organized events under the name Mars voor het Leven (engl. March for Life). The sheer number of plastic fetuses creates an eerie atmosphere. It would certainly draw attention from passersby. The neatly organized fetuses remind one of the organized rows in graveyards. And this is exactly what the Dutch organization wanted to achieve. The fetuses symbolize the supposed mass-killing of babies. The notion of murder is also part of CWA's rhetorical repertoire.

One major point of argument is that the right to abortion is not connected to equality and that women are already equal - without abortion. A post from December 2, 2021, illustrates that point. It is captioned: "Women are equal, empowered, and free WITHOUT abortion. CHOOSE LIFE!! Penny Young Nance yesterday following the historic Supreme Court oral arguments in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization." The caption is accompanied by a video clip of Nance giving a speech in front of the Supreme Court. Nance addresses her

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<sup>154</sup> "Over Schreeuw Om Leven," Schreeuw om Leven, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://www.schreeuwomleven.nl/over-ons/>.

supporters as well as people in favor of the right to abort. She counters the argument that equality should include the right of every woman to have the full authority over her own body to be free, by saying that women are already born free. There is no need for abortion to advance equality because women would already be equal. She alleges that some would spread the lie that a child would shatter a woman's dreams and aspirations. She never specifies who these people are who would supposedly promote this narrative, but it connects to the narrative of the career woman. The notion of a career driven woman who would have to choose between raising a family or her own career aspirations is a common construct. In a way, Nance uses liberal feminist rhetoric in the sense that she asserts that women can have a career while raising a family at the same time. She clearly does not try and constrain women within the domestic sphere. Given that she is a highly successful woman while also being a mother, her argument is not surprising. It seems that to her, a woman should be able to choose between a career or a family or both. However, this self-determination does not extend to autonomy regarding reproductive rights. Rather, a woman's dreams would depend on hard work and the grace of God.

Nance addressed the audience at a podium adorned with the slogan "Empower Women. Protect Life." CWA uses slogans which are reminiscent of the liberal feminist desire to empower women. However, Nance's understanding of female empowerment differs from that of liberal feminists. Whereas abortion is a staple in many liberal feminist organizations, CWA regards it as harmful to women. As shown in the article analyzed previously, CWA argues that the possible dangers of abortions are countering female empowerment. This same rhetoric can be seen in multiple protests signs portrayed on their website and on Facebook. A couple of examples include "Stand for Women. Stand for Life.," "Let Her Live.," "Empower Women. Promote Life." "I'm with Her." The last slogan was written on a poster with a drawing of a fetus inside the womb with a pink ribbon in its hair signaling that the fetus is female. CWA never fully addresses how the opposition to abortion would be empowering women. Rather, they use it as a catchphrase to signal that they are a feminist organization. CWA repeatedly claims that abortion would be harmful to women and that people allegedly affiliated with the abortion lobby would say that a baby would be the end of women's aspirations. CWA and Nance claim that women are already equal and that liberal politicians, who would merely claim to be feminist, are trying to attack the existent equality. Therefore, liberal politics would be the true threat to women's empowerment.

It is interesting to see that CWA uses the label of feminism as a combat term. To counter liberal feminists, they call themselves the true feminists and advocate that every "real" feminist

should join them. The diffuse definition of the term allows both sides to claim it as their own. Both sides – the liberals and conservatives – want to empower women and yet they could not be further apart on the issues of gender and abortion. Regarding gender, CWA is clearly within the spectrum of trans-exclusionism. The debate whether there is a conservative feminism has been an issue in recent scholarship. CWA falls within that debate. They are an organization primarily consisting of women who advocate for policies which would safeguard women's need under the law. They do not try to constrict women to the domestic sphere. However, they see a fundamental difference between men and women and assert that women need special laws to safeguard their equal status. CWA clearly distinguishes between the male and female gender norms and affirm that this clear distinction is necessary to protect women's status within American society. For CWA, trans women would endanger this clear division between the two sexes. In other words, it would harm, what CWA would call, "real women." Their rhetoric regarding gender should be analyzed within the trans-exclusionary feminist discourse.

