THE END OF AN E.R.A.: COUNTER-NARRATIVE INHERENCY AND
THE STOP ERA COUNTERMOVEMENT

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“No man is as anti-feminist as a really feminine woman.” –Frank O’Connor
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by
Angela Elizabeth Perry
Master of Arts in Communication
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The Equal Rights Amendment has a long history, but the climax of its journey occurred between 1972 and 1982. During these years, the proponents of the Amendments sought ratification from the States, while facing steep opposition from the STOP ERA countermovement. STOP ERA, headed by Phyllis Schlafly, fueled the spread of a pervasive and persuasive counter-narrative, and is given credit for defeating the passage of the ERA. This essay postulates that once the narrative of a social movement has become the dominant narrative, countermovements necessarily create their own counter-narratives built on the foundation of the perceived weaknesses of the social movement. The rhetoric of STOP ERA is a prime example of a counter-narrative created by a countermovement. By demonstrating that Schlafly uses the dominant narrative as the foundation for her own counter-narrative, this paper seeks to establish the inherency of counter-narratives to the existence and success of countermovements. STOP ERA was massively persuasive, and managed to kill an amendment whose failure was deemed incomprehensible. This essay seeks to establish that the countermovement and counter-narrative are inseparable, and that they developed in tandem by using the weaknesses of the pro-ERA social movement to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In March 1972, the Equal Rights Amendment was passed by the U.S. Senate and sent to the states for ratification, but the history of the amendment goes back much further (Soule & Olzak, 2004). The 1972 congressional vote was the culmination of efforts by women’s groups that had begun as far back as 1923. The National Women’s Party (NWP) proposed the Amendment in 1923 at the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention, and in December of that year two Republicans from Kansas introduced it into Congress (Miller & Greenberg, 1976). By the 1940s, over thirty national organizations, including the Democratic and Republican parties, supported the NWP and its proposed amendment for equal rights. Although the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed equal protection of all laws, the rights of equal protection were not directly extended to women until Reed v. Reed in 1971 (Miller & Greenberg, 1976). After this significant ruling, the Supreme Court ruled that the equal protection clause made laws that distinguished different rules for women and men unconstitutional (Soule & Olzak, 2004). This shift in legal history partially explains why the ERA, which had been introduced in every Congress in the United States since 1923, was not actually debated on the floor of the House until 1970-71 (Soule & Olzak, 2004).

Opposition to the ERA was bound up with hostility toward the new feminism of the sixties and seventies (Thom, 1991). Warnings were released by opponents claiming that the ERA and other feminist goals would “bring social disruption, unhappiness, and increasing rates of divorce and desertion. Weakening of family ties,” the opponents proclaimed, “may also lead to increased rates of alcoholism, suicide, and possible sexual deviation” (Thom,
Phyllis Schlafly, founder and leader of the STOP ERA foundation, called the ERA and its supporters “a series of sharp-tongued, high-pitched, whining complaints by unmarried women. They view the home as a prison, and the wife and mother as a slave” in her first published issue of the *Phyllis Schlafly Report* (Thom, 1991, p. 85).

By 1978 it was clear that the opposition to the ERA was highly organized and was making influential arguments that the amendment would be damaging to women (Soule & Olzak, 2004). In particular, Phyllis Schlafly and the members of her STOP ERA organization argued that the passage of the amendment would force women into active military combat and require all women to join the labor force, regardless of their own desires. The widespread dissemination of these arguments led to a decline in public opinion favoring the ERA between 1972 and 1982 (Daniels & Darcy, 1985). Following this decline, the rate at which states ratified the amendment plummeted, and the amendment eventually died three states short of its ratification requirement (Miller & Greenberg, 1976).

**PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION**

A preliminary examination of the literature concerning the STOP ERA movement, countermovements, and counter-narratives will be provided below. This information will create a foundation of understanding of the type of movement STOP ERA was, the types of appeals it utilized, and a general knowledge of the organization itself.

**A History of STOP ERA**

Given the challenges to established doctrines posed by the agitation for women’s rights, the development of a countermovement was perhaps inevitable (Solomon, 1979). Less predictable – and less predicted – was the capacity of that countermovement to arrest, and even reverse, the momentum toward passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, thought
by many observers to be virtually assured of passage (O’Reilly, 1978; Solomon, 1979). The success of STOP ERA is a testimony to the skill by which Phyllis Schlafly, the acknowledged leader of STOP ERA, utilized persuasive rhetorical appeals and fundamental Christian archetypes to tap into the instinctive fear of change and loss of sanctity in the American psyche (Mathews, 1993; Solomon, 1979).

Central to all STOP ERA rhetoric is the argument that the ERA will endanger or disrupt an established, desirable order in society (Foss, 1979; Solomon, 1983). Passage of the ERA, it was claimed, would force women into the military, require all women to work outside the home, and create only unisex bathrooms (Kruse, 1983; Solomon, 1983; Soule & Olzak, 2004). Moreover, opponents argued that the ERA would remove protections women were guaranteed by state-level domestic relations and labor-laws (Lundardini, 1996; Soule & Olzak, 2004). Divorce rates, alcoholism, suicide and child endangerment and abandonment would all skyrocket after the ERA, argued Schlafly and STOP ERA, and the very sacred backbone of morality America was built on would be crushed (Kruse, 1983; Solomon, 1979; Solomon, 1983; Soule & Olzak, 2004). By placing individuals before the law, heedless of gender, the ERA would distort what it meant to be female (Mathews, 1993). Feminists, STOP ERA claimed, were challenging the sacred order of creation (Foss, 1979).

