

“THE MOST DAMNABLE THING:” WOMEN WHO WANT TO BE WOMEN AND
THE FIGHT TO RESCIND THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT IN TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

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In the 1970s states were quickly ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which aimed to bring equality between men and women. Success, however, was short lived as a vocal and well-organized opposition of middle class, religious, White women, led by conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly, mobilized to protest the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Although Phyllis Schlafly is the most recognized name associated with the anti-ERA movement, the success and influence of the movement lay on the shoulders of countless activists and groups who organized conservative women to become politically active and fight for their values. One such organization, Women Who Want to be Women, began in Texas, and grew to influence the movement nationally. Scholarship on Women Who Want to be Women does not currently exist to fully examine the history and national influence of the organization.

This study uses information from Women Who Want to be Women to expand the existing historiography on the role that this group played in the anti-ERA movement. This study examines the group's literature, beliefs, and history to demonstrate how religious fundamentalism motivated thousands of women to become active participants in their states to either prevent the passage of the ERA or to rescind their state's vote for the amendment. This thesis also examines why some states were able to prevent a successful rescission effort by having an existing pro-ERA network to combat the activities of WWW and similar organizations. Fully understanding the anti-ERA movement is vital in understanding the defeat of the Equal Right Amendment, and this thesis demonstrates

the importance of local organizations actively campaigning against the amendment and illustrates the need for further research into the topic in various states to form a more complete understanding of the motivations of anti-ERA activists. This work highlights the success that fundamentalists Christians had in preventing the amendment from being ratified.

KEY WORDS: Women Who Want to be Women, Texas, Equal Rights Amendment, Antifeminism, Church of Christ, Fundamentalist Christians, Phyllis Schlafly, Lottie Beth Hobbs, Women's history

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In 1923, suffragist Alice Paul proposed the first version of an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to Congress. The amendment languished there for almost 50 years until in March 1972, after successfully passing the House of Representatives, the Senate voted to approve the Equal Rights Amendment and send it to the states for ratification.

The proposed amendment read:

Section 1: Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Section 2: The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Section 3: This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.¹

Hours after the amendment went to the states, Hawaii became the first state to ratify the amendment. By the end of the first week, six other states ratified it. Ratification seemed imminent after twenty-two states ratified the amendment by the end of the year.²

Success, however, was short-lived as a vocal and well-organized opposition of middle class, religious, White women mobilized to protest the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Led by conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly, various anti-ERA groups around the country worked to stop the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. The fight between pro and anti-ERA forces in the 1970s is an example of clashing ideologies, resistance to social and political changes, and a manifestation of antagonistic views about what is best for women and the country.³

¹ Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 1.

² *Ibid*, 12.

³ Marjorie J. Spruill, *Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women's Rights and Family Values that Polarized American Politics*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 13, 314-315.

Although Phyllis Schlafly is the most recognizable name associated with the anti-ERA movement (later called the pro-family movement as it grew to encompass a variety of conservative beliefs), the success and influence of the movement lay on the shoulders of countless activists and groups who organized conservative women to become politically active and fight for their values. Schlafly used her political savvy, grassroots organizing skills, and vast network of connections to bring smaller organizations under her leadership to combat what these groups viewed as anti-American, anti-family, and anti-Christian changes in the United States.⁴ While a vast amount of scholarship exists about the activities of Phyllis Schlafly and her organizations, scholars often overlook the foot soldiers of the movement. This thesis draws on existing scholarship about the anti-ERA movement, archival materials from Texas Woman's University and the University of Kansas, and newspaper archives with over 19,000 newspapers globally to explain the origins and activities of one of these organizations, Women Who Want to be Women (WWWW), in Texas during the 1970s. The goal of this thesis is to bring together scattered writings on WWWW and provide an in-depth and coherent explanation of the organization's motivations, methods, and influence in the national anti-ERA movement. While not successful in convincing the Texas legislature to rescind its vote to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, WWWW's efforts contributed to preventing the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment existed from its inception in 1923 as activists who opposed women's suffrage quickly turned their opposition to the ERA after the ratification of the 19th amendment. These activists included both men and women

⁴ Spruill, 106; and Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 217-220.

who believed that a constitutional amendment granting women equal rights under the law was unnecessary and dangerous for American society and the American family, arguments which the opposition would echo in the 1970s.⁵

The Equal Rights Amendment battle took place on the heels of sweeping legislative decisions that changed many aspects of American public and private life. In the 1960s, the Supreme Court used vaguely worded amendments, like the First, Fifth, and Fourteenth, to rule on cases in a liberal way. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Court banned prayer in schools (*School District of Abington v. Schempp*), mandated cross city bussing (*Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*), and legalized abortion (*Roe v. Wade*). These court decisions cemented in the minds of Americans that the Federal courts could and would apply vague principals of the constitution in ways that would fundamentally change American society. Middle of the road and conservative Americans believed that the court could use the similarly vaguely worded Equal Rights Amendment to force undesired and unanticipated changes on the roles of men and women. One argument that anti-ERA activists used when arguing against ratifying or in favor of rescinding the amendment was that the ERA would offer the supreme court another “blank check” to open a “Pandora’s box” of changes to the fundamental roles of men and women and change American society in unprecedented ways.⁶

For Schlafly, a turn to anti-ERA activism began with a desire to unify Christian women against feminism and creeping socialist policies. Schlafly recognized that the Equal Rights Amendment could serve as a rallying point to motivate Christian women to become politically active and introduce an overlooked group of the electorate into

⁵ Critchlow, 215.

⁶ Mansfield, 27-28.

politics. She published “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ for Women” in 1972, which served as the catalyst for many women to become involved in the anti-ERA movement. The article framed the ERA and the women’s liberation movement as anti-American and anti-family. She believed that feminists were seeking to strip women of protective rights, undermine the family unit, which served as the basic unit of society, and bring about socialist changes to American society.⁷ Schlafly argued that “[women] have the immense good fortune to live in a civilization which respects the family as the basic unit of society...it is based on the fact of life...that women have babies and men don’t. If you don’t like this fundamental difference, you will have to take up your complaint with God because He created us this way.”⁸ She also argued for capitalism as the true liberator of American women, dismissed the argument that American women were oppressed by the patriarchy, and linked feminism with communist policies like forced labor, state-run daycare centers, and the destruction of religious institutions.⁹

The grassroots mobilization of fundamentalist women was essential to the success of the anti-ERA movement. Lottie Beth Hobbs, a co-founder of Women Who Want to be Women and a leader in the anti-ERA movement, used her connections and influence in the Church of Christ to motivate fundamentalist women to join WWWW and campaign against the ERA. Before the 1970s, it would have been unfathomable for Catholics and Evangelicals to work together for political purposes; however, in the 1970s, religious leaders were more willing to put aside religious differences to work together on common

⁷ Critchlow, 217-218.

⁸ Phyllis Schlafly, “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* 5, no. 7 (February, 1972): 1.

⁹ *Ibid*, 1-4.

moral causes.¹⁰ Some anti-ERA groups appealed to religious women's faith and fears about the destruction of traditional lifestyles to recruit new members into the movement around America, while others used legal arguments to combat the ERA. The combination of religious and legal arguments against the ERA unified conservative women to work to stop the ratification of the ERA across the south and in other states around the country.¹¹

While scholars have researched and discussed the antifeminist for decades, only recently have leaders outside of Phyllis Schlafly have begun to receive significant attention from scholars. In chapter two, this thesis will discuss the existing historiography of anti-feminism with a focus on the lack of research on the activities of Women Who Want to be Women and their work in Texas. Currently, most of the scholarly information available about WWWW exists in chapters of books about women's history in Texas and provides an overview of the history and some activities of the group with little analysis of its impact on the greater anti-ERA movement. This thesis will place WWWW within the existing scholarship while providing conclusions about the impact of Women Who Want to be Women in Texas and other states within the broader anti-ERA movement.

Chapter three will examine the origins of Women Who Want to be Women and how religion affected the group's recruiting style and activities. Many of the women who joined WWWW belonged to the fundamentalist Church of Christ. The Church of Christ is a fundamentalist religion because they believe in the inerrancy of the Bible and treat it

¹⁰ Spruill, 86; and Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 106.

¹¹ Brown, 32, 35-36; and Spruill, 86. Anne Paterson, an anti-ERA organizer in Oklahoma, used religious and legal appeals in her rejections of the Equal Rights Amendment. Phyllis Schlafly's writings in several *Phyllis Schlafly Report* editions used both legal and religious points to explain why the ERA would be detrimental to women, especially citing the 14th amendment to support equality under the law and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act to demonstrate that existing laws already granted women full legal equality with men.

as the literal word of God, and members aim to live their lives as close to the teachings of the Bible as possible. Such beliefs separate fundamentalists from Evangelicals because while Evangelicals also adhere to the fundamental beliefs of the Bible, they do so in a less strict manner than fundamentalists. Members used their social networks and religious beliefs to motivate other women to become active in the anti-ERA battle. Members of fundamentalist churches often attend church services or church-sponsored activities several times a week and adhere to traditional gender roles in which the husband is the head of a household with the wife below him. For these women, religion is not just a part of her life but is the guiding force through which she forms her world view and beliefs. This important distinction illustrates what motivated these women into political activity.

Chapter four will focus on the political and recruiting activities of Women Who Want to be Women, including their literature and role in the Texas legislature's hearing about rescinding the Equal Rights Amendment in 1975. Additionally, this chapter will examine, the activities of Women Who Want to be Women in other states. WWWW grew throughout the American south and, along with the help of other anti-ERA groups, experienced varying degrees of success in stopping or rescinding the ERA.

Chapter five of this thesis will examine how the Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women, led by ERA activist Hermine Tobolowsky, worked to stop WWWW and preserve Texas' vote in favor of ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. The Texas legislature passed a state Equal Legal Rights Amendment in 1971 and the electorate voted 4 to 1 to add it to the state constitution in 1972. Hermine Tobolowsky wrote the amendment and, through her activism, created a large network of women's groups who supported both a state and national Equal Rights Amendment. The

successful addition of the state ELRA also validated in legislator's minds that the public supported the ERA and rescinding the amendment was not a popular move with voters.¹² The Texas BPW clubs used this network to combat and counter the work of Women Who Want to be Women, educate the public about the ramifications of the state and national ERA, and stop the Texas legislature from voting to rescind their prior ratification of the ERA.

Other women's groups in Texas looked to the BPW for materials, support, and manpower in counteracting WWWW. Some of the main ways that the BPW combatted WWWW were letter-writing campaigns to state representatives, speaking at public meetings, and contacting other women's groups to rally members to engage in the activities. Chapter five will also compare the activities in Texas to the five states that rescinded their ERA votes to demonstrate how, by having an existing network of pro-ERA groups Texas was more easily able to stop the work of WWWW from successfully rescinding the Equal Rights Amendment.

In the final chapter, conclusions about the importance and legacy of WWWW in Texas will be proposed. Although the Texas legislature never voted on rescinding the ERA, the legacy of Women Who Want to be Women is an important part of women's history and Texas history that warrants further discussion. The activities of WWWW demonstrate how the anti-ERA movement mobilized religious women to become active in politics to slow the Equal Rights Amendment's ratification process enough for the ratification date to pass without progress. The impact of WWWW in other states during

¹² Nancy E. Baker, "Hermine Tobolowsky: A Feminist's Fight for Equal Rights," in *Texas Women: Their Histories, Their Lives*, ed. Elizabeth Hayes Turner, Stephanie Cole, and Rebecca Sharpless, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2015), 435, 447-449.

the ratification process will also be discussed in the final chapter. The group's message motivated women to campaign against the ERA, with varying degrees of success, as its message spread to other states in the American south.

Understanding the role that Women Who Want to be Women played in the anti-ERA movement is critical to providing a full explanation of the way that grassroots organization impacted the Equal Rights Amendment ratification process. An examination of local organizations and their motivations will provide scholars with a more complete understanding of the women who worked to stop the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Understanding the activities of Women Who Want to be Women and how this organization fits into the state's history of women's influence in state and national politics will enhance existing scholarship about the women of Texas. The information exists to provide this organization justice in the pages of history, but it has yet to be synthesized into a coherent explanation of how and why women were drawn into the organization and its lasting impact on the anti-ERA movement of the 1970s.

CHAPTER II

Historiography of Fundamentalist Women in Women's History

Most scholarship about the mid-twentieth century women's movement focuses on the leaders of the feminist movement, its various factions, and the evolution of the movement over the last two hundred years. Scholars have often overlooked women who opposed feminism and its goals. The antifeminists, like their feminist counterparts, were ambitious, politically savvy, and entirely dedicated to their goals and beliefs. Some of the earliest opponents to women's suffrage were women, and in the decades after Alice Paul introduced the Equal Rights Amendment to Congress, women were some of the most vocal opponents of the amendment.¹³ Extensive scholarship is beginning to emerge about the antifeminists of the 1970s and onward, but an in-depth examination of the women of Texas and their impact on the greater anti-ERA movement is still relatively lacking. This chapter will examine the existing scholarship about antifeminism, with a focus on work pertaining to Women Who Want to be Women.

Scholars have offered many explanations for why the Equal Rights Amendment did not meet the requirements for ratification. One explanation that this thesis will explore is the grassroots activism of anti-ERA activists and how these organizations affected public opinion and the legislative process. In the article "The Equal Rights Amendment Reconsidered: Politics, Policy, and Social Mobilization in a Democracy," Donald Critchlow and Cynthia Stachecki explain how social mobilization shifted public opinion against the ERA over time and led to its defeat. After detailing how existing social science literature demonstrates that public opinion on the ERA decreased over

¹³ Critchlow, 215.

time, the authors discuss the importance of state organizations in the ratification process. They discuss how Phyllis Schlafly used her grassroots organizing skills to create a nation-wide network of anti-ERA activists to work within their states to prevent the states from ratifying the amendment. By allowing states autonomy in how they dealt with legislators and understanding that a “one size fits all” method would be ineffective, Schlafly enabled anti-ERA activists to pressure their legislators in a way that would be effective. The authors say that Schlafly framed “the social and legal implications of the ERA and the alleged harm it would cause women...as a single issue under the slogan, STOP ERA. This general call allowed female activists to emphasize aspects of the movement that appealed to different constituencies within their districts and the sentiments of their legislators.”¹⁴ Schlafly’s general arguments against the Equal Rights Amendment allowed a broad coalition of religions to work together against a common cause, an effort that would not have been fathomable in the decades prior.

With a historical focus on Phyllis Schlafly’s national work, this article emphasizes the work performed by local organizations as the key to the anti-ERA movement’s success in defeating the amendment. National women’s organizations failed to understand the importance of maintaining a local organization, leaving the opportunity for the opposition to mobilize and campaign against the ERA. Although Critchlow and Stacheski acknowledge Women Who Want to be Women as an important organization in the movement, there is no other mention of their specific activities. Rather, they analyze

¹⁴ Donald T. Critchlow and Cynthia L. Stacheski, “The Equal Rights Amendment Reconsidered: Politics, Policy, and Social Mobilization in a Democracy,” *Journal of Policy History* 20 no. 1, (Jan. 2008): 168. Accessed on September 25, 2020, EBSCOhost.

the whole anti-ERA movement, and the article offers explanations about the effectiveness of the movement.

Central to understanding the women involved with the anti-ERA movement is an overview of how the religious right emerged in American politics. Who were these activists, what did they believe, and how did they come to be associated with the Republican party? Daniel K. Williams explores these questions in *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*. Williams argues that “the fundamentalist movement, which emerged in opposition to theological liberalism, attempted to use politics to restore the nation’s Christian identity. The fundamentalists claimed to be concerned primarily with defending the ‘fundamentals’ of the faith, such as biblical inerrancy and the Virgin Birth, against the onslaughts of modern biblical scholarship, but they quickly began to combat cultural liberalism as well.”¹⁵ Williams’ study focuses on how various prominent religious leaders attempted to use their power to influence politicians throughout the twentieth century.