Judith Butler connects the opposition to trans rights in the United States with the prevalence of the evangelical Church. She argues that the evangelical movement would try and govern family structures and would see trans rights as a threat because it would potentially disrupt the natural, or divine order. To save civilization, evangelicals would oppose trans rights because "they challenge [...] the heteronormative fantasy that sustains the idea of the nation, one that often depends upon a doubling of the two fathers (familial and state masculine leadership)."<sup>155</sup> This assertion can be transferred to CWA. It seems that they do not cling to masculine leadership, as Butler asserts regarding other evangelicals, they do advocate for women in politics and several of its members also hold offices. But CWA, nevertheless, embraces the idea of heteronormativity, since they oppose the acknowledgement of genders or sexualities outside of the gender binary. Even within feminist movements such as the #MeToo movement, transwomen face exclusion and underrepresentation. The privilege of cis white women overpowers the voices of women falling out of that category and this leads to exclusion of women from a feminist movement.<sup>156</sup> Hines locates the topic of trans women in the center of feminist debate. She argues that some feminist cis women see transwomen as a threat to women's bodily safety. She analyzes the Twitter hashtag #NoUnexpectedPenises and concludes that the inclusion of trans women in women's spaces such as public toilets, shelters,

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<sup>155</sup> Judith Butler, "What Threat? The Campaign against 'Gender Ideology,'" *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation*, no. 3 (2019): 8-12, <https://doi.org/10.12893/gjcpi.2019.3.1>.

<sup>156</sup> Joshua L. Boe, Lorien S. Jordan, and Émilie M. Ellis, "#ThemToo?: Trans Women Exclusionary Discourses in the #Metoo Era," *Women & Therapy* 44, no. 3-4 (August 11, 2021): 321-322, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2021.1961437..>

and prisons is the key point of the debate.<sup>157</sup> CWA clearly falls within the discourse of TERF rhetoric. They utilize reversed feminist language to support their heteronormative agenda and exclude people who fall out of this binary view on sex and gender and counter policies aimed at their advancement.

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<sup>157</sup> Sally Hines, "The Feminist Frontier: On Trans and Feminism," *Journal of Gender Studies* 28, no. 2 (November 17, 2017): 151, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2017.1411791>.



## Conclusion

Feminism is a diffuse term. People supporting abortion can claim the moniker, just as anti-abortionists. Feminism can include transwomen, or it can be transphobic. It can have disparate meanings for different people. Especially conservatives oftentimes interpret feminism in the terms of liberal feminism mostly connected to second-wave feminism beginning in the 1960s. This brand of the emancipatory movement coincided with the rise of the New Right dating back to the times of the Goldwater campaign. The religious right, mostly evangelicals, found their way into mainstream conservative American politics and crucially influenced the view of social issues of the Republican party. The understanding of feminism by conservative women seems to date back to this opposition to second wave feminism. The opposition was mostly framed around the debate of abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment. Women such as Phyllis Schlafly and Beverly LaHaye have spearheaded women's organizations inherently opposed to liberal feminism. Their reasoning and the worldview they portrayed can be linked to the culture of domesticity.

I gave a detailed summary of the culture of domesticity, the idea that women and men have special 'spheres' to fill which would correspond with their supposed psychological differences. One of the most prominent advocates in the United States of this assumption was Catharine Beecher. She believed in a clear, God-given, order and distinction between the sexes. She linked the moral state of the nation to the educational influence of women. To showcase the red thread in history, I discussed the Goldwater campaign which illustrated that this idea of special female characteristics was utilized in the 1960s to get women's support for conservative issues. Goldwater targeted mothers specifically and elevated them to the saviors of America's morality. He closely connected women with morality and religion. This development can also be examined during Ronald Reagan's political career and his presidency. The religious right and Reagan put emphasis on the issue of abortion and the opposition to the ERA. Out of this opposition emerged two influential anti-liberal women's organizations – the Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America.