Opponents of the ERA intuitively responded to ratification as a religious issue, one that affected the very foundation of their social and personal selves (Mathews, 1993; Steuter, 1992). Anti-ERA women “raged at feminism” as though it were “responsible for every difficulty, disappointment, and disaster of the past generation” (Mathews, 1993, p. 133). The supporters of the ERA were viewed as dangerous anomalies in society, fighting against the divine fact that “woman is, quite literally, designed by God and fitted by biology to be a wife
and mother” (Solomon, 1983, p. 110). A woman’s first, best and most fulfilling role is as wife and mother, Schlafly argues, and “it is ludicrous to suggest that [there] are more self-fulfilling [activities] than the daily duties of a wife and mother in the home” (Solomon, 1983, p. 110).

STOP ERA, later merged with Schlafly’s Eagle Forum, provided “the alternative to women’s lib,” and placed supreme importance on “God, home, and country” (Solomon, 1983, p. 110). “The implication of pollution…seemed to reside in the ideal of sex-neutral language” used by the amendment; language which ratificationists believed should have commended the amendment (Mathews, 1993, p. 134). Phyllis Schlafly skillfully played upon the anger that sex-neutral and sexually ambiguous words evoked, by reminding women that they had been designed specifically by God, and should cling to the distinctions He had bestowed upon them (Mathews, 1993; Steuter, 1992). STOP ERA embraced traditional gender and rejected what they perceived as attempts to turn them into men (Foss, 1979). In doing so, STOP ERA carried a wave of public opinion against the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and eventually defeated it in 1982.

**Countermovements**

“Movement culture” is a dimension of social and political movements that is a reflection of the shared ideas, symbols, meanings and values that form a movement’s self-identification (Williams & Alexander, 1994, p. 2). It builds solidarity within the movement and distinguishes a movement’s “we” from the opposition’s “they.” Social movements, especially those that would affect profound change in political, social, and economic structures, often provoke organized efforts to prevent or reverse such change (Burt, 1998; Williams & Alexander, 1994). These countermovements usually arise out of existing groups
whose status, position, and security are threatened by the goals or achievements of the social movements they oppose. In the United States, movements and countermovements have mobilized to fight over abortion, gay rights, animal rights, cigarette smoking, gun control, marijuana use, busing, racism, pornography, language rights, nuclear power, school textbooks, and – of course – the Equal Rights Amendment (Meyer & Staggenbord, 1996).

In politics, as in physics, actions generate equal and opposite reactions (Roberts, 2009). Any social movement of potential political significance will generate opposition. Beginning with the wave of social reform in the 1960s, movements opposing social change became more organized and effective, prompting them to be titled countermovements (Jensen, 2006; Meyer & Staggenbord, 1996). When social movements seek change, countermovements seek to preserve the status quo (Roberts, 2009). While a social movement may be defined as a conscious, collective, organized attempt to bring about social change, “it is useful to define a countermovement as a conscious, collective, organized attempt to resist or reverse social change” (Mottl, 1980, p. 620).

A social movement consists of “collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities” (Tarrow, 1994, p. 3). A countermovement, on the other hand, is a movement that makes contrary claims simultaneously to those of the original argument. Social movements “of any visibility and impact create the conditions for the mobilization of countermovements” (Meyer & Staggenbord, 1996, p. 1632). By advocating change, by attacking the established interests, and by threatening the status quo, they create grievances and political opportunities for “organizational entrepreneurs” to define countermovement aims and goals (Meyer & Staggenbord, 1996, p. 1632; Zald & Useem, 1987).
Counter-narrative

According to Nelson (1996), counter-narratives are “stories of strong moral self-definition”; the author of a counter-narrative “re describes a dominant story, repudiates it for her- or himself, and sets a new course that commits her or him to certain values for the future” (p. 98). Counter-narratives often begin as nothing more than a cluster of responses by one or more people who do not feel the dominant story speaks for them (Nelson, 1996). If a community of like-minded people can find an appropriate space, their responses can confirm each other’s. As they talk, they “map out” the dominant narrative “as if it were a mountain, marking out the details so carefully and completely that not only are its proportions and general outline accurately represented but also its cracks and fissures” (p. 98). As they discuss their concerns, these cracks and fissures “widen alarmingly to reveal glimpses” of a counter-narrative that “positions itself against a…master narrative” (Nelson, 1996, p. 98). By offering the “details and moral ideas the dominant story ignores or underplays” the counter-narrative offers “dissent from the interpretations and conclusions the dominant story invited” (Nelson, 1995, p. 34). The counter-narrative can then be offered publicly “with the specific purpose of resisting and undermining [the] dominant story” (Nelson, 1995, p. 34).