While Williams’ study is important to the topic of the Republican party’s association with Evangelicals, it does not focus on the role that women played in this shift. Williams limits his discussion of conservative women to a section of a chapter on the anti-ERA battle. He credits Phyllis Schlafly with her role in stopping the ratification of the ERA but offers very little in-depth explanation about the role that women played in the religious movements of the 1970s. Williams instead focuses on leaders like Jerry Falwell, Billy Graham, and the growth of Evangelical political organizations, while

¹⁵ Williams, 2.

explaining the theological beliefs of evangelical and traditional Christians and how they related to political issues of the times.

It is difficult to find many in-depth journal articles or books detailing the work of specific local groups in the anti-ERA movement. Although there has been an increase in the scholarship about women in Texas history specifically, mentions of Women Who Want to be Women or other conservative women or groups are mentioned in chapters about the women's movement in Texas as a whole, usually occupying a few pages of a chapter with minimal analysis. Both *Women in Texas History* by Angela Boswell and *Texas Through Women's Eyes: The Twentieth-Century Experience* by Judith N. McArthur and Harold L. Smith are recent publications that offer an overview of various groups of women in Texas history that briefly mention conservative women.

Judith N. McArthur and Harold L. Smith's *Texas Through Women's Eyes: The Twentieth-Century Experience* seeks to fill the void of scholarship on women's activities in Texas during the twentieth century. Their research expands scholarship on women in Texas by examining the roles that women played in shaping the state's politics through social and economic movements. The authors acknowledge that the section about women's activism post-1965 is based on their own new research and presents an opportunity for other scholars to expand on their research. In their discussion of Women Who Want to be Women, the authors examine the pieces "Warning! ERA is Dangerous to Women!" and "Ladies! Have You Heard?" which WWW used to recruit new members and spread their message that the ERA would be detrimental to the traditional family and women. The propaganda effort of WWW was so effective that it forced the feminists to respond to the outlandish proposals about the impact of the ERA. McArthur

and Smith also acknowledge that while conservative women were unsuccessful in their rescission efforts in Texas, citing the successful passage of a state Equal Legal Rights Amendment to the state constitution in 1972 as a reason legislators did not feel compelled to rescind the state's ratification vote, the anti-ERA movement as a whole was successful in preventing the ratification of the amendment.¹⁶

Texas Through Women's Eyes is a broad study of women's movements in Texas that offers an effective introduction to Women Who Want to be Women and their activities within Texas during the 1970s. The authors credit the group with leading the movement to rescind the state legislature's ratification vote of the Equal Rights Amendment, however, their two-page overview of the organization lacks a significant explanation of the impact of the group within the state or its activities in other southern states during the anti-ERA movement.

Angela Boswell's *Women in Texas History* also seeks to expand on the scholarship of the role that women played in shaping Texas' history by providing a thorough analysis and description of the activities and struggles of the women who have shaped the state. In her discussion on women in the twentieth century, she examines how conservative women rose to prominence in Texas in the post-World War II years as a societal shift emphasized the family and traditional lifestyles. Societal norms encouraged women to become housewives and they stayed busy by becoming involved in public leadership roles through various clubs. Suburban white women used letter-writing campaigns and telephone chains to share information, campaign for politicians, and implement changes in their communities. These skills helped women form large

¹⁶ *Texas Through Women's Eyes: The Twentieth-Century Experience*, Judith N. McArthur & Harold L. Smith, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 216, 221.

grassroots networks to support candidates.¹⁷ In the 1970s, conservative women used these skills to encourage the Texas legislature to rescind their vote in favor of the ERA.¹⁸

Boswell's discussion of conservative women, although brief, credits Women Who Want to be Women with leading the anti-ERA movement in Texas and acknowledges the role that conservative women had in the Republican Party's embrace of religious and social issues in the 1980s. Because *Texas in Women History* is an overview of various groups and races of women in Texas, readers should not expect a larger discussion of one specific group.

The Texas Right: The Radical Roots of Lone Star Conservatism outlines the influence that radical movements had in shaping conservative politics in Texas. The chapter "Focus on the Family: Twentieth-Century Conservative Texas Women and the Lone Star Right" by Nancy E. Baker outlines the activities of conservative women in Texas from the antisuffrage movement of the early twentieth century through the antibusing and antifeminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s. In discussing the activities of Women Who Want to be Women, Baker links the group to their religious beliefs and to the national anti-ERA movement. The chapter also identifies the groups The Committee to Rescind the ERA, the Texas Farm Bureau, and Daughters Already Well Endowed as other organizations that worked to rescind the state's ratification vote of the ERA. Using recordings of the hearing on the rescission bill, HCR 57, the beliefs of the anti-ERA women are outlined as the amendment being unnecessary because existing laws already provide the resources for women to combat discrimination, undesirable

¹⁷ *Women in Texas History*, Angela Boswell, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2018), 213.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 245-248.

because most women did not want an Equal Rights Amendment, and uncertain because the true implications of the amendment remained unknown and could threaten women and families. The chapter provides an overview of the activities of conservative women in Texas throughout the twentieth century and demonstrates how these women used local activism to influence state politics.

One of the earliest examinations of the antifeminists in Texas comes from a sociological study by the University of Houston political scientists David W. Brady and Kent L. Tedin titled, “Ladies in Pink: Religion and Political Ideology in the Anti-ERA Movement.” Published in 1976, Brady and Tedin interviewed anti-ERA activists during the rescission hearing at the Texas statehouse to understand their motivations, beliefs, and demographic makeup. During their interviews, they learned that many of the women in the antifeminist movement were college-educated, most were married homemakers, 98% were church members, and two-thirds were members of fundamentalist churches.¹⁹ They also asked the women about their political priorities, beliefs, and motivation for becoming politically active. Through these questions, the authors aligned the women protesting the Equal Rights Amendment with the Religious Right, which “is motivated to political action more by fundamentalist religious belief than by direct political concerns. A literal and inflexible interpretation of the Bible leads fundamentalists to conceptualize world events simplistically as the clash between the forces of good and evil.”²⁰ This study revealed the direct link between the antifeminists’ religious beliefs and their political activity. For antifeminists, the battle against the Equal Rights Amendment was not just a

¹⁹ David W. Brady and Kent L. Tedin, “Ladies in Pink: Religion and Political Ideology in the Anti-ERA Movement,” *Social Science Quarterly* 56, no. 4, (March 1976): 570-573.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 566.

political mission, but a deeply personal one as well. Fundamentalist churches believe in a social structure in which the man is the head of the household, with the wife beneath him, and the children beneath the woman and they believed that the ERA was an affront to this social structure and would lead to disastrous results for the family as well as the country.²¹

Another sociological article, published in 1989 by Clyde Wilcox of Georgetown University, *Feminism and Anti-Feminism Among Evangelical Women*, sought to distinguish between Evangelical and fundamentalist Christian women's opinions on various feminist and antifeminist beliefs while linking these to their religious beliefs. Wilcox defines fundamentalists as believing in a literal interpretation of the Bible and having more conservative political beliefs than other Evangelicals. While fundamentalists are a subgroup of Evangelicals, their political and strict religious doctrines separate the two.²² Wilcox notes that while the consensus of the time was that Evangelical women largely aligned with antifeminist beliefs, he proposed that support for antifeminism was less unified among Evangelical women than previously thought.²³

Wilcox found that women who self-identified as fundamentalists tended to take a more antifeminist approach to issues and that moderate Evangelicals were more likely to support moderate feminist issues. He concluded that "among these Evangelical women, support for feminism seems to be most strongly predicted by the perception that there is little or no connection between religious and political beliefs and behaviors...those who support feminist policies or organizations see their religious beliefs as not relevant to

²¹ *Ibid*, 574.

²² Clyde Wilcox, "Feminism and Anti-Feminism among Evangelical Women," *The Western Political Quarterly* 42 no. 1 (March, 1989): 148

²³ *Ibid*. 147-148.

their political positions. In contrast, anti-feminist women perceive a strong relationship between these two domains of belief.”²⁴ This distinction is important because it separates fundamentalist women from Evangelical women and their varying degrees of support, or lack of support, of feminist issues.

While scholars often used the word Evangelical to classify all antifeminists, it is an inaccurate description because of the wide and often contradictory views of Evangelical women. Even though most of the women surveyed found religion to be important in their lives and attended church regularly, their adherence to feminist or antifeminist issues was largely shaped by religious doctrine, frequency of church attendance, denomination, and connection between religious and political beliefs. Women in fundamentalist denominations (belief in a literal interpretation of the Bible, strong connection between religious and political beliefs, and self-identified fundamentalists) held strong conservative beliefs on women’s issues, while those who did not see a connection between religious and political beliefs or who did not interpret the Bible literally tended to favor feminist positions.²⁵ Wilcox’s findings support those from Brady and Tedin’s study of the Ladies in Pink, as it supports the idea that fundamentalist religious beliefs are more likely to lead to antifeminist beliefs.

For A “Christian America”: A History of the Religious Right by Ruth Murray Brown examines the antifeminist movement and the women involved by exploring their methods of activism and motivations for becoming involved in the movement. Brown proposes that despite the radical societal changes brought on by the sexual and cultural revolutions of the 1960s, the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment was the catalyst for

²⁴ *Ibid*, 157.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 151-152.

many women to become politically active. According to Brown, the ERA “would, from the Christian conservative point of view, allow the government to interfere in God’s plan for the family.”²⁶ Despite American society becoming more secular and alienating many fundamentalists until the ERA passed Congress and was on the path to ratification, traditionalists remained largely inactive in politics. The perceived threat to their most precious space, the family, pushed religious fundamentalist women into political activism. Motivated by the belief that they were fighting for their very way of life, religious women networked and campaigned against the ERA with great fervor and relative success.

Because many of the women in the movement belonged to fundamentalist churches, they perceived the Equal Rights Amendment as a direct affront to their traditional view of the world. Brown notes that for some women, legal arguments against the ERA were enough to motivate them to take action, but she focuses most of her book on discussing the impact of religious women on the movement. She explains how religious fundamentalism drove women to become active in the anti-ERA movement by drawing a connection between personal and political beliefs. For these women, any measure that threatened the traditional family structure or sought to bring sweeping societal changes represented a threat to their way of life. Anti-ERA leaders used fear to motivate these women into political activism by linking the ERA to potential threats to their church and family lives.²⁷ Brown’s work is one of the first large scale scholarly examinations of the women of the anti-ERA movement and is often cited by scholars in

²⁶ Ruth Murray Brown, *For a “Christian America”: A History of the Religious Right*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 21.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 42.

later writings about the movement. Her personal relationships with many women in the movement offer firsthand insight into the women of the movement's activities and motivations.

Another study in the field of conservative women's activism is Donald T. Critchlow's *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade*. Critchlow chronicles Phyllis Schlafly's political career from her early days working for conservative think-tanks, to her anti-communist activities, her activism in the anti-ERA fight, and her subsequent role in guiding the Republican party to embrace socially conservative values through the 1980s. Critchlow focuses his study exclusively on how Schlafly used her education and experiences to help shape the Republican party as a socially conservative force. He explains that many studies up to that point focused on the role male leaders played in shaping the Republican party's embrace of religious social conservatism, but that women, through various organizations, were also important to the success of this movement.²⁸

Conservative anti-New Dealers like Schlafly believed in limiting the powers of the federal government, embracing personal responsibility, traditional values, and divine moral authority.²⁹ The alliance between religious women and traditional libertarian beliefs, under the leadership of Phyllis Schlafly, proved to be a strong political force that helped reshape the future of the Republican party. With the primary focus on Schlafly's national work, Critchlow narrowly explores some smaller women's groups and their connection to Schlafly's organization STOP ERA. He briefly describes Women Who Want to be Women and the Family Preservation League and their work alongside STOP

²⁸ Critchlow, 7-8.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

ERA in recruiting women from different religions into the anti-ERA movement. Under Phyllis Schlafly's leadership, local organizations and state-run STOP ERA branches mobilized religious women to become active in politics and campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment.³⁰

Marjorie Spruill's *Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women's Rights and Family Values That Polarized American Politics* argues that there were two women's movements in the 1970s, a feminist movement, and an antifeminist movement. She uses these movements to draw "the connection between the events that divided American women in the 1970s and the subsequent polarization of American politics at large as the two major parties chose sides between feminists and their conservative challengers."³¹ Centered around the National Women's Convention of 1977, Spruill explores the political maneuvering of both the feminists and antifeminists, examines how they battled in state conventions, and how these fractures permanently changed the American political landscape. The National Women's Convention was a federally funded initiative to observe 1975 as International Women's Year and provide American women a platform to tell Congress and the president what women wanted. As Spruill notes, the ERA held cross-party support before the 1970s; both the Republican and Democratic parties supported the ERA and it had bipartisan backing in Congress and many states. It was not until conservative women organized under the leadership of Phyllis Schlafly that pressure to oppose the ERA crested.³²

³⁰ *Ibid*, 220-225 Critchlow's work is extensive in its exploration of Schlafly's activism. Added research into other groups would take an extensive work to a new level and distract from his main purpose of exploring the movement from Schlafly's perspective. The insight into the women who became active in politics by the anti-ERA message is critical to understand how women became active in the movement.

³¹ Spruill, 2.

³² *Ibid*, 31 and 75.

Spruill focuses most of her study on the tactics and beliefs of Phyllis Schlafly and how she used her networking, campaigning, and grassroots organizing skills to unify women from various religions (Catholics, Evangelicals, Mormons, and Fundamentalists) across America in opposition to the ERA. Schlafly educated these women about issues related to the anti-ERA fight and the emerging family values movement through her writing and speeches. She also relied on the recruiting ability of women within different religions to gain access to these groups. For example, the influence of Lottie Beth Hobbs through WWW allowed for the recruitment of fundamentalist women into the movement. As a Catholic, Schlafly would have had a difficult time reaching these women and earning their trust, but Hobbs' leadership introduced fundamentalist women to the anti-ERA movement.³³

While Spruill focuses on the larger conservative women's movement, she pays a good amount of attention to Women Who Want to be Women and one of its founders, Lottie Beth Hobbs. Spruill explains how WWW worked in multiple states to push ERA rescission or block ERA ratification. The efforts of WWW and Church of Christ women, while unsuccessful in Texas, were successful in rescinding or blocking ratification of the ERA in Tennessee, Kentucky, Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Florida.³⁴ Also discussed in the study is how small groups like WWW networked in their communities to spread information and propaganda to mobilize religious women into political action. Small groups coalesced under Phyllis Schlafly's STOP ERA and became the core of the conservative women's movement. Under the guidance of Phyllis

³³ *Ibid*, 86-88.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 86.

Schlaflly, various groups of different religious affiliations united to cause one of the largest political interruptions of the 20th century.³⁵

Most of the scholarship that exists about Women Who Want to be Women provides an overview of the group's activities without providing sufficient analysis of the true impact that the organization had in the anti-ERA movement. There is also a lack of in-depth analysis of the role that religion had on the formation of the group and its activities. This thesis will expand on this discussion and offer some ideas about how Women Who Want to be Women contributed to the rescission efforts in various states and how the group was able to help stall and block the ratification of the amendment in other states. The goal of this thesis is to offer new answers about the effectiveness of Women Who Want to be Women in the state of Texas compared to its success in other states.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 79.