To illustrate their gendered rhetoric and how they connect to the culture of domesticity and the anti-liberal feminist sentiments gaining traction in the '60s, I examined their rhetoric on Facebook. I specially looked at the topics of gender and abortion. I chose those topics because both organizations have their origins in the 1970s committed to the fight against the Equal Rights Amendment. Both framed their opposition in terms of their traditional conservative gender ideals and asserted that women, and their unique role in society deserve special protection which the ERA would undermine. Furthermore, due to their connection to

the religious right, both have been opposing abortion since their founding days. The analysis of their current rhetoric shows that they still utilize the same anti-liberal feminist language.

This study aimed to answer the question how conservative women's organizations utilize gendered rhetoric to further their conservative agenda. The case studies demonstrated that they use, what I call, a reversed feminist language. I would define this as using a rhetoric which is predominantly associated with liberal feminism, appropriating catchphrases such as "female empowerment," and applying that to their anti-liberal feminist agenda. The Eagle Forum frames their opposition to gender inclusivity in public spaces, especially schools, in terms of a supposed moral decay. As Goldwater argued against feminism as part of a liberal/socialist subversion, the Eagle Forum now argues against the inclusion of gender identities or sexual preferences outside of the cis-heteronormative as being part of a liberal plot to undermine presumed American (or Christian) values. According to the Eagle Forum, activism against this supposed liberal plot would be an act of saving western civilization. The language they use regarding abortion is similar. However, the reversed feminism becomes even more apparent. They use words such as female empowerment to describe their anti-abortion stance. They accuse pro-choice policies and organizations of hindering female empowerment and advocating for policies which would hurt women by deliberately omitting supposedly dangerous complications of abortions. Further, they connect the ERA to the abortion lobby and say that the Act would use pretend-feminism to fund the abortion lobby. The ERA in turn has been rhetorically framed as harming women's autonomy since the 1970s by conservatives.

Concerned Women for America operates similarly to the Eagle Forum. However, they can be classified as more religious. Given that the founders, the LaHayes were evangelicals, and that Tim LaHaye was an evangelical minister, the undeniable connection to ultra-conservative religious ideals and the promotion of biblical values is not surprising. The language they use to oppose abortion and gender inclusivity is more radical than the rhetoric of the Eagle Forum. Regarding abortion, they use the same reversed feminist rhetoric as the Eagle Forum, proclaiming that abortion would hurt women and that pro-choice organizations would allegedly withhold crucial information. The true empowerment would be to give women all the necessary data. They call themselves the "real" feminists. The more striking difference between the Eagle Forum and CWA, is the radical language they use regarding transwomen. Both oppose the inclusion of different gender identities in public spaces, but CWA's rhetoric can be classified as being in line with trans-exclusionary radical feminists. It would be futile to make an assessment whether CWA can be branded as feminist, but it is clear that they use (reversed) feminist language in their fight against gender inclusion. They radically oppose the entire

acknowledgement of transwomen as women and go even further claiming that transwomen would be a serious threat to women's rights. Indeed, ultra-conservative women's organizations, such as CWA, are working together with groups who are in favor of abortion, simply to advance their shared transphobic agenda.

The Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America both have an idiosyncratic relationship to feminism. Both oppose liberal feminist policies such as the right to abortion or the Equal Rights Amendment. However, they use feminist language to counter these liberal feminist policies. The aim of this study was to highlight the reversed feminist language of the two organizations. By drawing on the past, on the culture of domesticity, and its revival in the postwar years, I highlighted the connection between their current rhetoric and its connection to the gendered ideals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the case studies show the connection the Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America draw between their conservative cause and feminism. In most scholarship, these organizations would be classified as anti-feminist, and yet it is vital to acknowledge the feminist language they use. The result of this study is that conservative women's organizations should be viewed within the larger framework of feminism, since they appropriate feminist language and occupy the term to change the narrative. The power and influence of these organizations lies in their ability to discredit liberal feminism as anti-women and formulate their own conservative agenda within the framework of women's advancement. The rhetoric of conservative women's organizations should be analyzed in how they relate to feminist language. Discounting them as anti-feminist will lead to an underestimation of the power their (reversed) feminist language holds in persuading Americans of their brand of female empowerment.

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## ***Illustrations***

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