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

“Women’s anti-feminist countermovements have until recently been ignored,” and such a powerful and influential movement deserves study to understand its organization and effect (Steuter, 1992, p. 290). “The claim has been made that women are the only group to have actively organized against their own emancipation,” and while this statement may not be entirely true “the fact that some women have organized against the movements of their
feminist sisters is of significant and worthy of further investigation” (Steuter, 1992, p. 290-291). The framework of social movements is based largely on male models, and the women’s experience and influence on social and counter-movements necessitates inspection (Steuter, 1992). Because countermovement rhetoric evolves in a predictable and reactive fashion, movement activists can do more than simply react to countermovement rhetoric; with understanding and study of it, they can anticipate it (Roberts, 2009).

This study will undertake an examination of an influential event in American history, and will examine the rhetoric and rhetorical appeals used by the countermovement organization STOP ERA in order to build a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of a counter-narrative, and its inherency in the formation of a countermovement. The ERA was assumed to be unstoppable, and yet STOP ERA was able to defeat it. As Solomon (1983) asserts, “scrutiny of STOP ERA rhetoric should help clarify why so many people found the message persuasive.”

**PURPOSE OF STUDY**

This essay will argue that the predictable rhetoric of countermovements manifests itself in the form of a counter-narrative. Counter-narratives are told much like any story whose aim is to make moral sense of something: the countermovement chooses particulars from the array of experience and looks at them in the light of important moral ideas, creating a parallel but opposing narrative (Nelson, 1995). Like the strong, morally self-defining narratives of social movements, counter-narratives are self-defining and capable of attending to difference, but they differ in that “they are told for the specific purpose of resisting and undermining a dominant story” (Nelson, 1995, p. 34). The countermovement uses their “standpoint as Other to set into equilibrium certain details and moral ideas the dominant story
ignores or underplays, thus allowing…dissent from the interpretations and conclusions the dominant story invites” (Nelson, 1995, p. 34).

While the dominant narrative of a social movement determines in a present moment what has previously been morally indeterminate, counter-narratives “take what has (for the moment, at least) been determined, undo it, and reconfigure it with a new moral significance” (Nelson, 1995, p. 34). All dominant stories inherently contain the possibility for this kind of undoing; “it is the nature of a narrative never to close down completely the avenues for its own subversion” (Nelson, 1995, p. 34). The construction, revision, and reinterpretation that are continually ongoing in dominant narrative construction leave plenty of opportunities for counter-narratives to weave their way inside.

As will be discussed in Chapter Two, countermovements only appear once the social movement has gained enough traction to threaten the disenfranchised members of society. This essay postulates that once the narrative of the social movement has become the dominant narrative, countermovements necessarily create their own counter-narratives built on the foundation of the perceived weaknesses of the social movement. The rhetoric of STOP ERA is a prime example of a counter-narrative created by a countermovement. By demonstrating that Schlafly uses the dominant narrative as the foundation for her own counter-narrative, this paper seeks to establish the inherency of counter-narratives to the existence and success of countermovements. STOP ERA was massively persuasive, and managed to kill an amendment whose failure was, at the time, deemed “incomprehensible” (Solomon, 1983, p. 109). This essay seeks to establish that the countermovement and counter-narrative are inseparable, and that they developed in tandem by using the weaknesses of the pro-ERA social movement to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment.
CHAPTER PRÉCIS

In Chapter Two, I will perform a review of the pertinent literature to this thesis. An examination of the history of the ERA and the STOP ERA movement will be undertaken, as well as an assessment of the literature already in existence which looks at STOP ERA rhetoric. Secondly, an appraisal will be made of the literature examining movements and countermovements, assessing their origins and the stratagems they employ. Lastly, a review of narrative and counter-narrative theory will be provided, in order to establish the precedence of this study.

In Chapter Three, an analysis will be undertaken, examining the rhetoric utilized by Phyllis Schlafly and the STOP ERA countermovement. The existence of a counter-narrative will be established and shown to have originated in the narrative of the pro-ERA social movement. First, an examination of the “Positive Woman” will be made, assessing the position in society Schlafly (1977) deems appropriate for women. Secondly, I will assess the reasons STOP ERA provides for the rejection of the ERA and Schlafly's interpretation of feminists' objectives as the foundation offered for that rejection. Lastly, an examination of the consequences of feminist goals and the passage of the ERA foretold by STOP ERA will be performed, demonstrating the effect Schlafly believed these influences would have on the United States. In this chapter, the theories of Nelson (1995, 1996) will be supported with examples from STOP ERA rhetoric; *The Power of the Positive Woman* (1977) will be used as the main source for this analysis, supported by issues of *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* from 1972-1982.

In Chapter Four, I conclude my analysis by summarizing my findings and discussing the implications of this study. STOP ERA is a prime example of a successful countermovement; the efforts of Phyllis Schlafly and her organization are widely credited
with the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (Davis, 1991; Schlafly, 1977; Solomon, 1979, 1983; Thom, 1991; Tillson, 1996). Additionally, STOP ERA’s rhetoric is an inimitable example of a counter-narrative. The argument of this paper, therefore, is that countermovements and counter-narratives are indivisible; a counter-narrative is an indispensable aspect of a countermovement.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines the existing literature pertinent to the study of STOP ERA. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of STOP ERA, an exposition of the history of the ERA must first be undertaken. Following that, an assessment of existing literature concerning countermovements and the traits that contribute to their success will be made. Lastly, an appraisal of the extant literature regarding counter-narrative will be provided. STOP ERA necessarily produced a counter-narrative to combat the forward momentum of the pro-ERA movement. Therefore, in order to better comprehend the inherent connection between countermovements and counter-narratives posited by this essay, an understanding of both of these theories must be established.

THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

Movements and countermovements do not exist in a cultural vacuum, but often take place during – and are instigated by – periods of political and social conflict. In order to be effective, a movement must reflect the cultural and political opinions of its audience, and operate within the parameters of existing social norms. According to Doob (1948) “The values and policies of modern society are unstable and therefore social conflicts are numerous”; in order to accomplish anything, a movement’s aims must resonate with a majority of society (p. 261). Therefore, to more fully understand the techniques and functions of a movement (or countermovement), it is essential to understand the historical context in which it occurred.
**In The Beginning**

The Equal Rights Amendment was first introduced in the U.S. Congress in 1923, near the end of what has been labeled the first wave of the American feminist movement (Davis, 1991; Miller & Greenberg, 1976). Proposed by the National Women’s Party (NWP), led by feminist activist Alice Paul, it stated that “men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction” (Davis, 1991, p. 29). The amendment was an attempt to cement the progress made by the first wave feminists, and to guarantee the rights of American women in areas of labor practices, education, marriage, and other various legal jurisdictions (Miller & Greenberg, 1976; Soule & Olzak, 2004). Women had only recently obtained the right to vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, and “to the women of the NWP, the Equal Rights Amendment was the next logical step after the right to vote. With one stroke, it would overturn scores of laws that discriminated against women” (Davis, 1991, p. 29).

It was generally assumed that with the right to vote the first wave feminists, commonly known as suffragists, had fulfilled all of their goals and exhausted their list of complaints (Davis, 1991). Many feminists felt compelled by the mounting social pressure from conservatives to preclude any additional freedom for women (Soule & Olzak, 2004; Tillson, 1996). The conservative concern was that “if women voted as a bloc, they would threaten America’s free institutions” (Davis, 1991, p. 27). Despite this, Paul, who was considered radical even by her peers, continued to push for further equality. As a result, the first ERA was defeated in Congress with strong opposition from labor unions, as well as many women’s groups who feared the loss of certain protective labor laws (Critchlow & Stachekci, 2008; Davis, 1991). For a variety of reasons, the country had turned to other pressing social concerns, and many feminist groups moved on to focus on the issues of birth
control and the growing women’s peace movement (Thom, 1991). Black women, ever on the fringe of the white feminist movement, forged their own coalitions to combat racism and to pursue the specific needs of their own communities (Tillson, 1996).

The ERA remained tabled in the Judiciary Committee in the U.S. Congress for nearly 50 years. Each year it was reintroduced in the House of Representatives, but it rarely ever came to a vote. In 1943 the wording of the ERA was revised in order to maintain consistency with the 14th Amendment (Thom, 1991). In 1946, a simple majority of the Senate finally approved the ERA, now reading “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex,” but not by the two-thirds majority necessary for a constitutional amendment (Davis, 1991, p. 29). Again, the division among feminists groups themselves played a role in the Amendment’s defeat (Tillson, 1996). Many feminists were unwilling to relinquish the protective labor laws and divorce and custody provisions given to women, and which they were afraid would be demolished by the ERA (Davis, 1991).

In 1950, in an attempt to placate the differing feminist factions, the Hayden rider was attached to the ERA, which stated that “the provisions of this article shall not be construed to impair any rights, benefits, or exemptions…conferred by law upon persons of the female sex” (Davis, 1991, p. 33). Designed to pacify, this rider only exacerbated the issue, and was vehemently rejected by so-called “equality” feminists as rendering the ERA useless. Though the more moderate feminists dominated women’s organizations in the 1960s, the continued opposition to any modification of Section I of the ERA by the equality feminists prevented alteration or passage of the Amendment until 1972 (Tillson, 1996).
The Second Wave

The “second wave” of the American feminist movement had been building momentum for nearly a decade at this point. Beginning with the publication of Betty Friedan’s controversial book, *The Feminist Mystique*, in 1963, many American women began to question their own dissatisfaction with the traditional role of housewife and mother (Soule & Olzak, 2004). They were surprised and grateful to find their feelings both corroborated and validated by Friedan’s book, and the social climate began to adapt to allow for more open discussions of feminist viewpoints. The resulting social and political dialogue, followed closely by the media, facilitated the progress and expansion of the second feminist wave (Davis, 1991; Tillson, 1996). The creation of the National Organization of Women (NOW) enabled feminist political action to take root in America in the mid-1960s, and its newly elected president, Friedan, stated that NOW was formed “to take the actions needed to bring women into the mainstream of American Society” (Davis, 1991, p. 83). This mainstreaming of feminist ideas was reflected in increasing media coverage of the issues and events. By 1971 “there were over 100 feminist journals and newspapers,” and in January of 1972 the groundbreaking feminist magazine *Ms.* published its premier issue (Davis, 1991). All 300,000 copies sold out in eight days, tens of thousands of letters poured in from women all over the country, and the magazine received 50,000 subscription orders.