CHAPTER III

The Anti-ERA Movement Begins

When Congress approved the Equal Rights Amendment on March 22, 1972, supporters hoped that the ratification process would be quick. The ERA had the support of many mainstream churches as well as the National Council of Churches, the League of Women Voters, the Girl Scouts of America, professional organizations, and labor unions. Also, public polling showed that a majority of men and women supported the ERA. In 1970, 56% of Americans favored the ERA, and support remained relatively stable throughout the decade. This data remained consistent across gender lines, giving the feminists hope for a quick ratification process.³⁶

This chapter will examine the political activities of Phyllis Schlafly to explain how she started and led the anti-ERA movement nationally. Schlafly's writings in her monthly newsletters created the narrative used by anti-ERA activists and guided how the various groups operated and spoke out against the Equal Rights Amendment. Lottie Beth Hobbs, one of the founders of Women Who Want to be Women, used Schlafly's writings to shape her messaging to fundamentalist women in Texas; however, she emphasized fundamentalist teachings to recruit women into the organization. Also discussed will be the religious beliefs of the Church of Christ that led women to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment. This chapter will discuss these beliefs in the context of their assumed

³⁶ Mansbridge, 14; and Spruill, 75. As Mansbridge explains in "Why We Lost the ERA" available public polling data on the ERA during the 1970s and into the early 1980s shows that the public consistently supported the idea of the ERA and equal rights for women. This number dropped significantly when polls asked respondents about the ERA potentially changing roles for women, which showed lower support. She explains how the wording of the question affected the outcome of polling results and how often public polling data did not match the outcomes when citizens in states voted to approve state Equal Rights Amendments.

ramifications of the amendment and will explain why these women resisted the amendment.

Widescale organized opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment did not emerge until the early 1970s when Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative political activist well known in the Republican party for pushing ultra-conservative policies, became informed about the amendment. Friends convinced Schlafly to take up the ERA issue, and after researching the amendment, she published “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ For Women?” in *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* early the following year.³⁷ The piece eviscerated the ERA from a conservative point of view, claiming that it would end the traditional family unit, force women to work, and bring about communist-inspired programs such as state-run daycare centers and forced labor.³⁸ By focusing on potentially disastrous outcomes for women if the ERA was ratified, rather than women gaining ideological rights from the amendment as feminists argued, Schlafly’s words motivated women to become active against the ERA.³⁹

Oklahoma was the first state to reject the ERA. After it passed the state Senate with little resistance and no debate on March 23, 1972, the state House of Representatives was set to approve the ratification on the following Monday. Armed with “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ For Women,” Ann Paterson, a leader of the ERA opposition in Oklahoma, and other concerned women called a Republican legislator and convinced him to stall the ratification process in committee while they organized opposition to the amendment. The women then began distributing copies of *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*

³⁷ Critchlow, 217; and Spruill 79-80.

³⁸ Schlafly, “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ For Women?” 1-4.

³⁹ Mansbridge, 20.

and encouraged others who were upset by the ERA to attend hearings and express their opposition. They suggested that the amendment might have “dangerous unintended consequences” that “at least warranted careful study.” Through these methods, the women were able to convince the legislature to reject ERA’s ratification, marking it the first defeat for the amendment.⁴⁰

The hasty organizational efforts in Oklahoma inspired women to continue their activism in other states. Ann Patterson quickly reached out to Phyllis Schlafly and volunteered to help organize women around the country to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment by following Oklahoma’s model of allying with friendly lawmakers to stall ratification while the opposition organized to appear at hearings and speak against the amendment’s ratification. The model was then replicated elsewhere while messaging and organizing were perfected under the leadership of Phyllis Schlafly.⁴¹

The Origins of Women Who Want to be Women

Lottie Beth Hobbs, a native of Abilene, Texas, was a women’s Bible class teacher in the Church of Christ and an author of Christian books for women. As she recalled to Ruth Murray Brown, during one of her classes, she noticed a leaflet about the ERA and read it. The pamphlet sparked a discussion among the women in the Bible class, and they all agreed that something had to be done about the amendment. The women looked to Hobbs for guidance. She later checked out some books from the library about feminism and recalled, “They were so awful that I put them under the bed so my nieces and nephews wouldn’t see them! But as I was digging more and more into it and found out

⁴⁰ Brown, 29-30.

⁴¹ Brown, 29-30; and Spruill, 82.

the basis of it, I knew it was much bigger than just ERA. ERA was just one of the arms of the whole thing.”⁴²

Hobbs co-founded Women Who Want to be Women in 1974 with Becky Tilotta, who was also a member of the Church of Christ.⁴³ Tilotta attended Phyllis Schlafly’s leadership seminars and considered feminism to be extremely dangerous. She believed that feminists and the National Organization of Women (NOW) were “pushing to tear down the home” and that feminism was “the most damnable thing that has ever hit our nation...I think we’ve got to speak out against evil. God has destroyed whole nations because of this.”⁴⁴ Hobbs and Tilotta shared deep religious beliefs and viewed the potential ramifications of the ERA as detrimental not only to themselves as fundamentalist Christian women but to the nation itself. They named their group Women Who Want to be Women because, “from what we could understand, the feminists weren’t proud to be women. They put down women and wanted to be equal with men. We wanted to emphasize that we had a different philosophy, that we were proud of being women.”⁴⁵

In 1975, Women Who Want to be Women partnered with Phyllis Schlafly’s group STOP ERA and quickly expanded to several other southern states, including Oklahoma, Florida, and Kansas. WWWW became a valuable tool in Schlafly’s war against the ERA because it became a vehicle to recruit fundamentalist women into the anti-ERA movement. As a Catholic, Schlafly needed women like Lottie Beth Hobbs to gain access to fundamentalist women. Because Hobbs was a well-known leader and teacher in the

⁴² Brown, 65.

⁴³ Pro-Family Forum, “Brief History of the W’s,” 1980, Pro-Family Forum (U.S.), RH WL EPH 603.2, The Wilcox Collection, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

⁴⁴ Kaye Northcutt, “Fighting the ERA: The Ladies Mobilize,” *The Texas Observer*, November 15, 1974, 3.

⁴⁵ Brown, 65.

Church of Christ, women concerned about the Equal Rights Amendment looked to her writings to become more educated about the ERA issue. Her ability to educate women on issues in language that they understood was vital to the success and spread of WWW. She drew on their religious beliefs to explain the peril that the ERA presented to women, families, and the nation. Hobbs taught women that the ERA and feminist movement were trying to eradicate the traditional woman and family because feminists did not want women to be homemakers and mothers or for women to have traditional protections in marriage. Hobbs claimed that feminists even wanted to influence church doctrine by forcing churches to ordain women.⁴⁶

Schlaflly used the ERA issue and her network of activists to unite members of different religions behind conservative politics, creating a united force against feminism and liberal agendas. By working with and uniting various groups around the country, Schlaflly was able to influence the activities of the groups, streamline their communications, and create a network for sharing information and campaigning.⁴⁷ To better understand these religious appeals, it is necessary to discuss how religion influenced the personal and political lives of fundamentalist women and activists.

Religious Beliefs and their Impact on Women Who Want to be Women

To understand the outrage expressed by fundamentalist women over the Equal Rights Amendment and feminism, one must understand the beliefs of fundamentalist religions and how they are different from other Christian religions. While liberal Protestants in the late 1800s and early 1900s strove to use Christianity to answer new challenges facing the United States by focusing on individuals and the ethics of Jesus in

⁴⁶ Spruill, 87-88.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 53, 66.

lieu of traditional doctrines, fundamentalists viewed this shift as a sign of the apocalypse and turned to the fundamentals of the Bible to shape the future of the church.⁴⁸

Evangelical Protestants, “those who believed in personal salvation through a Christian conversion experience and who accepted the Bible as their supreme authority,” grew in influence and prominence in the American religious landscape through the early 1900s.⁴⁹ By the 1950s Evangelicals split even further, with the fundamentalist separating because they believed that some Evangelical leaders were too liberal and willing to compromise. The fundamentalists believed that they were the defenders of the gospel.⁵⁰

Although fundamentalism is a subset of Evangelism, the belief that the world will end guides fundamentalist thinking and directs fundamentalist’s thinking and interactions with people outside of the faith. Fundamentalists believe that only through close reading and adherence to the Bible would God save them from the end of times to enjoy the afterlife in Heaven. They also believe that it is possible to save others from suffering during the apocalypse.⁵¹ To save another person means a church member guides them to develop a personal relationship with Jesus, accept him as their savior, accept the teachings of the Bible, and live their lives in a way that reflects these teachings.⁵² Fundamentalists look to scripture to support their beliefs, citing Matthew chapter 28, “go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Matthew Sutton, “American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism,” (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 12; and Williams, 2.

⁴⁹ Williams, 12.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 33-34.

⁵¹ Sutton, 3-5.

⁵² Brown, 71; and Williams 2-4.

⁵³ Matt. 28:19-20, King James Version.

Fundamentalist churches also teach Biblical inerrancy, the idea that the Bible is the literal word of God. They also believe that all guidelines for living a religious life are provided by the Bible and people should follow its teachings exactly as stated, while some Christian churches use the Bible as a guide for correct behavior. Anything or anyone who acts in violation of the Bible is not acting in accordance with God's will. For members of fundamentalist churches, being religious is not one part of their life, but is their whole life.

The main structure that anti-ERA women saw threatened by the Equal Rights Amendment was the natural role of each sex in the home and society. Fundamentalist churches teach that the man is the head of the household and the wife and children are subordinate to him in the family hierarchy. The ERA threatened this balance by proposing elevating women to an equal position with men in society. The Church of Christ does not allow women to become ministers, lead Bible groups for men, and does not allow frequent mixing of the sexes in church.⁵⁴

One Church of Christ theologian, Neil R. Lightfoot, wrote in a paper about the role of women in the church that "Ephesians 5: 22-23 is perhaps the grandest piece in all

⁵⁴ It is important to note that in recent years, some Churches of Christ have allowed women to take leadership roles in the church including preaching and reading passages during service. They cite multiple Bible passages in which women were asked to speak during the early church and see the lack of female leadership as detrimental to young girls. See: Steve Gardner, "One of Largest Churches of Christ Opens Preaching Role to Women – And Some Questions," *Authentic Theology*, September 17, 2019, <https://authentictheology.com/2019/09/17/one-of-largest-churches-of-christ-opens-preaching-role-to-women-and-some-questions/>. Highland Oaks Church of Christ in Dallas recently opened more leadership roles to women. In 2014, the church examined the Bible to determine how best to incorporate women into a more prominent role in the church. They decided that "the Bible teaches full equality of men and women in status, giftedness, and opportunity for ministry, and the church is best served when men and women share responsibilities and serve together as complementary partners." In the new church structure, women can take more prominent roles in the church except becoming church elders or preachers. See: Highland Oaks Elders, "Women and Ministry at Highland Oaks Church of Christ," November 2014, <http://www.hocc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/11-23-2014-Shepherds-Statement-Position-on-Women-and-Ministry-at-Highland-Oaks-Church-of-Christ.pdf>.

of literature on the relationship of husbands and wives.”⁵⁵ In analyzing the passage,

Lightfoot says that when

husband and wife in marriage become one, each necessarily has duties toward the other. Wives are to be subject to their husbands (vv. 22, 24) ‘as to the Lord’ and ‘in everything.’ ‘In everything’ should not be deprived of meaning, which in context probably denotes everything in the marital relationship. ‘As to the Lord’ is further explained in the next sentence, with the meaning that the wife regards submission to her husband as submission to Christ. The concluding exhortation to wives (v. 33) is that they ‘respect’ and ‘revere’ their husbands.⁵⁶

Lightfoot continues saying that in this passage the duties of husbands to their wives are just as demanding as those given to wives. Husbands must be faithfully devoted to their wives and are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Lightfoot does not believe that the idea of a woman subjecting herself to her husband is a negative teaching in the Bible. Through mutual love and care in the marriage, husbands and wives submit themselves to each other, with the husband taking the lead in the marriage. While Ephesians 5 does not teach mutual subjection (the husband submitting to the wife and the wife submitting to the husband), the Bible does teach this idea through love. In marriage, more is not required of women than of men, because “when a Christian woman marries, she voluntarily yields herself in subjection to her husband. When a Christian man takes a wife, he voluntarily submits to her in his love for her. He nourishes and cares for her as Christ does the church.”⁵⁷ If one spouse is not acting with love toward the other, they are violating the Bible’s teachings; therefore, mutual love must guide the relationship between men and women.

⁵⁵ Neil R. Lightfoot, “Wives, Be Subject To Your Husbands,” in “1989: Abilene Christian College Bible Lectures – Full Text,” (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 1989), *Lectureship Books*, 35, 190, https://digitalcommons.ecu.edu/sumlec_man/35.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 191.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 196-197.

Leaders in the Church of Christ instruct that although men and women are spiritual equals in the eyes of God, men and women have different and distinct “spheres in which to show their identity as male and female” and that differences between the sexes does not equate to inequality between the sexes.⁵⁸ Women are expected to help and support their husbands while men are expected to love their wives. This belief is rooted in the order of creation: God created Adam first, then created Eve from Adam to serve as his “helper” or “a companion complementary to the man.” The creation story does not imply subordination but guides the role of women in a marriage.⁵⁹

Lottie Beth Hobbs echoed these teachings in her writing. According to Hobbs, the proper role of a wife was to help and support her husband spiritually and emotionally while accepting his love and care. She also uses the creation story to demonstrate and justify this belief, saying that “Adam’s attitude [toward Eve] was not tyrannical but tender, for he said, ‘She is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh’ (Gen. 2:23), an attitude becoming godly men of every age and time (Eph. 5:25-31).”⁶⁰ Husbands are not to be cruel but tender toward their wives, and they must guide and love them as his wife loves and assists him.

She also uses other Biblical stories and figures to reinforce the Church of Christ’s norms for women. Hobbs uses the life of Priscilla to teach the role of women to the Church of Christ members. Priscilla spread the message of the Lord by working with her husband, Aquila, and was a respected woman in the early church. Hobbs says that this

⁵⁸ Ferguson, “Women in the Church: Doctrinal Considerations,” 2014, 6, http://www.hocc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Ferguson_Doctrinal_Considerations2.pdf.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 4-5.

⁶⁰ Lottie Beth Hobbs, *Daughters of Eve: Strength for today...from Women of yesterday*, (Harvest Publications: Fort Worth, 1963), 11.

situation should not seem unusual because, from the beginning, God teaches that women are to be their husband's helper, but that in modern times, women think little of this role. Priscilla was an extremely faithful woman who exemplified the ideal Christian woman. Theologians use her as an example of the role that women should play in the church because she, with her husband, once corrected a visiting preacher's error in his sermon. Rather than correcting the male preacher in public, she did so in private, not violating her role as a nurturer and quiet observer in church.⁶¹ Priscilla occupied her sphere and, through mutual support, assisted her husband.

For Hobbs and Church of Christ women, their roles in the church, families, and public life were clear. A woman's true place is beside her husband, serving and loving him while being cared for and loved by him. Church members constantly seek to improve themselves in the eyes of the Lord, and the Bible provides all of the instructions for achieving a holy status. Hobbs wrote that, "a lovely life must be deliberate; it never happens by accident. Making the most of ourselves requires a lifetime of constant vigilance and diligence," to show women that they must always be working to achieve holiness and through becoming holy, their inner and spiritual beauty could grow.⁶²

Linking Religious Teachings to Anti-Feminism

The idea that the Equal Rights Amendment, a law created by man and not God, sought to provide equality between men and women was an insult to Biblical teaching, and for fundamentalist activists, it signaled a dangerous shift in the role that religion played in American life. According to fundamentalists, the Equal Rights Amendment not

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 218-220.

⁶² Lottie Beth Hobbs, *You Can Be Beautiful with Beauty that Never Fades*, (Harvest Publications: Fort Worth, 1959), 15.

only sought to undo the natural order of life but was an affront to God's teachings. While many traditional women supported the ideas of women's equality in the areas of work opportunities and equal pay, they did not believe that any law could or should erase the fundamental gender differences between men and women. Because God created the biological differences between men and women, people have no right or ability to change them. In the belief of the antifeminists, legislation already existed to address work opportunities and equal pay between the sexes. They believed that certain jobs are more appropriate for men and jobs that are more appropriate for women. A woman should be allowed to work if she chooses; likewise, a woman should be allowed to raise children and not work if she chooses. If she chooses to stay home with her children, she should receive basic protections provided by her husband. Antifeminists believed that the ERA would erase such protections for women.⁶³

Many women active in the anti-ERA movement in Texas came from fundamentalist churches, specifically the Church of Christ. These women attended church activities, such as worship service and Bible study groups, several times a week. They had a strong and personal relationship with the Lord, and prayer played a significant role in their lives. They were mostly White, middle-class women, most of whom were married, and had some form of education. Of the women who participated in the state hearings on the ERA, 98% reported being church members, two-thirds of whom belonged to the Church of Christ. In addition to holding strong religious beliefs, these women were regularly politically active and believed in the power of citizens to shape the actions of the government. The supposed threat of the Equal Rights Amendment and perceived

⁶³ Phyllis Schlafly, "The Right To Be A Woman," *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, 6 no. 4 (November 1972); and Schlafly, "What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for Women?"

threats of communist policies, moral decay, and a loss of American influence around the world motivated women into political action. Many of these women viewed their political beliefs as an extension of their religious beliefs.⁶⁴

While feminists saw traditional gender roles as relegating women to a subordinate position relative to men, antifeminists saw the two genders as complementary roles.

Whereas traditional teaching places the man at the head of the household, women held a special place of privilege in the family and society. Phyllis Schlafly believed that “Our respect for the family as the basic unit of society, which is ingrained in the laws and customs of our Judeo-Christian civilization, is the greatest single achievement in the entire history of women’s rights. It assures a woman the most precious and important right of all – the right to keep her own baby and to be supported and protected in the enjoyment of watching her baby grow and develop.”⁶⁵ For Schlafly and like-minded women, the greatest achievement that a woman could reach was becoming a mother and being supported and cared for by her husband. In “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” Schlafly cites community-property laws as an example of how American laws benefit women by demonstrating that “a wife’s work in the home is just as valuable as a husband’s work at his job. Therefore, in community-property states, a wife owns one-half of all the property and income her husband earns during their marriage, and he cannot take it away from her.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Brady and Tedin, 569-574; and Brown, 69-70.

⁶⁵ Schlafly, “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ For Women?” 1. I have relied heavily on Schlafly’s writing here because they were disseminated to a national audience and outlined antifeminist and anti-ERA sentiments. The newsletters guided the anti-ERA narrative around the country, and Women Who Want to be Women would have also used these writings to guide their literature.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

Physical differences between men and women also dictate the natural order of a household. Because women give birth to babies and do the majority of the care for children, men are responsible for providing his wife and family with physical and financial protection.⁶⁷ This sentiment echoes the Bible's teaching that women suffer the pain of childbirth to be rewarded with a loving and protective husband. According to antifeminists, women restrictive pressures from men did not oppress women. Instead, their families held them in high regard for their work in the home and they were afforded special protections such as alimony, child support payments, and social security and retirement benefits from their husband's job should anything happen to him.

In her books for Church of Christ women, Lottie Beth Hobbs made similar arguments to Phyllis Schlafly about the role of women regarding equality. In the preface to *Daughters of Eve: Strength for today...from women of Yesterday*, Hobbs wrote, "the moral fiber of a nation is determined primarily by women...a nation can maintain a moral strength no greater than the homes which constitute it, and the home usually rises no higher than the ideals of the woman in it. This being true, a heavy responsibility rests upon older women to lead in ways of righteousness and also upon younger women who will help to mold the moral and spiritual stature of the next generation."⁶⁸ This echoes the church's teachings that one sphere that women occupy is to educate other women.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 1.

⁶⁸ Hobbs, *Daughters of Eve*, 3.

⁶⁹ Ferguson, "Women in the Church: Doctrinal Considerations," 3; and Ferguson, "Women in the Church: New Testament Texts," 2014, 1, http://www.hocc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Ferguson_New_Testament_Texts2.pdf. These documents were part of the Highland Oaks Church of Christ's discussion about changing the role that women would play in the future of the church. The texts acknowledge that while women did play a significant role in the early church, men take on church leadership roles. One important role that women played in the early church was educating younger women. Titus 2:3-5 instructs, "Tell the older women to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women."

The future of the family, and society, rests on the shoulders of women teaching their children in the ways of the Bible and raising holy people. If the family fails, so does the nation. In the Bible, God destroyed civilizations that fell into moral decay or did not actively defend the Lord against his enemies. Hobbs believed that the evils that destroyed early civilizations had already saturated the United States, leading to a weakened society ripe for the wrath of God. She believed that the root of this decay lay in the church's rejection of the Bible as the literal word of God. She believed that "without a fixed standard of authority in morals and religion, chaos and eventual destruction will result. The world today understands this in every secular realm." Only by returning to a spiritually centered way of existence could the country be saved, and the Equal Rights Amendment embodied an affront to these teachings. The notion that man's law could supersede the will of God led traditional women to believe that the amendment threatened the natural order.

Women, through Eve, are designated their first and most important role, that of companion and helper to man. Hobbs emphasizes that while God created Adam in His image, God created Eve as a helpmeet suitable for Adam, meant to be his companion. Through Eve's sin, mankind fell and was punished; but through Eve's children, God delivered a redeemer for all mankind. When Jesus was crucified then resurrected, mankind was given their redeemer and savior.⁷⁰ The role of the mother and nurturer of children is one important job that women must fulfill. Women bring children into the world and must ensure their safety and spiritual education.⁷¹ Women again, are not unequal to men, but rather occupy a different role in the family and society. Each gender

⁷⁰ Hobbs, *Daughters of Eve*, 11-16. "Helpmeet" is a term for a helper.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 103.

has specific jobs, with no job being more important than another. But the jobs are different and given to men and women based on biological differences between the genders.⁷²

Antifeminists believed that the Equal Rights Amendment aimed to erase traditional gender roles by undermining the will of God in the name of equality. Such an action would also strip women of special protections, force women to work outside of their home, and force children into government-run daycare centers. Feminism and women's liberation were a targeted action to eradicate the family, corrupt children by undermining the word of God, and institute communist policies in America.⁷³ For many conservative women, living a traditional life of submission to their husbands and embracing the role of domestic homemakers were intrinsically linked to their feminine identity. They saw the potential ramifications of the ERA as a threat to their very way of life and identity.⁷⁴

For fundamentalist women, the assault on families and traditional roles were the most alarming potential ramification of the Equal Rights Amendment. If 38 states ratified the ERA, it would mean the immediate end of the traditional family, traditional gender roles, and the downfall of American society. To protect their religion, lives, and nation, these women rallied behind leaders like Phyllis Schlafly and Lottie Beth Hobbs through grassroots organizations. These political novices proved to be a formidable force against the feminist movement, quickly spreading their message through church-based networks,

⁷² Ferguson, "Women in the Church: Doctrinal Considerations," 11.

⁷³ Schlafly, "What's Wrong With 'Equal Rights' For Women?" 1-4.

⁷⁴ Williams, 109.

rallying support for political activism, and creating small, attention-grabbing stunts to further their message.

CHAPTER IV

Tactics of Women Who Want to be Women

Women Who Want to be Women used a variety of methods to express their opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, many of which came from Phyllis Schlafly and paralleled the activities of other anti-ERA groups around the country. While the organizations had no official headquarters or paid fieldworkers, the women coordinated between communities to recruit members and organize speaking events and letter-writing campaigns.⁷⁵ This chapter will examine both the literature circulated by WWWW and the political activities that members of the organization participated in to protest the Equal Rights Amendment. Exploring the literature is an important part of understanding both the messaging of WWWW and its recruiting methods as the organization welcomed male membership. Also discussed in this chapter is the Texas legislature's hearing on rescinding the state's Equal Rights Amendment ratification vote and outside support that WWWW received.

Lottie Beth Hobbs wrote the most well-known piece of literature from WWWW, the flyer "Ladies! Have You Heard?" which was nicknamed the "pink sheet" for the bright pink paper it was printed on. "Ladies! Have You Heard?" was distributed through the mail, was posted in churches, workplaces, and newspapers by members of WWWW, and became notorious among pro-ERA activists in Texas. The piece used Phyllis Schlafly's literature to guide its message and information for members. The pamphlet poses 12 questions and answers about the potential ramification of the ERA. Some of the questions asked, "Do you want to lose your right not to work? Do you want to lose your

⁷⁵ Brown, 44.

right to privacy? Do you want your husband to sleep in barracks with women? Will the ERA help working women? And How will the ERA affect churches?" Each question is followed with a short answer, explaining how the ERA will eradicate "special" rights given to women, such as the right not to be drafted, the right not to work, and will strip divorced women of rights such as child custody, child support, and alimony.⁷⁶

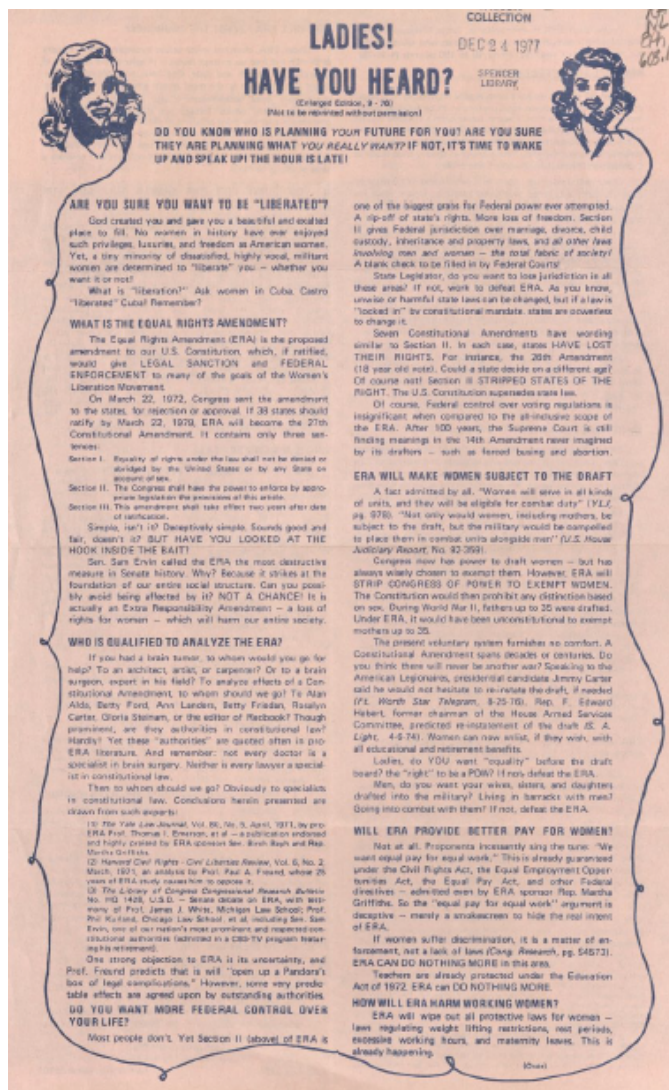


Figure 1 Front page of “Ladies! Have You Heard?”
(Courtesy of Wilcox Collection, University of Kentucky)

⁷⁶ Lottie Beth Hobbs, “Ladies! Have You Heard?” Women Who Want to be Women, 1974, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman’s University, Denton, Texas.

The piece cites Senator Sam Ervin as saying the ERA was “the most drastic measure in Senate history’...because it strikes at the very foundation of family life, and the home is the foundation of our nation.” This claim was based on the idea that the ERA could invalidate any law requiring a husband to provide for his wife and family. Anti-ERA activists asserted that this would force women out of the home and into the workplace, rather than remaining at home to raise her children, which would force families to place their children in federally run daycare centers. This thought was especially startling to religious women because they believed that their rightful place was at home with their children, teaching and guiding them spiritually and morally through their childhood. WWW also claimed that the ERA could hurt divorced women because courts could grant husbands custody of the children and force wives to pay child support or alimony. Additionally, they claimed that the ERA would allow homosexual adoption and marriage.⁷⁷

Regarding privacy, antifeminists claimed that the ERA would invalidate all laws about privacy which would lead to schools, prisons, and bathrooms becoming co-ed. This would force men and women to bunk together in military barracks. Also, the military could draft women and force them to serve in combat beside men. Perhaps most appallingly, “Ladies!” claimed that the ERA would eradicate “seduction laws, statutory rape laws, laws prohibiting obscene language in the presence of women, prostitution and ‘manifest danger’ laws.” Essentially, all laws meant to punish sex-based crimes would be overturned in the name of gender equality.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

“Ladies! Have You Heard?” also claimed that the ERA would do nothing to benefit working women because it would not ensure equal pay. Anti-ERA activists believed that legislation guaranteeing equal pay for women already existed. They also believed that the Equal Rights Amendment would invalidate any workplace regulations meant to protect women, such as lifting restrictions, overtime limits, and maternity leave. It continues by using Russia as an example of a post-ERA America, claiming that women in Russia worked back-breaking jobs alongside men in addition to maintaining her home, all while her children were placed in state-run daycare centers. Finally, the flyer claims that the National Organization for Women demanded that all churches allow women to become ordained ministers which contradicted the Bible’s teachings that women should not lead services or preach in church.⁷⁹ Not all Christian religions forbade women from assuming these roles in the church, but the Church of Christ doctrine teaches that women did not belong in positions of leadership. The perceived threat to their religious institution could have motivated women from the Church of Christ and similar fundamentalist religions, such as the Assemblies of God, Bible Churches, and Missionary Alliance, to participate in the anti-ERA movement.⁸⁰

The pink sheet appeared seemingly everywhere in Texas. Kaye Northcutt reported in the *Texas Observer* that the “infamous ‘pink sheet’ [was] popping up all over the place,” and called it “an efficiently dishonest piece of propaganda.”⁸¹ Hermine Tobolowsky, a leader in the pro-ERA movement in Texas and a member of the Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women, wrote in 1974 or 1975, “I am getting so

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Spruill, 87.

⁸¹ Northcutt, “Fighting the ERA: The Ladies Mobilize,” 3.

many requests from all over the state—B&PW and non-B&PW—to answer the ‘Ladies! Have You Heard?’ article of the Women Who Want to Be Women... Understand the ‘Ladies, etc.’ thing was plastered all over the bulletin Boards at Texas Instruments and other firms where many women are employed.”⁸²

“Ladies! Have You Heard?” spread around Texas so quickly for a variety of reasons. Members distributed it through church literature tables, placed it on doorknobs of homes, reprinted it in local newspapers, and posted the flyer in businesses. The emotional appeals used by Hobbs in “Ladies!” was highly effective in appealing to fundamentalist women because it scared them into political action. Schlafly and Hobbs both appealed to fundamentalist women by convincing them that the Equal Rights Amendment would not only bring about appalling consequences for women and families but that it also violated God’s plan. Anne Patterson, an organizer of WWW in Oklahoma, who was not a member of the Church of Christ, called the piece “accurate” and although it was “an emotional way to promote the issue,” she was fascinated by the success of the emotional appeals.⁸³

In particular, the structure of the Church of Christ allowed the pamphlet to circulate quickly to members. Unlike most organized churches, the Church of Christ does not adhere to a church hierarchy; instead, most churches are autonomous. Although there is no top-down communication in the Church of Christ, there is a large amount of church-to-church communication. Each church has a list of other churches which members or pastors can access to notify other churches and members of issues or activities. Another

⁸² Letter from Hermine Tobolowsky to Wilma Comfort, September 28, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman’s University, Denton, Texas.