It was during this exuberant feminist wave that the U.S. Congress passed the ERA in 1972. Politically, the U.S. was more open to liberal, progressive ideas, having witnessed the painful civil rights era, the ending of the Vietnam war and the burgeoning sexual revolution (Soule & King, 2006; Thom, 1991). As Davis (1991) explains, “the vote [for the ERA] was the result of massive and unprecedented lobbying by women’s organizations. In fact, the intense two-year struggle to get the ERA through Congress was the fire that forged liberal
feminists into a coherent political force” (p. 121). The winds of change were tremendous, and with the lack of any organized controversy, the momentum of the second wave provided the impetus for the U.S. Congress to approve the Amendment.

**Conservative Opposition**

Conservative opponents, belatedly rousing themselves, found several powerful anti-ERA sympathizers in Congress. Because of the efforts of Rep. Emanuel Cellar, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, the ERA was bottled up for years with legislative blocks (Tillson, 1996). Once the Amendment finally made it to the floor of the House it was easily passed, but then required approval from the Senate where it faced strong opposition from Senator Sam Ervin, an outspoken ERA opponent (Paterson, 1986). Ervin’s view of the perils of the ERA included the disruption of the traditional family, a drastically increased rate of divorces, and men deserting their families leading to their “increased rates of alcoholism, suicide, and possible sexual deviation” (East, 1982, p. 10). The next two years involved a tremendous political struggle between the opposing forces in the U.S. House and Senate. Although the ERA was finally approved by the House by a vote 354-23 in 1971, and in the Senate 84-8 in 1972 without any restrictive amendments attached, its strict wording provided ample ammunition for ERA opponents during the later ratification process (Soule & King, 2006; Thom, 1991).

Although numerous revisions to the ERA had been offered in the House and Senate, none made it into the final version of the Amendment (East, 1982). Most of the conservatives’ proposed modifications included protective clauses ensuring preferential treatment for women in some labor practices, in cases of alimony and other spousal support, and with exemptions for women in the draft and combat (Tillson, 1996). These revisions
were all rejected as a result of political pressure on key legislators by equality feminists. With the passage of the ERA, many and various social and political issues became the subjects of public discourse in the media and the nation. In late 1972, Phyllis Schlafly organized the STOP ERA campaign, and began actively recruiting supporters in her drive to stop the ratification of the ERA.

**The Backlash**

Controversy surrounding the ERA and its opposition had a significant impact upon American politics and culture during the ‘70s. According to Petchesky (1981), “the women’s liberation movement in the 1970s had become the most dynamic force for social change in the country, the one most directly threatening…to conservative values and interests” (p. 211). In response, the right wing of the Republican party, threatened by the ERA’s alleged assault on conservative views on gender roles, abortion, child care, education, homosexuality, the federal government, and a mélange of other issues, began mobilizing in ever-increasing numbers (Tillson, 1996). Socially conservative groups viewed the ERA as the brainchild of the women’s movement, and both Democrat and Republican feminists became increasingly vigilant to attempts by conservative legislators to repeal the ERA (Davis, 1991).

According to Faludi (1991), “the critical New Right groups all got underway within two years after the two biggest victories for women’s rights – Congress’s approval of the ERA in 1972 and the U.S, Supreme Court’s legislation of abortion in 1973” (p. 233). Conservative and religious groups organized politically, forming “hundreds of single-issue groups to oppose sex education, gay rights laws, or other types of social change” Davis, 1991, p. 435). The political/religious New Right movement incorporated these diverse individual constituencies, as well as other fundamentalist groups such as the Mormon
Church, the Ku Klux Klan, and the John Birch Society (Tillson, 1996). Faludi (1991) states that every backlash movement has its enemy, and “for the New Right, a prime enemy would be feminist women…One New Right group after another lined up behind this agenda” (p. 232).

The ERA was an issue that focused and mobilized both the feminist and the NEW Right social movements, attracting hundreds of organizations to their respective causes during the decade (Tillson, 1991). Feminist groups, flush with the initial success and momentum of the ERA’s ratification, were slow to entirely comprehend the strength of the conservative backlash against the Amendment. By the mid-1970s feminists belatedly began coordinating their efforts and forming political coalitions as the ERA’s 1979 ratification deadline approached (Soule & King, 2006). Pro-ERA state legislators, although prepared, found it increasingly arduous to garner the necessary support in their respective legislatures. Many of their efforts were too little, too late, as the STOP ERA campaign and other anti-ERA groups’ political pressure began to see marked success in halting the ERA’s ratification.

**STOP ERA Research**

Some research has already been done specifically on the topic of STOP ERA by communication scholars. Most notably, Solomon (1979 & 1983) has examined the rhetoric of the STOP ERA movement and its function in creating meaning and myth for its followers. Solomon (1979) admits that “given the challenges to established doctrines posed by [the ERA], the development of a countermovement was perhaps inevitable” (p. 262). However, “less predictable was the capacity of that countermovement to arrest, and even reverse, the momentum toward passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, thought by many observers to be virtually assured of passage” (Solomon, 1979, p. 262). Solomon’s 1979 article argues that
the rhetoric of STOP ERA employs a formal archetypal pattern, the mythoi of the romantic quest, at its basic structure. Further, the recurrent characterizations of supporters and opponents of STOP ERA in the organization’s rhetoric embody the qualities associated with the hero and villain in a romantic quest, and also “reflect the diverse elements of the psychological archetype of the mother as delineated by Carl Jung” (p. 263).