⁸³ Brown, 41-43.

reason that the literature spread through the Church of Christ so quickly is that members had more homogenous beliefs than members of other churches. While other Christian churches may have varying degrees of fundamentalism within one sect, Churches of Christ tend to be more homogeneous because of the social lives of members of fundamentalist churches. Fundamentalists tended to attend church-based activities in their free time which allows for fewer opportunities to formulate independent opinions. While a member of a non-fundamentalist church may attend service weekly, they are less likely than a Church of Christ member to participate in multiple church-sponsored activities in their free time.⁸⁴

Beverly Findley, an organizer of Women Who Want to be Women in Oklahoma used this social network to recruit women to the group. Findley was a member of the Church of Christ and recalled that she organized WWWW by “[notifying] the people I worshiped with” because they “are the people that think the way I do, and I knew that they would be likely to feel the same [about ERA] as I did.”⁸⁵ Members took the time to notify each other about the ERA issue, allowing their message to spread quickly from church to church. Members sometimes took to reprinting “Ladies!” in their local newspaper as another method of communicating with and recruiting other women. Eventually, the piece spread from Oklahoma and Texas, and it heavily influenced the leader of WWWW in Kansas.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 75.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 38.

⁸⁶ Brown, 41; Kristi Lowenthal, “The Equal Rights Amendment and the Persistence of Kansas Conservatism,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 37 (Spring 2014): 41; and Spruill, 87.

Other Literature

In addition to “Ladies! Have You Heard?” Women Who Want to be Women published other pieces about the Equal Rights Amendment that appealed to the religious convictions of the readers. They did not only target women, but men as well in a flyer titled “Equal Rights in Action – The Effect on Men,” which outlined the potential negative effects of the ERA on men and the traditional family. This piece used quotes from prominent feminists, politicians, and news articles to argue that “unisex equality is actually harmful to men.” On the left side of the piece are predictions about the effects that the Equal Rights Amendment will have on things like jobs, the economy, sports, privacy, and masculinity, and on the right are the anticipated consequences of that prediction. The opening prediction states, “those who suffer most will be the working men, who under the present system have enormous family responsibilities and who will be pushed out of work.” The aligned consequence is that women’s lib will be responsible for massive male unemployment because more low-wage women will be entering the workforce to compete for the same jobs.⁸⁷ The piece continues by claiming that the ERA will threaten “masculine virility,” force sports to be unisex, strip privacy rights, and allow homosexual marriage and adoption, all of which are violations of traditional lifestyle. The flyer ends with a call encouraging men to contact their legislators to rescind the ERA to “stop further erosion of masculine-feminine roles.”⁸⁸

WWWW released a similar piece aimed at women called “Equal Rights in Action – The Effect on Women” that was set up in the same pattern of predictions and

⁸⁷ Women Who Want to be Women, *Equal Rights in Action – The Effect on Men*, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman’s University, Denton, Texas.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

consequences. It also used news articles, studies, and quotes from leading feminists to make its arguments. This flyer opens with an appeal for women to “keep [their] legal protections” by stopping the ERA. They argue that existing legislation guaranteed legal protections for equal pay, equal jobs, and equal educational opportunities for women and that the ERA threatened “traditional legal protections for women.”⁸⁹

“Equal Rights in Action – The Effect on Women” argues that the ERA will eradicate family support laws, force divorced women to pay child support and alimony to their husbands, erase workplace protections for women, end the right to privacy, end punishments for sexually motivated crimes, draft women into armed combat, and lead to a decline in general well-being for women. Similar to the male-targeted flyer, it ends with a call for women to contact legislators to rescind the ERA to “stop further erosion of your legal protections” and “stop the transformation of our male-female society into a unisex society.”⁹⁰ Together, these pieces encouraged men and women to become active in the anti-ERA movement to defend special protections for women and traditional gender roles.

⁸⁹ Women Who Want to be Women, *Equal Rights in Action – The Effect on Women*, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman’s University, Denton, Texas.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

EQUAL RIGHTS IN ACTION-THE EFFECT ON MEN

MEN! DO YOU REALLY WANT THE MASCULINE ROLE RESTRUCTURED VIA THE FEMINIST (WOMEN'S LIB) MOVEMENT. A UNISEX SOCIETY???

Though, in principle, about the E.R.A. Equal Rights Amendment, will become more so well known, it is possible that a unisex equality is actually harmful to men?? Let's take a look at the Feminist Movement and Equal Rights in action.

THE PREDICTIONS...

JOB SECURITY

"Those who suffer most will be the working men, who under the present system, have economic family responsibilities and who will be pushed out of work. That unfortunately, will be the result of abolishing discrimination against females."
George Greer, President, Family

RESTRUCTURING THE MASCULINE ROLE: IN THE FAMILY...

"The family has to be restructured. And if all you're going to restructure in terms of those absolute male and feminine roles, it is not going to be any longer the family structure in the future and the future is bleak."
Betty Friedan, Founder National Organization for Women (NOW)

"This common and reasonable idea requiring name change for the married woman would become legal nullities."
The American would not prohibit the women from requiring that a child's last name be the same as his or her father's..."
Yale Law Journal, April 1971

IN THE ECONOMY...

"We have to change the economy, when almost completely. We have to allow for men also taking different roles, playing more of a role at home, and perhaps changing the workday system, instead of working 8 hours in day, going 100 mph as they now could spend time at home and with their families."
Jacqueline Ceballos, for N.O.W.

THREAT TO MASCULINE VIRILITY

"In the future, the male role will be restructured. And the male role will be restructured. It is the case that we have created a breed of revolutionary girders?"
When women become aggressive and dominating, they often produce substance abuse or uncharacteristic behavior. It goes against a whole biological plan."
Dr. Benjamin Spock, Nursing Practitioner

SCUM Society for Cutting Up Men: brings that they plan a female-dominated society. The SCUM society may not exist but their early days showed out as drugs or shouting around in drug or generally working the high powered female in action. Calling themselves the SCUM society, women have been in breeding in the past with the husband or they came off to the nearest friendly neighborhood outside center where they will be quickly, quickly and quickly govt to death."
State House is Powerful: An Anthology of Working the Women's Liberation Movement, edited by Ruth Morgan

LOSS OF EMPLOYER'S RIGHTS TO DETERMINE PERSONNEL POLICIES

"The proposed equality compromise, no flexibility in contract but rather a loss of legal equality."
Professors Paul Freund and Richard Posner

"If the discrimination complaint is filed against an employer, the burden of proof is on the employer to show that he was not discriminating on the basis of sex. He is guilty until proven innocent."
Harvard Law School

THE CONSEQUENCES...

LIB BLAMED FOR EXPECTED JOBLESSNESS

"Women Lib is in trouble on a surprising new front. The surge of women into the job market, according to a business researcher, will create massive unemployment in the 1980's."
Houston Chronicle, 10/29/71

COURT ORDERS ROLE REVERSAL

"In the first ruling of its kind here, a judge has awarded the husband in a divorce case custody of his three children and ordered the children's mother to pay child support."
Associated Press, 2/24/73

"The parents of the two girls were approximately the same."
"A woman may legally use her name regardless of her marital status in California and California attorney general Evelle J. Younger."
Houston Chronicle, 3/17/74

MALE IMPOTENCE LINKED TO FEMALE FREEDOM

Some feel the threat to the male role by Dr. Gosselin, French and Shapovalov is equivalent to an attack on women's liberation."
Houston Chronicle, 8/30/72

According to labor Dept. lawyer Ernest Dr. Phil Hadden: "A wide variety of its benefits make or result in tension and stress, and three factors are the direct result of female taking over traditional male roles: "Increasing rate of mental and physical diseases and the need to separate, separate into two groups of men, one group result in murder, suicide, delinquency, homosexuality, drug use, etc." Hadden took up the subject with another from books by phrenology, sociology, biology, and psychology."
Houston Chronicle, 4/16/70

FEMALE DOMINATION ENDANGERS

The longest living ones in the world... the Abkhazians... have extremely long and gentle waves."
Alaskan: The Long Living People of the Caucasus by John B. Poul, of Anthropology, Hunter College

HIRING PRACTICES

"You can't fire a pregnant woman. Now can you refuse to hire her?" The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission also states that child-bearing leaves be the same for both sexes. A company that gives maternity leave for women must give paternity leave to men. This seems to bring up baby a different than one left for childless. Most employers are waiting for court action to decide these policies."
St. Paul Pioneer-Press, 9/2/73

"An employer who has men with young children on the payroll cannot automatically refuse to hire women with pre-schoolers of home."
Houston Post, 1/21/71

Figure 2, Front Page of *Equal Rights in Action – The Effect on Men*
(Courtesy of the Business and Professional Women's Archives, Texas Woman's University)

EQUAL RIGHTS IN ACTION-THE EFFECT ON WOMEN

KEEP YOUR LEGAL PROTECTIONS: STOP THE E.R.A. (EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT)

Let's Remember: equal pay, equal jobs and equal educational opportunities for women are NOT the result of E.R.A. but rather of various federal statutes (Civil Rights Act of 1964, Equal Pay Act of 1963, etc.). There have been no other laws being introduced without E.R.A. Stopping E.R.A. will NOT affect these laws! But E.R.A. is damaging traditional legal protections for women! (See below)

THE PREDICTIONS...

FAMILY SUPPORT

"If the ERA would presumably abolish the common rule whereby a husband has the primary duty of support toward his family..."
Statement of Paul Paul Freund (Harvard Law School) Reorganized (former Dean, Harvard Law School) and other lawyers and legal scholars in opposition to the ERA.

"The Equal Rights Amendment would bar a State from imposing a greater liability for support on a husband than on a wife merely because of his sex."
Yale Law Journal, April 1971

PROTECTIVE LABOR LEGISLATION

"The Equal Rights Amendment would destroy all the protective labor legislation achieved over the course of years."
Senator Max Baucus, Montana

"A national ERA would force more women into factory production jobs, with no statutory workload limitations whatsoever."
Mrs. Naomi McDougal Kraft, Pres. Women of Industry

RIGHT TO PRIVACY

"Under the ERA, all laws which separate men and women such as separate schools, restrooms, dormitories, and prisons, and others will be stricken. Also men and women will be forced together with no separation in the grounds of sex in the military."
Congressional Record, March 22, 1972

"Segregation by sex in sleeping quarters of prisons or similar public institutions would be outlawed."
Congressional Record, March 22, 1972

THE CONSEQUENCES...

COLORADO WIVES "EQUAL"—MUST SUPPORT HUSBANDS

Prior to Colorado's state adopted ERA, a man was criminally liable for the support of his wife and children; after Colorado adopted the ERA, both husband and wife are criminally liable. See Ch. 160, Section 1-43-1-1, Colorado Revised Statutes 1963, amended."

As a result of Texas' State ERA, H.B. 784 introduced by Miller, Weddington, Thompson, Bailey and Johnson, would weaken the husband's previous legal duty to support his wife by adding "Where she is unable to support herself." Although historically, Texas law has required a criminal sanction for spousal rape, support only against husbands, H.B. 784 would hold both husband and wife equally responsible for support."

WORKING WOMEN LOSE RIGHTS

"A State court has decided that a business firm which gave rest time to women ending their work shifts late at night was discriminating against male employees. Rather than give a similar but unnecessary service to men, the company stopped the service to women."
Houston Tribune 2/22/73

"In another case, a company which provided a rest lounge for women workers was found to be discriminating against men, so it must either provide a lounge for men or close the lounge for women. As leaders of organized labor in California had feared, the law is being used to eliminate special services previously provided for women."
Houston Tribune 2/22/73

UNISEX TOILET FACILITIES PROPOSED BY LABOR DEPARTMENT

The Labor Department is preparing to abolish the federal requirement that employers provide separate toilet facilities for men and women. The new proposal would also abolish the requirement for separate change rooms and resting rooms with couches for women."
Women Constitutionalist 1/13/73

Texas H.B. 784 would eliminate legal requirement for rest rooms for women only in Commissioner's court in each county in Texas, as well as in public buildings as may be needed to make the room attractive and comfortable for women."
Further, the word "Menstrual" is intended the rest room is eliminated and the non-sexual word "Cathodian" substituted.

"The Courtland has quietly done away with its regulations requiring separate bathrooms for men and women aboard its ships."
St. Paul Dispatch 9/8/73

ARMY COED BARRACKS LAUDED

Women will be moved to men's barracks at Fort Dix by October 31. The Women's quarters on the 3rd and 4th floor have two entrances, one permanently locked and another that locks when the door is closed."
Houston Post 8/27/74

"If Barracks are integrated to this extent without ratification of the ERA, it would certainly mean that even this slight segregation of the sexes would be eliminated if the ERA is ratified."

"Sexual Activity is rampant at COED Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Framingham. Rep. Edward P. Coury (D-New Bedford) charged sentencing Boston Herald 6/2/73

Figure 3, Front Page of *Equal Rights in Action – The Effect on Women*
(Courtesy of the Business and Professional Women's Archives, Texas Woman's University)

WWWW circulated other flyers outlining their view of the ERA and its supposed implications throughout the 1970s. Each of these flyers used religious appeals and made the same arguments as “Ladies!” that the ERA would damage families, force women into the workforce, and strip women of protective laws.⁹¹ As the anti-ERA movement developed, it grew to support issues outside of the ERA and re-framed itself as a “pro-family” movement. This shift is apparent in later literature that dedicated more space to issues like abortion, family roles, and education.⁹² As the Pro-Family movement expanded to other states, WWWW changed its name twice. First, they changed the name to “The Association of the W’s” to include the considerable number of men who had joined the organization, then finally to the “Pro-Family Forum.” This name was chosen in 1978 to more accurately “reflect the aims of the now nationwide organization...dedicated to promoting the family unit as the vital link in a continuing democracy and more important, a Christian nation.”⁹³ A piece from New Mexico Pro-Family groups list affiliations with both Schlafly’s Eagle Forum and the Pro-Family Forum, demonstrating the growing influence of the Texas group. The flyer encourages “women and men who believe in GOD, HOMES, FAMILIES, and COUNTRY...who are determined to remain abreast of current events that affect these institutions and inform other...and who will defend the Biblical values that made out nation the greatest in the world” to unite and “work to save our great nation and Christian culture” (emphasis original).⁹⁴

⁹¹ Women Who Want to be Women, *Equal Rights Amendment is Dangerous to Women*, Pro-Family Forum (U.S.), RH WL EPH 603.1, The Wilcox Collection, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

⁹² Pro-Family Forum (Association of the W’s), *Stop ERA Because...*, Pro-Family Forum (U.S.), RH WL EPH 603.1, The Wilcox Collection, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

⁹³ Baker, “Focus on the Family,” 143; and Pro-Family Forum, “Brief History of the W’s.”

⁹⁴ Otero County Coalition of Women Aware, Flyer Supporting the Pro-Family Movement in New Mexico, Pro-Family Forum (U.S.), RH WL EPH 603.1, The Wilcox Collection, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

The literature distributed by Women Who Want to be Women reflects the deep religious convictions of the men and women they aimed to recruit into the anti-ERA movement. Although many of the women who joined WWWW came from fundamentalist churches, they also recruited women from conservative, but not fundamentalist, denominations (Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians). Their ability to recruit across religions speaks to the group's ability to appeal to traditional, conservative values. Ann Patterson, who led the anti-ERA fight in Oklahoma, was not a fundamentalist, yet she still joined the movement and worked with WWWW because she felt like the organization represented her views on what it meant to be a woman and was relevant to her disagreement with feminism. She said, "I have a good feeling about being a woman. There are some things that I do better. We are different. Women have so many responsibilities in church anyway that men won't take, why should women take on these others?" Patterson joined with Beverly Findley, the eventual head of WWWW in Oklahoma and a Church of Christ member, after the first hearings about the Equal Rights Amendment at the Oklahoma statehouse. The women joined forces to recruit women to participate in the anti-ERA campaign. Patterson struggled with the idea of churches taking an official stance on political issues, and thus, worked to separate herself from recruiting directly from them; instead, she chose to seek out women who might have similar political and social beliefs outside of their religions.⁹⁵

The members of Women Who Want to be Women believed that the Equal Rights Amendment would undermine the traditional family, threatened the sanctity of the nation, and would harm women. The fear tactics employed were successful in recruiting new

⁹⁵ Brown, 33-35.

women into the political arena. As WWWW grew in influence, and notoriety, through their literature they were able to recruit new members, both from fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist religions, and hoped to influence the legislature of Texas to rescind the ERA. While the exact number of members is unknown, in 1975, Lottie Beth Hobbs claimed that the organization had members from forty-six states.⁹⁶

Political Activities of Women Who Want to be Women in Texas

Literature was not the only method that Women Who Want to be Women used to gain membership and raise awareness about their opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment. The actions that the group performed were not unique to WWWW but replicated actions taken by other anti-ERA groups. Most of their ideas came from Phyllis Schlafly's newsletters which inspired copycats among the anti-ERA organizations. These large public stunts were meant to draw attention to the participant's femininity, contrasting their appearance with those who supported the ERA and attract the attention of the public and legislators. Hundreds of women would present themselves to legislators with freshly baked bread and pastries, dressed in all pink at the same time. These individual actions, when carried out in a large group, had a significant impact, and made for excellent newspaper stories.

The presentation of homemade bread to lawmakers on the opening day of the legislative session became known as "Bread Day" and each homemade loaf included a handwritten poem penned by Beverly Findley of the Oklahoma branch of Women Who Want to be Women. The poem was meant to remind male legislators that some constituents enjoyed being homemakers and encouraged lawmakers to vote against the

⁹⁶ Baker, "Fight for the Family," 141.

ERA, or in the case of Texas, vote in favor of rescission. In other states, groups brought cakes or pies to legislators.⁹⁷ At the 1982 Bread Day in Oklahoma, anti-ERA women unfurled a scroll containing twenty-thousand signatures on a petition against the ERA down the capitol building's steps.⁹⁸

On November 23, 1974, Women Who Want to be Women hosted an event at the Handley Street Church of Christ in Fort Worth. At this event, Ann Daniels, the leader of the successful Tennessee rescission movement, encouraged the women in Texas and provided advice about how to interact with legislators. She repeated the importance of the women in attendance presenting themselves in a feminine way when speaking with legislators. She said that the women in Tennessee wore dresses, never pants, and “[distributed] homemade hot bread with real butter to legislators.” She also said that the women in Texas seemed more organized than the groups in Tennessee. State Representative Larry Vick from Houston also spoke at the event. He said that WWW should put NOW and COW (Commission on the Status of Women) into a “KOMA.” KOMA stood for, “know your facts, organization, money, and aggressive action.” Through this method, he believed that WWW would be successful in fighting back feminists during the rescission battle.⁹⁹

During the 1975 legislative session, when legislators tackled the ERA issue, WWW, joined by Phyllis Schlafly, arrived in Austin to speak to the legislature about HCR 57, the proposed ERA rescission bill. They arrived in church groups and distributed bread to legislators. Before this legislative session, the possibility of Texas rescinding its

⁹⁷ Spruill, 97-98.

⁹⁸ Brown, 63-64, 97.

⁹⁹ Kaye Northcutt, “Dirty, Mean, & Vicious, *The Texas Observer*, December 13, 1974.

vote in favor of the ERA seemed unlikely, however, there seemed to be a “growing sentiment around the Capitol in favor of rescision [sic] or some other action to register opposition to the ERA.” While legislators heard from pro and anti-ERA supporters, spectators could only gain admission to the gallery by acquiring a pass. The gallery was packed with viewers from both sides, who were rotated every 45 minutes, ensuring as many spectators as possible could witness the proceedings. Pro and anti-ERA supporters held contrasting rallies outside of the statehouse. The antis donned pink outfits and pro-ERA women wore red, white, and blue clothing or dressing as they saw fit. The dueling protests and groups remained peaceful, despite a rumor of a physical altercation between women on opposing sides.¹⁰⁰

Although the subcommittee hearing the ERA issue acknowledged that there was probably very little that they could do to officially rescind the vote in favor of the ERA, after hearing from pro-ERA witnesses admit that some women might be drafted into the armed forces, the ERA’s favorability in the legislature seemed to wane. Schlafly spoke for the anti-ERA position and argued that pro-ERA supporters “[had] ‘made no affirmative cause’ for passage of the amendment” while contending that it would take away many legal advantages for women while providing no replacement protection. Outside of the building, the anti-ERA women talked about God and the home while carrying signs with slogans like “God’s Law is Best” and “There is a Difference – Let’s Keep It This Way” and “ERA Will Destroy Me.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ John Ferguson and Kaye Northcutt, “The Legislature Adrift,” *The Texas Observer*, May 9, 1975.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*



Figure 4, Photograph of anti-ERA protestors outside of the Texas statehouse during the 1975 subcommittee hearing on rescinding the state's ratification of the amendment. (From Kaye Northcutt and John Ferguson, "The Legislature Adrift," *The Texas Observer*, May 9, 1975)

The anti's tactics were successful in southern and midwestern states because they played on the middle-aged white male legislator's assumptions about gender roles. The legislators also feared alienating female constituents because many of the women were politically active, held influence over their friends, and volunteered in political campaigns. These women placed the defeat of the ERA at the top of their political wish-

list, and to vote against them could prove fatal to re-election campaigns.¹⁰² The grassroots efforts of the women were also compelling to legislators, with one telling Ruth Murray Brown that it was “the closest thing to a groundswell that I have ever seen – a genuine grassroots movement – people coming out of their private lives who have never been active in politics before.”¹⁰³ These tactics, while hated by feminists, proved to be effective as they emphasized traditional gender roles, conformed to the status quo, and rejected the idea that all women supported the Equal Rights Amendment. Their innovative campaign strategies also captured the attention of media headlines and influential legislators in battleground states.¹⁰⁴

Other methods of activism included WWW members organizing letter-writing campaigns, holding public meetings to educate the public about the ERA, and members speaking at Parent-Teacher Association meetings. Chapters of WWW often hosted monthly letter-writing campaigns to write to legislators about current issues.¹⁰⁵ They wrote so many letters that state legislators were forced to publicly acknowledge the growing anti-ERA sentiment. State legislator Ray Hutchison reported that legislators received so many letters about the ERA, most of them anti, that they were “continuing to break mailroom records.” Another state legislator from Denton reported that his mail “has all been from those opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment” and encouraged his constituents to contact him about their opinion on the issue.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Critchlow, 224.

¹⁰³ Brown, 89.

¹⁰⁴ Critchlow, 224.

¹⁰⁵ Clara Locker, “WWW Formed in City,” *The Amarillo Globe-Times*, January 9, 1976, Accessed on May 14, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/29549949>.

¹⁰⁶ Sandi Green, “Equal Rights Amendment Still Being Questioned,” *Denton Record-Chronicle*, November 17, 1974, Accessed on May 14, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/30981759>.

Members also posted inconspicuous articles in local newspapers alerting the public to hearings about the Equal Rights Amendment. One such article from the Longview News-Journal notified readers of the establishment of a local WWW chapter and claimed that the group planned “a massive voter education campaign to alert people to the consequences of ERA” which they hoped would encourage the public to write letters to their legislators about repealing Texas’ ERA ratification.¹⁰⁷

Mary Kay Cosmetics briefly supported WWW until an article from a 1975 edition of the *Texas Observer* exposed the link between the political group and the female-led company (although rumors of the affiliation existed for a while before the official break). A New Mexico senator reported that anti-ERA letters she had received came from Mary Kay and alleged that the company had “mailed out vast volumes of literature to all religious organizations and groups on its mailing lists.” Despite this allegation and others of affiliation with WWW, chairman Mary Kay Ash denied all links to the group. It was not until NOW implied that they would support a boycott of the company that Mary Kay formally denounced working with WWW in a notice to employees and salespeople. The notice stated that

“neither Mary Kay, individually, nor Mary Kay Cosmetics, Inc., either opposes or supports the equal rights amendment...all of you are independent salespersons and not employees of Mary Kay Cosmetics subject to our will or control, we suggest it is your *individual* responsibility as citizens to consider both sides of the question, make up your own minds, and then lend your efforts, if so led, to which either side you choose – BUT, totally, separately, and apart from your Mary Kay Business and careers” (emphasis original).¹⁰⁸

The organization between local, state, and national anti-ERA groups created a large network through which antifeminist women could coordinate activities, literature,

¹⁰⁷ “Newly Formed WWW For Protection Of Women’s Rights,” *Longview News-Journal*, October 27, 1975, Accessed on May 14, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/205228215>.

¹⁰⁸ “Mary Kay & the ERA,” *The Texas Observer*, March 28, 1975, 8.

and messaging. Under the guidance of Phyllis Schlafly, local turned national leaders like Lottie Beth Hobbs received critical support to further the cause, gain the attention of legislators, and influence politics. Hobbs' goal for WWW was to wage a successful rescission in Texas which would send the message to the federal government that the public did not want the ERA. While many of the activities were unorthodox, they were successful in getting the attention of the press and legislators. Even though the Texas legislature did not end up voting on the issue of rescission, the activities of WWW forced the legislature to look at the issue, something which is difficult to accomplish even for seasoned political activists.

CHAPTER V

Organized Opposition to Women Who Want to be Women

Women Who Want to be Women faced immediate backlash from various groups who supported the Equal Rights Amendment. In Texas, one of the most active groups in opposing WWW was the Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW), whose mission was to fight for opportunities for women to enter professional careers and push for legislation that promoted women's interests and rights. Other groups that opposed Women Who Want to be Women included religious groups like Church Women United, the National Council of Churches, the United Methodist Church Women's Division, and the United Presbyterian Church in addition to secular groups like Texans for ERA, an auxiliary group of NOW, the League of Women Voters, and the American Association of University Women. Hermine Tobolowsky, an attorney who was well-known for getting the Texas state legislature to pass the state Equal Legal Rights Amendment in 1971, led the BPW's campaign against WWW and worked with Texans for ERA.¹⁰⁹

Tobolowsky presented herself as a conservative woman and actively distanced herself from being labeled as a radical feminist. She worked her entire career to advance the rights of women and was a respected leader of the women's movement in Texas. She spent a good part of the 1960s promoting the state Equal Legal Rights Amendment (ELRA), which she wrote, in the Texas legislature. In 1971, the legislature passed the ELRA, and voters overwhelmingly supported it when they approved the amendment in 1972. Because of her year's long effort to move women's rights in Texas forward, when

¹⁰⁹ Baker, "Hermine Tobolowsky," 447; McArthur & Smith, 213-217; and Boswell, 232-235.

opposition to the ERA sprang up in the early 1970s, a pro-ERA network already existed in the state to counteract the anti-ERA movement. Additionally, Tobolowsky's 15 year battle to get the state amendment through the legislature meant that politicians were well informed on the issue and were unlikely to be swayed to change the ratification vote by public pressure.¹¹⁰ By 1975, more than twenty Texas organizations unified to fight to protect the Equal Legal Rights Amendment and the legislature's 1972 ratification of the ERA.¹¹¹

The Texas BPW started receiving correspondences from members about the efforts of Women Who Want to be Women in late 1974. Members of the BPW and other women's groups around the state wrote to Hermine Tobolowsky and the main BPW office requesting materials and information to combat WWW's literature and claims their members made about the negative effects of the ERA in public. Copies of "Ladies! Have You Heard?" were found in Texas Instruments and other firms where large numbers of women worked.¹¹² WWW members spoke at Parent-Teacher Association meetings and to other groups that were less informed on the ERA issue to recruit members.¹¹³ After seeing the literature or having run-ins with WWW members, ERA supporters turned to the BPW and Tobolowsky for guidance in refuting the claims of WWW.

¹¹⁰ Baker, "Hermine Tobolowsky," 442-449.

¹¹¹ "Texas Organization To Fight For ERA," *The Odessa-American*, February 9, 1975, Accessed on May 14, 2020. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/301765837>.

¹¹² Correspondence from Hermine Tobolowsky to Wilma Comfort, September 28, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas.

¹¹³ Correspondence from Marilyn Jones Neathery to Texas Business and Professional Women, October 10, 1974, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas.

Individual women were not the only people seeking Tobolowsky and the BPW's help. The League of Women Voters also contacted the BPW with concerns about Women Who Want to Be Women. Mrs. Darvin M. Winick, president of the League of Women Voters, expressed concern over "a concerted movement in Texas to rescind [sic] the [Equal Rights] Amendment during the upcoming legislative session" and asked that BPW members be made aware of the activity, that they collect any information that the group distributed, and that they be prepared to engage in a letter-writing campaign to counter anti-ERA letters being sent to the legislature.¹¹⁴ Wilma Comfort, the executive secretary for the BPW, responded they had been "aware of the activities of W.W.W.W. for quite some time" and that information countering the group would be published in their forthcoming issue of the BPW's monthly magazine, *Texas Woman*. She also communicated that BPW members were already appearing before PTA groups and other organizations speaking in favor of ERA, in addition to sending letters to legislators reminding them of the public's support of the ERA.¹¹⁵

In October of 1974, Tobolowsky sent an announcement to members of the BPW asking for their help writing letters to state leaders, pressing them to resist the effort to rescind the ERA. She encouraged members to write letters to Representative Bill Clayton, the assumed new Speaker of the House, to counter letters "urging him to promote repeal of the ratification by the Texas Legislature of the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution." She requested that members write a

¹¹⁴ Correspondence from Mrs. Darvin M. Winick to Texas Business and Professional Women, October 21, 1974, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas.

¹¹⁵ Letter Wilma Comfort to Mrs. Winick, October 25, 1974, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas.

minimum of 20 letters to Representative Clayton stating that they support the ERA and oppose repeal or rescission. Additionally, she asked that any other groups that members belonged to be made aware of the effort and pass resolutions officially supporting the ERA if they had not already done so.¹¹⁶ Tobolowsky herself sent letters to legislators urging them to resist pressure to rescind the state's ratification vote. The letters all read about the same and reminded the representatives that over 50 groups in Texas supported the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and that "Women Who Want to be Women has been disseminating material which misrepresents the purposes, effect, and sponsorship of the Equal Rights Amendment."¹¹⁷

Repeated calls for BPW Club members to write their legislators in support of the ERA were necessary to combat the large amount of mail flowing into representatives' offices calling for the rescission of the ERA. State representative Walt Parker of Denton, Texas, said, "My mail lately has all been from those opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment, and it's been a real sizable amount...I want to hear everybody's opinion. I want to find out where we stand on this thing. The only way I know what the people in my district think is to have them tell me."¹¹⁸ To combat the WWW's letter-writing campaign, supporters of the ERA needed to act quickly to ensure that their voices were also heard in the debate.