Solomon’s 1983 article traces the elements of a divinely ordained order which STOP ERA advocates perceived in women, families, and societies, and “explores the contrasting anomalies and anomy which STOP ERA supporters perceive in the opposition” (p. 109). The essay also examines the rhetorical function of the vision offered by STOP ERA to its members, and assesses the social impact of the message. Solomon (1983) observes that “STOP ERA rhetoric has comfortingly and persuasively reaffirmed the values and commitments of many women,” but begs the question, “has STOP ERA rhetoric contributed to the larger social good?” (p. 115). Regrettably, Solomon (1983) finds the answer to be no. While STOP ERA rhetoric encouraged its members to take a positive view of their lives, it also “created division, alienation, distrust, and bitterness in a larger social context” (Solomon, 1983, p. 116).

Foss (1979) also wrote about the ERA controversy, looking at the situation through the perspective that “the ERA involves a conflict between two world views that are created by the rhetoric generated by each side” (p. 275). Foss (1979) found that the discourse formulated and presented by both the proponents and the opponents of the ERA create perceptions that are more influential than the arguments presented to the public, despite their correlation with reality or lack thereof. Foss’s (1979) study represented a rhetorical approach to the study of movements that had been called for by numerous rhetorical critics, and
examined the “particular realities” created by the fantasizing that occurs in small groups (p. 276). Much like the present examination, Foss (1979) sought to examine the unique culture created within particular groups, and the resulting fantasy themes of campaigns and social movements. “When members wish to convert others to their position, they will begin to create messages for public speeches, the media, and literature, shaping the fantasy themes that excited them in their original discussions into suitable form for various audiences” finds Foss (1979, p. 276).

**Implications**

Though the present examination owes a great deal to these previous studies, there is further to go in the attempt to understand not only the STOP ERA countermovement, but social and political movements in general. The examination of movements and countermovements has evolved significantly since these examinations of STOP ERA were made, as will be shown, and new research and theory has been proposed which may explain the phenomenon better than could be done at that time. Additionally, the fairly recent emergence of counter-narrative theory has significant potential to alter the perception of countermovements such as STOP ERA and their origins.

**COUNTERMOVEMENTS**

Social movements developed concurrently with modern nation-states, and evolved into a familiar means of pressing claims (Tilly, 1984). Analysts have employed various definitions of social movements, emphasizing the mix of institutional and noninstitutional tactics, the collective identity of challengers, and sustained dynamic interaction with mainstream politics and culture (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). Tarrow (1994) provides a relatively economical definition: a social movement consists of “collective challenges by
people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities” (p. 3). A countermovement, conversely, is a movement that makes contrary claims simultaneously to those of the original movement.

**Countermovements: An Evolution of Understanding**

During the 1970s the United States experienced a series of “anti-movements”; reactions to reforms following the 1960s protests (Mottl, 1980, p. 620). Although observers had discussed these movements, prior to 1980 few scholars had analyzed them as countermovements, “a particular kind of protest movement which is a response to the social change advocated by an initial movement” (Mottl, 1980, p. 620). Tilly (1978) and Zald and Useem (1982) considered the resource mobilization of reactive protests and countermovements in the 1970s, but it was not until Mottl’s analysis in 1980 that movements and countermovements were seen as “elements of common social processes of collective action centering on reform” (p. 620).

Scholars primarily viewed these reactive movements as an entirely different phenomenon than the initiating movements they opposed, as a “particular kind of protest movement which is a response to social change advocated by an initial movement…a conscious, collective, organized attempt to resist or to reverse social change” (Mottl, 1980, p. 620). In this view, countermovements are essentially reactionary, and are directed more at the state and society than at the precursor movement (Useem, 1980). Challenging this focus on solely conservative oppositional movements, Lo (1982) argued that a countermovement has the potential to be either progressive or reactionary; its defining characteristic is that it is dynamically engaged with an oppositional movement, not the political leanings of the organization. Zald and Useem (1982), too, moved away from the study of exclusively
conservative movements, premising that “movements of any visibility and impact create the conditions for the mobilization of countermovements” (p. 1). By advocating change of any kind, movements inspire grievances and provide opportunities for organizational impresarios to define countermovement goals and issues.

Zald and Useem (1987) continued to build upon their own findings, as well as Lo’s (1982), tracing countermovement materialization to movement development and claims. For them, the countermovement’s dependence on – and reaction to – an initiating movement is the most vital characteristic of countermovements, and they are an increasingly prevalent form of social change advocacy. According to Zald and Useem (1987),

movements of any visibility and impact create the conditions for the mobilization of countermovements. By advocating change, by attacking the established interests, by mobilizing symbols and raising costs to others, they create grievances and political opportunities for organizational entrepreneurs to define countermovement goals and issues. Movements also have a ‘demonstration effect’ for political countermovements – showing that collective action can effect (or resist) change in particular aspects of society. (p. 247)

Movements thus create their own opposition, which sometimes takes the form of a countermovement.