In addition to strong external pressure from voters on state representatives to support the state's ratification, the pro-ERA forces had the support of Representative

¹¹⁶ Correspondence from Hermine Tobolowsky to Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women members, October 2, 1974, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas.

¹¹⁷ Correspondence from Hermine Tobolowsky to Representative Joseph Pentony, November 5, 1974, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas.

¹¹⁸ Green, "Equal Right Amendment Still Being Questioned."

Sarah Weddington to advocate for maintaining the state's support of the ERA.

Weddington was one of the lawyers who argued the landmark abortion case *Roe vs. Wade* and a supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment. She sent a letter and information about the Equal Rights Amendment to fellow representatives to help them “respond to the inquiries [they] may be receiving” and offering her assistance learning the facts about the amendment.¹¹⁹ The accompanying information on the ERA included the text of the amendment, information about Texas' ratification of the amendment, the public approval of the state ELRA, information about women's groups that supported ratification of the ERA, and information about the legality of rescinding a ratification vote of an amendment.¹²⁰ She also sent the same information to the BPW club of Fort Worth and offered to assist, however she could, in combatting the efforts of the anti-ERA coalition in the state.¹²¹

The pro-ERA forces needed more than support from the legislature to preserve the state's ratification of the amendment; they also needed public support. To counter the claims made by Women Who Want to be Women in “Ladies! Have You Heard?” they needed facts and data to convince the public that WWWW's claims against the ERA were illogical and unlikely to occur after full ratification. The BPW distributed an ERA Face Sheet, which used expert opinions, legal precedent, and existing laws to address claims posed by WWWW about potential effects of the ERA, to guide their discussion

¹¹⁹ Correspondence from Sarah Weddington to state representatives, October 10, 1974, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas.

¹²⁰ Sarah Weddington, *The Equal Rights Amendment: What are the facts?* Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas.

¹²¹ Correspondence from Sarah Weddington to Chloe Monroe, October 17, 1974, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas.

around the Equal Rights Amendment. It addressed issues such as the degradation of the family, women being forced to work outside of the home, communism and the ERA, homosexual rights, better pay for women, the impact on schools and churches, and sex crimes.¹²² Just like their opponents, pro-ERA advocates shared a common narrative that supported their viewpoint that the ERA would be beneficial for both men and women once it was ratified. By maintaining common messaging, the pro-ERA forces were unified in combatting the effort to rescind the ERA in Texas.

Newspaper articles from pro-ERA groups addressed the claims made by WWW, sometimes rebuking “Ladies!” point by point, and other times speaking only to the highest interest points. One article sponsored by a group of pro-ERA organizations addressed each point in “Ladies!” in a multi-page report and advertised a public seminar called “The Equal Rights Amendment – What it Will and Won’t Do” to inform the public about the ERA. The seminar was sponsored by an ERA coalition, which included the American Association of University Women from Beaumont, the Business and Professional Women’s Club of District 14, the Beaumont League of Women Voters, and the Golden Triangle Women’s Political Caucus.¹²³

Hermine Tobolowsky also used public appearances to push against rescission. When the Texas Women’s Political Caucus granted her the Woman of the Year award in 1975, she said that opposition to the ERA “is sadly misinformed,” and that “legally, there is no possibility it can be rescinded.” She also encouraged women interested in the ERA

¹²² *The Equal Rights Amendment Fact Sheet*, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman’s University, Denton, Texas.

¹²³ “ERA, WWW Stage Battle: Echo Questions Bouncing on Views of Equal Rights,” *The Port Arthur News*, December 29, 1974, Accessed on May 28, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/30158093/>; and “ERA Information,” *The Port Arthur News*, December 29, 1974, Accessed on May 28, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/30158093/>.

issue to educate themselves about issues facing women and the positive effects a national Equal Rights Amendment would have on women's lives while also downplaying the impact of anti-ERA groups. She said, "the minority are the ones that are so well-organized they give the impression they are the majority. I think it is important now for women to inform themselves so they can discuss the issues intelligently and not just sit back and listen."¹²⁴

Other organizations that joined the BPW to support the ERA in the rescission effort included the Texas Conference of Churches, Texas AFL-CIO, Texas Civil Liberties Union, American Association of University Women, Women in Communications Inc., Texas Nurses Association, and Young Democrats of Texas. Coalitions of these organizations spanned the state's major and minor cities.¹²⁵ Again, Hermine Tobolowsky was at the front of these organizations advocating for the ERA and refuting claims that a state could rescind a vote for ratification after it passed. Texans for ERA also campaigned to educate Texans about the ERA issue. In 1975, Marjorie Schuchat, field secretary for the group, spoke in Marshall, Texas to the Republican Women of Harrison County to educate Republican women about the rescission effort as well as about the amendment itself. She encouraged voters to educate themselves about the facts of the ERA, rebuked WWW for spreading false information about potential

¹²⁴ Mary Dudley, "'Mother of ERA' Hermine Tobolowsky named TWPC Woman of the Year," *Austin American-Statesman*, August 21, 1975, Accessed on May 14, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/357877748/>.

¹²⁵ "Texas Organization To Fight For ERA," *The Odessa American*, February 9, 1975, Accessed on May 14, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/301765837>.

effects of the ERA, saying that the ERA “simply guarantees partnership and cooperation by male counterparts.”¹²⁶

In El Paso, Women Who Want to be Women charged that, in addition to stripping women of special rights and forcing changes to the family, the Equal Rights Amendment would also transfer state power to the federal government. This transfer of power would bring about a unisex society, forcing women to surrender their rights and function on an equal level with men.¹²⁷ Members of the El Paso Women’s Caucus refuted the WWW’s claims saying that while the ERA might make women eligible for the draft, the ERA would not infringe on the right to privacy, would not affect homosexual marriage, expand abortion, or force women to work outside of the home. Bonnie Lesley, of the Women’s Caucus, said that “the whole attack against ERA seems to be based upon the fears and inadequacies felt by some women-fears of losing their husbands and of losing status, fears of being forced to work outside the home.” She also refuted their claims by saying that in a rapidly changing world, these changes will come about in time due to a changing economy and social values.¹²⁸

The cooperation between multiple state-wide groups to support the Equal Rights Amendment existed because of Hermine Tobolowsky’s work adding the Equal Legal Rights Amendment added to the Texas constitution. Pro-ERA and women’s groups easily achieved cooperation because they had a strong leader in Tobolowsky, their message was consistent, and they appealed to their specific demographics to gain support. Enthusiastic

¹²⁶ Brenda French, “ERA Still Facing Opposition,” *The Marshall News Messenger*, March 17, 1975, Accessed on May 14, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/320523368>.

¹²⁷ “Opponents of ERA Fear Power Transfer,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, January 24, 1975, Accessed on May 14, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/12675854>.

¹²⁸ “El Paso Women’s Caucus Refutes Charges,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, February 6, 1975, Accessed on May 14, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/images/12689843>.

letter-writing campaigns to legislators from both sides pushed the issue to the front of many Texans' minds during the mid-1970s.

Texas' local pro-ERA groups did not receive much support from the national organizations in their campaign against Women Who Want to be Women. While they occasionally reached out to national branches for more copies of literature, the vast majority of organizing and dissemination of information to members happened through local organizations.¹²⁹ Because the Texas pro-ERA groups did not rely on national organizations to guide their campaign, they organized rapidly, maintained a unified message, and were able to push back against WWW in public and with legislators. This was the strength in Texas' pro-ERA faction. By keeping local control over the issue, they did not need to play from behind their opponents or wait for guidance from national leaders.

Opposition to Anti-ERA Forces in Other States

Texas was able to uphold its ratification vote because of the presence of a strong pro-ERA network to support the state's ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. While all states that ratified the amendment faced rescission efforts of varying sizes and levels of success, the benefit of having local organizations leading the fight against rescission cannot be overstated.¹³⁰ The states in which rescission was successful often shared the quality of having strong local anti-ERA movements that were able to influence legislators to take up the rescission effort. The antis also enacted similar tactics in each

¹²⁹ Correspondence from Judith Wiebe Stafford to Wilma Comfort, October 28, 1974, Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women Records, Box 35, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas.

¹³⁰ Nancy E. Baker, "Integrating Women into Modern Kentucky History: The Equal Rights Amendment Debate (1972-1978) as a Case Study," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 113 no. 2/3, (Spring/Summer 2015): 484.

state such as letter-writing campaigns, protests, and campaigning against legislators who supported the ERA. While Women Who Want to be Women was not active in each state that rescinded the ERA, a brief examination of these states is necessary to demonstrate the strength of a state having a strong, local pro-ERA network to prevent rescission of the amendment.

Nebraska, one of the first states to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, was the first state in which a rescission movement was successful.¹³¹ The state was able to ratify the amendment quickly because the legislature suspended the rules to avoid the amendment stalling in committee and brought it directly to the unicameral floor. Five lawmakers, including the only two female members of the body, sponsored the ratification motion. The unicameral completed the ratification process and passed the ratification documents on March 29, 1972.¹³²

Although there was little resistance to the amendment from the public during the ratification process, later in 1972, a few newspapers published letters to the editors from concerned citizens expressing their discontent with the unicameral's hasty adoption of the amendment and their fears about the potential effects of the amendment. One such letter reflected typical anti-ERA messaging about the amendment, repeating the ideas that the amendment dealt with more than "equal pay for equal work." She also warned of the military drafting women, confusion in naming children, loss of alimony for divorced women, legalization of gay marriage and adoption, and the eradication of separate spaces

¹³¹ Ibid, 485.

¹³² Ginger Rice, "Nebraskans Jubilant About ERA Passage," *Lincoln Journal Star*, March 23, 1972, Accessed on June 1, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/313590827>; "Equal Rights is Welcomed," *Lincoln Journal Star*, March 24, 1972, Accessed on June 1, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/313591223>; and United Press International, "Equal Rights Amendment Ratified," *Lincoln Journal Star*, March 24, 1972, Accessed on June 1, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/66205778>.

for each sex. The writer cited the group Happiness of Womanhood (an Arizona anti-ERA group) and Phyllis Schlafly as sources of information for concerned citizens.¹³³

By early 1973, anti-ERA sentiment in Nebraska crested, suggesting that while anti-ERA sentiment may have existed in Nebraska during the ratification process, it wasn't organized enough to stage a real fight in the unicameral, especially given the speed with which the amendment was ratified. After ratification, the best the anti-ERA groups in Nebraska could hope for was rescission of the amendment. Anti-ERA women wrote letters to legislators in the Nebraska unicameral encouraging them to rescind the state's ratification vote. These letters expressed concerns over unintended consequences of the amendment, fears about the potential destabilization of the family, and hypothetical communist impacts on the nation's women. Legislators and the press suspected that the letter-writing campaign, while not officially sponsored by any anti-ERA group, was part of an organized group effort to rescind the ERA.¹³⁴ The letter-writing campaign and pressure from constituents proved successful when on March 15, 1973, the unicameral voted to rescind the ERA ratification.¹³⁵

After Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment, the Tennessee Business and Professional Women's club led the effort to ratify it.¹³⁶ The amendment passed the Tennessee State House smoothly but met resistance in the Senate when Doug Henry urged caution in quickly ratifying the amendment and encouraged the legislature to take

¹³³ Letter to the editor, "Women's Lib," *Beatrice Daily Sun*, September 12, 1972, Accessed on June 1, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/507115761>.

¹³⁴ Dick Herman, "Male Legislators Reconsider Support...Unicam May Switch ERA Vote," *Lincoln Journal Star*, January 10, 1973, Accessed on September 6, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/313598334/>.

¹³⁵ Dick Herman, "Statehouse Letter," *Lincoln Journal Star*, March 18, 1973, Accessed on September 6, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/38578913/>.

¹³⁶ "Equal Rights for Women Amendment Passes Senate, Now Goes to States," *The Tennessean*, March 23, 1972, Accessed on July 14, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/111891517>.

some time to study any potential legal ramifications of the amendment.¹³⁷ Tennessee ratified the Equal Rights Amendment on April 4, 1972. Despite the leadership of the BPW and other national groups, anti-ERA women's groups acted to push rescission. Women Who Want to be Women had branches in Tennessee, but the rescission effort was led by STOP ERA, who worked to educate the public about the potential dangers of the ERA through public forums, campaigning legislators, and writing letters to the editors of local newspapers.¹³⁸

By 1974, the anti-ERA forces succeeded in pressuring the state legislature to rescind its vote for the Equal Rights Amendment. Similar to the hearings in Texas, at the hearings in Tennessee both pro and anti-ERA forces attended to show support for their side. Legislators in favor of maintaining the state's ratification vote claimed that the opposition was acting on emotion, lacking logic, and fearing unproven consequences of the amendment. Those in favor of rescinding the state's ratification claimed that the ERA would force women to be drafted, lead to the destruction of the family, eradicate separate spaces based on sex, and alleged that the state's initial ratification was completed too hastily. Throughout the hearing, legislators debated the constitutionality of rescission. While most legislators agreed that there was no constitutional basis to support rescission, the motion to rescind passed on April 23 by a vote of 56 to 33. Anti-ERA groups succeeded because they stirred up public sentiment against the amendment, causing

¹³⁷ "Women's rights ratified...by legislature," *Johnson City Press*, April 5, 1972, Accessed on July 14, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/589887282>.

¹³⁸ Larry Daughtrey, "Senate Reneges on Equal Rights," *The Tennessean*, March 19, 1972, Accessed on July 14, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/111592475>; and "Stop ERA Session Draws Crowd," *Germantown News*, December 20, 1974, Accessed on July 4, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/408638151>.

confusion about the effects of the amendment, and promising dire consequences for women if the amendment were ratified nationwide.¹³⁹

Idaho also ratified the Equal Rights Amendment early approving it on March 24, 1972. While the amendment received the support of the Idaho Business and Professional Women's Club, the event received little coverage in state newspapers.¹⁴⁰ There is very little scholarship available on the ERA opposition in Idaho, offering an area of exploration for scholars, but in one Idaho newspaper's letters to the editor's section, three letters expressed opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, while only one expressed support, suggesting a growing anti-ERA sentiment in the state.¹⁴¹

STOP ERA and members of the Mormon Church led the rescission effort in Idaho. At a STOP ERA sponsored event, speakers claimed that the Equal Rights Amendment was an anti-family and anti-women measure aimed at weakening the family. They also claimed that it would cause more harm than good for women. Before rescission succeeded in 1977, two prior rescission efforts had failed. On February 8, the Idaho Senate voted 18-17 to rescind the ERA. Legislators reported receiving large amounts of mail urging them to rescind the ERA. Many legislators expressed that while they personally did not oppose the amendment, the pressure from constituents to rescind was too strong to ignore. Instead of using a two-thirds majority vote, the Senate allowed a

¹³⁹ Marirose Arendale, "Tennessee and Women's Rights," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 39 no 1, (1980): 74-75; and Veronica Lerma, "The Equal Rights Amendment and the Case of the Rescinding States: A Comparative Historical Analysis," Master's Thesis, University of California, Merced, 2015, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7bg4s908>.

¹⁴⁰ "BPW Receives Telegram On Equal Rights Bill," *Idaho State Journal*, March 26, 1972, Accessed on September 6, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1612761>; and "Idaho ratifies women's rights," *The Times-News*, March 26, 1972, Accessed on September 6, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/394837094>.