Once a countermovement is mobilized, movement and countermovement necessarily react to one another (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). Zald and Useem (1987) characterize the ensuing interaction between movements and countermovements as “a sometimes loosely coupled tango of mobilization and demobilization” (p. 247). Movement and countermovement interact in a conflict in which the state may occasionally intervene on one side or the other, and elites may intervene on behalf of opposing sides (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). In some instances, “a countermovement may in turn generate a counter-countermovement that is different from the original movement,” thereby dividing the efforts of the social movement and potentially weakening its efforts (Zald & Useem, 1987, p. 249).
Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) further developed the definition of a countermovement, departing from the linear understanding of movement-countermovement combat. Rather, they view countermovements as “networks of individuals and organizations that share many of the same objects of concern as the social movements that they oppose. They make competing claims on the state of matters of policy and politics and vie for attention from the mass media and the broader public” (p. 1632). Often in contemporary politics, the struggle between movements and countermovements is prolonged, and it may be beneficial to think of the initiating and responding movements as *opposing* movements. The opposing movements influence each other both directly and indirectly by altering the environment in which each side operates. The opposing movement is a critical component in the structure of political opportunity the other side faces.

### The Emergence of Countermovements

Social movements generate countermovements when critical issues are put into play, and when the viability and necessity of countermobilization is evident. Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) argue that there are three conditions which promote the rise of countermovements: first, that the movement show signs of success; second, that the interests of some population are threatened by movement goals; and third, that political allies are available to aid oppositional mobilization.

### Movement Success

Movements generate opposition by generating political awareness concerning their issues of concern. Movements that show signs of succeeding, either by putting their issues on the public agenda or by influencing public policy, are the most likely to provoke countermovements (Berry, 1989). By boosting the public profile and the salience of an issue,
social protest can generate media interest, win the attention of those who make policy, an
generally put an issue into play (Walker, 1991). Protests movements can open a “policy
window,” creating opportunities for institutional action, which consecutively encourages a
wide range of actors to mobilize on the issue in a variety of venues (Kingdon, 1984; Meyer &
Staggenborg, 1996).

The relationship between movement success and the emergence of a
countermovement is curvilinear (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). Movements that have
achieved some success are most likely to provoke the creation of a countermovement, while
movements that do not appear to have the potential to change policy are unlikely to generate
countermovements. Activists are unlikely to view countermobilization in substantial
numbers, with all of the inherent risks and costs, as necessary without substantial evidence of
success on the part of a movement (Meyer, 1993). However, a movement that is able to win
policy reforms decisively, limiting the apparent prospects for subsequent reform, is also
unlikely to generate an extensive or protracted countermovement with any effect on the
political mainstream (Kingdon, 1984).

While Eisinger (1973) and Tilly (1978) viewed protest mobilization as a response to
partly open governmental structures, Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) refined this insight to
apply to particular issues. Individual movements make political claims on limited sets of
issues, responding to particular conjunctures of policies and political alignments. Those who
advocate specific policy alternatives may adopt the form of a social movement when they
believe that such an approach to be potentially efficacious (Troyer & Markle, 1983; Useem
& Zald, 1982). During periods when the relevant state structures are relatively stable
against dissent, opportunities vary across issues in response to changes in public policy
(Meyer, 1993). When aggrieved groups or movement entrepreneurs perceive that change is possible in a particular policy area, it is significantly more likely that they will attempt to mobilize activism (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). When an issue is “closed” and there is little or no opportunity for change to occur, movements and countermovements are unlikely to form.

**MOVEMENT THREATS TO EXISTING INTERESTS**

When a movement shows signs of success, others may see its gains as threats to their own interests. A policy response from the government intended as a concession to one group may threaten another and, in turn, provide an opportunity to mobilize those alarmed by the change (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). When the United States Supreme Court legalized abortion with the *Roe v. Wade* ruling in 1973, opponents of abortion who had not previously stepped forward flocked to the countermovement and joined antiabortion groups (Luker, 1984; Staggenborg, 1991). After civil rights movement challenges to schools segregation resulted in court-ordered busing in American cities, northern working-class whites, generally bystanders in earlier waves of civil rights conflicts, joined the fray as they saw their own interests being directly affected by this policy change (Useem, 1980). The creation of policies protecting and preserving wilderness areas and public lands have resulted in the mobilization of “wise use” and “property rights” countermovement organizations (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). Thus, policy success for one side, or even the appearance of likely success, produces new threats and grievances for opponents.

Different types of threats are likely to produce different types of countermovements. Some countermovements are based on a limited interest, while others are founded on issues symbolic of larger values and broader social changes (Markson, 1982). When movement
issues appear to symbolize an entire set of values and behaviors, they are likely to threaten a broader range of constituencies that will be attracted to countermovement action for difference reasons (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). Abortion, for example, has been used to symbolize social changes in sexual behavior and evolution of gender roles. The antiabortion movement in the U.S. includes both liberal Catholics, many of whom are concerned with abortion for strictly religious reasons, as well as fundamentalist Christians and others who oppose abortion not only because of the practice itself, but because they view it as a symptom of a national decline in “family values” (Luker, 1984; Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996; Staggenborg, 1987).