¹⁴¹ "Buzz of the 'Burgh...Letters," *Idaho State Journal*, January 26, 1977, Accessed on September 6, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/16099597>.

simple majority vote to pass the house resolution rescinding Idaho's ratification.¹⁴² While it appears that Idaho lawmakers supported the ERA and worked with pro-ERA groups to maintain the state's support for the amendment, the anti-ERA forces were able to pressure enough lawmakers to change the rules for their benefit. More research on the anti-ERA movements in Idaho is necessary to form a complete picture of the activities in the state.

Kentucky faced two unsuccessful rescission efforts before the state legislature rescinded their ratification vote on March 16, 1978. Led by STOP ERA, women organized to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment through petitions, letter-writing campaigns, and speaking to House committees. The 1975 rescission hearing, while unsuccessful, impacted Representative Lloyd Clapp who remarked about "how professional these women are in their organization." The opposition in Kentucky used techniques similar to WWW's; anti-ERA supporters appeared at the statehouse in pink and brought homemade goods to legislators. While many of the women were involved in and recruited by church groups, the anti-ERA movement in Kentucky included women outside of the church community.¹⁴³

Pro-ERA forces in Kentucky organized in 1975 under the group Pro-ERA Alliance. Leaders of the group were feminists who were involved in organizations like the Kentucky Civil Liberties Union, NOW, the League of Women Voters, and the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. The leaders of the Alliance

¹⁴² Dan Flynn, "Drive to Stop ERA Given LDS Backing," *Idaho State Journal*, January 9, 1977, Accessed on September 6, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/16098053>; and Chris Peck, "Idaho Senate votes out ERA," *The Times-News*, February 9, 1977, Accessed on September 6, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/408540486>.

¹⁴³ Baker, "Integrating Women into Modern Kentucky History: The Equal Rights Amendments Debate (1972-1978) as a Case Study," 113, 485-488, 495.

held advanced degrees and worked outside of the home. The Pro-ERA Alliance was successful in preventing successful rescission efforts for years but were unable to stop the rescission movement. The Alliance was unsuccessful in stopping rescission because they organized after the anti-ERA movement and were unable to persuade enough legislatures that the amendment would not bring about the consequences that the antis claimed. The anti-ERA movement was able to gain support and momentum from the public and politicians who were sympathetic to their cause. Had the pro-ERA forces organized earlier, they may have been able to stop the state from rescinding the state's ERA vote.¹⁴⁴

Another hinderance in the Kentucky pro-ERA groups organization is that most of the pro-ERA women worked outside of the home while anti-ERA women were often full-time homemakers. Anti-ERA women viewed their activism as their job and were able to dedicate hours to lobbying politicians, writing letters, and could more easily speak at hearings about the ERA. Women in the Alliance would have had to take time off work to make a trip to the capitol to participate in lobbying activities and had a limited amount of time during the day to organize.¹⁴⁵

South Dakota became the 24th state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment on February 3, 1973, after the state House of Representatives voted in favor of the amendment 43-27. Although the amendment had the support of the legislature and politicians championed it as an amendment which would end discrimination against women and allow men and women to achieve their fullest abilities, some lawmakers expressed reservations about the amendment. One representative, Robert Weber, said that while he did not oppose equal rights for women, he was unsure about the potential

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 493-405, 497-502.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 504.

ramifications of such the ERA. He mentioned Nebraska's ongoing rescission efforts as part of his concern over the effects of the amendment.¹⁴⁶

Much like Idaho, there is minimal research on the rescission process in South Dakota. From newspaper articles, it appears that the ERA faced several rescission efforts before ultimately passing the state legislature through a series of parliamentary maneuvers. State Representative William Decker reported that his constituents were so divided on the issue that he flipped a coin to decide his vote, a move that caused him to vote "no" on the action to rescind. Another state Senator, Dick Flynn, who initially opposed the resolution to rescind the ratification vote, changed his vote to support it after his priest told him that the ERA and abortion were linked.¹⁴⁷ With such a lack of information on the rescission effort in South Dakota, it is hard to determine how the movement happened, whether from local or national anti-ERA groups or to determine the involvement of pro-ERA groups.

In the states that rescinded their ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, a strong coalition of anti-ERA organizations campaigned state legislators through letter-writing campaigns, speaking at hearings, and by coordinating large numbers of women to appear at state capitols dressed in feminine outfits to speak to legislators about the amendment. A range of issues like religion, abortion, and legal consequences, drove the rescission efforts. In each state though, anti-ER groups used coordinated activities to convince the legislatures to reexamine the issue and rescind the amendment. In a few of the states, the pressure of vocal constituents compelled legislators who viewed the

¹⁴⁶ Terry De Vine, "Equal Rights Amendment Ratified in House," *The Daily Republic*, February 3, 1973, Accessed on September 6, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/7724846/>.

¹⁴⁷ Mark Plenke, "Priest more effective than actresses," *Rapid City Journal*, March 6, 1979, Accessed on September 6, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/351776314>.

amendment favorably to vote in favor of rescission. The next section will examine the rescission effort in Texas to demonstrate the importance of local pro-ERA organizations in protecting a state's ratification vote.

The Power of Pro-ERA Networks in Combatting Anti-ERA Activities

Kansas was similar to Texas because pro-ERA forces were able to stop the state legislature from taking up a rescission vote despite a strong effort from anti-ERA organizations, including Women Who Want to be Women. Kansas ratified the ERA on March 28, 1972, with the only two female representatives voting against the resolution.¹⁴⁸ Kansas has a rich history of supporting progressive women's movements dating back to the 1800s. In the nineteenth century, Kansas supported pro-women measures such as property and custody rights for women, granting women voting rights in school elections, temperance efforts, and the state held the nation's first referendum on women's suffrage. In the 1920s, Kansas women separated from national suffrage organizations to regain local control in the suffrage movement. Once women's suffrage became law, two Kansas lawmakers introduced the first Equal Rights Amendment to Congress. When Congress passed the ERA, Kansas was one of the first states to ratify the amendment. Although it passed both branches of the Kansas legislature easily, several lawmakers voiced concerns over the impact of the amendment.¹⁴⁹

Immediately following the state's ratification of the ERA, public sentiment appeared split between those who favored the amendment and those who were against

¹⁴⁸ "Kansas is 7th state to ratify equal rights bill." *The Salina Journal*, March 29, 1972, Accessed on July 13, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/43971133>.

¹⁴⁹ Lowenthal, 36, 37-39.

it.¹⁵⁰ By 1974, Women Who Want to be Women's literature had spread to Kansas.

Women circulated "Ladies! Have You Heard?" and began organizing. The leader of Kansas anti-ERA mobilization, Barbara Hanna, was inspired by Lottie Beth Hobbs' work with WWW and "Ladies! Have You Heard?" to mobilize traditional, conservative, religious women in the state to push for rescission. Kansas lawmakers submitted bills and referendums to rescind the legislature's vote in favor of the ERA in 1973, and every year from 1975 through 1979. Attempts at rescission caused frantic letter-writing campaigns by both pro and anti-ERA supporters. Pro-ERA letters voiced general support for the ERA, while anti-ERA letters repeated common concerns of religious women such as societal decay, the need to maintain traditional gender roles, and ire with the women's liberation movement.¹⁵¹

Despite the efforts of Kansas anti-ERA women to convince the state legislature to rescind its vote for the ERA, local state organizations also mobilized to convince the legislature to maintain its vote for the amendment. Women in the Kansas Federation of Women's clubs adopted a resolution encouraging members to write letters to legislators either giving their support of the ERA or encouraging lawmakers not to rescind their vote for the amendment. The Kansas Press Women group also voted to send their legislators letters in support of the ERA.¹⁵² Other groups that wrote letters to legislators include the Federation of Business and Professional Women, nurses' associations, woman lawyers' associations, NOW, and other out of state women's organizations. Most of the letters sent

¹⁵⁰ Barbara Phillips, "What a week for women's lib!" *The Salina Journal*, March 29, 1972, Accessed on July 13, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/43971201>.

¹⁵¹ Lowenthal, 41-43.

¹⁵² Linda Mowery, "Kansas women keep pace with nation," *The Salina Journal*, December 29, 1974, Accessed on May 14, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/46898291>.

to state legislators were from pro-ERA writers, with much of the support coming from in-state activists and women. Unable to overcome the overwhelming support for the amendment in the state, anti-ERA women were unsuccessful in rescinding the ERA. Up against Kansas' tradition of supporting women's rights, lawmakers were unwilling to take up the rescission issue.¹⁵³

In states where rescission was successful, strong local anti-ERA groups overwhelmed pro-ERA groups which were less organized than in Texas. By having a strong pro-ERA network already embedded in the politics of the state, feminists were able to convince legislators that the state's ratification of the ERA was unable to be rescinded, and successfully fought off rescission efforts by Women Who Want to be Women. States where rescission was successful lacked robust pro-ERA networks and existing or newly created pro-ERA organizations were unable to fight the objections to the amendment raised by STOP ERA, Women Who Want to be Women, and other local anti-ERA organizations. Other states, like Kansas, were entrenched in a deep history of pro-women legislation and legislators could not justify bucking tradition and ratification at the complaint of a significant minority.¹⁵⁴

Another complication in the ERA ratification battle, which supports the idea that Texas' existing ERA support networks bolstered the state's ability to maintain its ratification vote, was an organizing problem with national women's groups. While they were able to successfully target Washington D.C. to pass the amendment in Congress, they were unable to control the ratification process in the long run because few states maintained local ERA coalitions. The local pro-ERA organization did not manifest

¹⁵³ Lowenthal, 43, 49.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 49.

quickly enough in some battleground states to counter calls for rescission. This lost time placed the pressure of defending the ERA on weak local women's organizations, which allowed anti-ERA organizations to gain a foothold in these states.¹⁵⁵ Texas, having recently undertaken a year's long battle over the state Equal Legal Rights Amendment, had a strong existing network of women's organizations who were able to quickly mobilize to combat anti-ERA sentiment. The feminists in Texas did not need to wait for support from national groups to supply materials, send in speakers, or organize volunteers before they started their fight. They were able to immediately respond to growing anti-ERA sentiments and counteract the claims made by Women Who Want to be Women, potentially protecting women who were unsure about their opinion on the amendment from believing the messaging of Women Who Want to be Women.

¹⁵⁵ Mansbridge, 13.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

There are many theories about why the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment failed, and the work of anti-ERA women is an important piece in understanding its failure. Existing scholarship on the anti-ERA movement largely focuses on the national efforts of Phyllis Schlafly, but the movement was successful because of local anti-ERA organizations and the women who campaigned against the amendment. These forgotten women wrote countless letters to legislators, spoke at government hearings on the amendment, organized and participated in protests, and recruited other women to join the anti-ERA movement. While Phyllis Schlafly's ideas and methods guided the activities, the movement would not have been possible without the efforts of local women and anti-ERA organizations. Women Who Want to be Women was one of these groups. Started in Fort Worth, Texas, the group's influence spread to other southern states, and the members spent years campaigning against the ERA and feminism. While WWW was not successful in its mission of convincing the Texas legislature to rescind the ratification vote, the methods and literature of the group inspired women in other states to join the anti-ERA movement.

Local organization of anti-ERA groups was imperative to the amendment's ultimate failure to meet the ratification deadline. Anti-ERA organizations benefited from having a strong national leadership which enabled local associations to take the methods of the national leadership and apply them consistently across different states. The motivations and backgrounds of anti-ERA supporters were broad, but this research sought to explain how, through targeting religiously fundamentalist women, Women

Who Want to be Women demonstrates the impact that grassroots organizations can have on policy. Although WWW was not successful in convincing the Texas legislature to rescind its ratification vote of the ERA, partially due to Texas' existing pro-ERA network and Hermine Tobolowsky's efforts to pass the state ELRA, the impact that WWW had outside of the state demonstrates how the organization was a key component in the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Women Who Want to be Women maintained a strong presence in Oklahoma, which never ratified the amendment. Members worked around the state to prevent legislators from ratifying the amendment and, as in Texas, the women came from the Church of Christ, adhered to fundamentalist doctrines, and viewed the ERA as a threat to traditional families and lifestyles. They also had a strong presence in Kansas and promoted the rescission effort against strong local pro-ERA organizations. Women in Georgia, Tennessee, and other southern states were inspired to join the anti-ERA movement by "Ladies! Have You Heard?" WWW's most important piece of literature.¹⁵⁶

The activities of Women Who Want to be Women in the 1970s demonstrates the ability of grassroots organizations to change policy because, through traditional grassroots methods, such as word of mouth recruiting and influence in the press, WWW pressured the Texas legislature and pro-ERA women to acknowledge their beliefs and debate what was thought to be a settled issue in the state. While it is difficult to gauge how many members were active in the group, their presence was large enough to influence aspects of state politics for several years. Their influence in other states also

¹⁵⁶ Brown, 41-43, 45, 64; and Lowenthal, 41.

supports this position. Because the group reached women outside of the state via word of mouth and member to member telephone communication, it is clear that their message was compelling and meaningful to a certain type of woman who was often overlooked in political activities. For many women who joined WWWW, it was their first, and sometimes only, step into political activism. Some women chose to continue their activities after the Equal Rights Amendment battle was over, while others returned to their quiet lives at home.

This research also sought to explain how Women Who Want to be Women used fundamentalist religious doctrines to recruit members. Existing scholarship points to WWWW as an example of how religious fundamentalism played a role in defeating the ERA, but it often does not explore this topic further. By explaining the beliefs of fundamentalists and examining WWWW's literature, it can be concluded that fundamentalist women were motivated to join the anti-ERA movement because they felt threatened by the potential effects of the amendment. This supports existing scholarship that explains how Evangelical Christians were able to influence national politics through the 1970s and 1980s. What is still missing from this topic is more explanation about the role that women played in this shift. Women did not sit idly by while their husbands and male church leaders influenced legislators and national leaders. Instead, they too arose to champion their beliefs and advocate for policies that they valued.

There is still much work to be done in examining the role that local organizations played in the defeat of the ERA. As noted, there is a lack of scholarly research about opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment in Idaho and South Dakota. From examining local newspapers, it appears that there was a religious influence in these states, but

abortion also appears to have played a role in the rescission of the amendment. Scholars should examine Idaho and South Dakota's rescission efforts to see to what degree religion affected these efforts, how the anti-ERA groups mobilized, and to examine other factors that influenced the rescission efforts.

Women Who Want to be Women is an important group in understanding backlash to the ERA and the motivations behind the rescission efforts. Because there is little scholarly work written specifically about the group, it can be difficult to determine their true influence in the movement. As scholars learn more about WWWW, they are appreciating the influence that they had over fundamentalist women within the anti-ERA movement.

What should be remembered from this research is the power of local organization in a broader movement. A small organization begun in Fort Worth, Texas became one of the leading sub-organizations in the Equal Rights Amendment ratification process. Their message motivated women not only in Texas but throughout the American south to become active in the anti-ERA movement. Guided by the tactics and literature of Phyllis Schlafly, WWWW used fundamentalist religion to motivate women to advocate for their beliefs and defend what they thought would be the effects of the Equal Rights Amendment. WWWW forced states to look at potential ramifications of the Equal Rights Amendment differently than advocates for the amendment pushed. The organization and movement of antifeminist women in the 1970s shaped a decade long battle over the meaning of equality between the sexes and how such a concept could impact legislation and personal decisions in the future.

The subsequent ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment by several states in recent years has reignited the debate over women's equality in the United States. There are many unanswered questions about the legality of these ratifications, still unanswered questions about how the amendment could be used to shape future legislation, and debated about the merit of a constitutional amendment versus piecemeal legislation to address specific areas of inequality. As the debate continues in modern times, reflecting similar arguments that pro and anti-ERA supporters made fifty years ago, and local people and organizations will continue to make changes.

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