**ELITE ALLIES AND SPONSORS**

The availability of elite support is one important aspect of a favorable political opportunity structure (Tarrow, 1994). Elites, including government authorities and other powerful interests such as businesses, may choose to remain uninvolved in response to movement challenges, or they may repress or aid the movement in a variety of fashions (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). In some cases, elites may find opportunities to thwart a movement without mobilizing a countermovement. In other instances, elites may support or even sponsor the efforts of a countermovement. Elites’ decisions to support or initiate countermovements are affected by the positions of other elites, the possible courses of action, and the likelihood of success. Powerful interests, such as the nuclear power and tobacco industries, have often found that there are significant advantages to the social movement form and have initiated countermovement organizations (Troyer & Markle, 1989; Useem & Zald, 1982). However, these groups have met with limited success, in part due to their opponents obtaining elite allies of their own (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). Both
movements and countermovements generally require allies among elites, and when elites generate or support an effective countermovement it has the potential to prolong the conflict for many years rather than put an end to movement challenges.

**Implications**

It is important to understand countermovements in order to comprehend STOP ERA, and to appreciate how the relationship between the opposing forces impacts both the original movement and the countermovement. STOP ERA was created to oppose the pro-ERA movement, but its actions were also a catalyst for a “counter-countermovement” to arise in its opposition (Zald & Useem, 1987, p. 249). The original social movement existed to support the ERA; with the introduction of STOP ERA, proponents not only had to argue for the benefits of the ERA, but also against the arguments of STOP ERA. The failure of the ERA has been attributed to this division of attentions, and it is therefore necessary to appreciate the impact of a countermovement when considering the significance of STOP ERA (Mansbridge, 1986). This paper also posits that counter-narratives, soon to be discussed, are an essential function of countermovements. Therefore, in order to understand the fundamental argument of this essay, it is compulsory to possess a command of the definition and the function of a countermovement.

**COUNTER-NARRATIVE**

Fisher (1984) proposed a theory of human communication based on a conception of persons as inherent narrators. The so-called “narrative paradigm” synthesized two strands in rhetorical theory: the argumentative, persuasive theme and the literary, aesthetic theme. In an earlier work, Fisher (1984) indicated his intentions to move toward an alternative paradigm for human communication with the assumption that “humans as rhetorical beings
are as much valuing as they are reasoning animals” (p. 376), and in the conception of good reason as “those elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical” (p. 378). The narrative paradigm insists that human communication should be viewed as historical as well as situational, “as stories competing with other stories constituted by good reasons,” and as inevitably moral inducements (Fisher, 1984, p. 2). According to Fisher (1984), the narrative paradigm challenges the accepted wisdom that human communication must be an argumentative form, that attribution of reason is limited only to discourse marked by clearly identifiable modes of inference and implication, and that the standards for evaluation of rhetorical communication must be rational norms taken essentially from informal or formal logic. The narrative paradigm does not deny reason and rationality; “it reconstitutes them, making them amenable to all forms of human communication” (Fisher, 1984, p. 2).

Narrative and reasoning may potentially seem antithetical. Common knowledge tells us that poets tell stories, while scientists reason. However, a growing number of scholars believe that there is a logic to storytelling, and that public policy is often determined by the stories persuaders tell (Hart & Daughton, 2005). These stories are told in practical terms, often updating centuries-old mythologies to apply to modern life. Persuaders may opt to tell only snippets of stories, an anecdote here, an abbreviated fable there, “always moving listeners forward to some propositional conclusion” (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 88). Park-Fuller (2000) observed that, within certain situations, most narrative is intrinsically contrary; it is “part of a struggle. It ‘takes sides’” (p. 22). Narratives therefore advance persuasion by disarming their audiences by enchanting them with visions of possibilities, awakening dormant experiences and feelings within their audiences, and exposing, subtly, some sort of
propositional argument. Various studies, summarized by Hart and Daughton (2005), have shown that people reason differently in the presence of narrative; because rhetorical narrative is *narrative*, opponents find it hard to attack.

There is a dearth of research pertaining to counter-narratives available to scholars today. Originally introduced as “counterstories” by Nelson (1995), counter-narrative can be defined as “a story that contributes to the moral self-definition of its teller by undermining a dominant story, undoing it and retelling it in such a way as to invite new interpretations and conclusions” (p. 23). A counter-narrative, therefore, is simply a retelling or restructuring of a story in order to agree with the storyteller’s perspective. Counter-narratives allow the teller to “challenge and revise the paradigm” in which they are told; to reconfigure dominant stories which may have excluded or oppressed others within the community (Nelson, 1995, p. 24).

Nelson’s (1995) research originally focused on the “found” communities American feminists have created in order to be afforded a feeling of belonging, and to be able to exercise their right of choice. Nelson demonstrated “how a certain kind of narrative…told in a feminist community of choice, permits its tellers to reclaim as full citizens in good standing what is valuable about the ‘found’ communities of place in which they also must live” (p. 24). The narrative of which she speaks – the “counterstory” – allows for the expression of self-definition, and for the negotiation of self and life on independent terms. The dominant story need not be used; Nelson examines a community “where its members can come together to discern, construct, correct and celebrate the community’s story” (p. 24).

The communities Nelson (1995) analyzes are morally self-defining, and the members create the story collectively and democratically. However, Nelson makes a point of
emphasizing that these stories can become something more; “they can become counterstories – narratives of resistance and insubordination that allow communities of choice to challenge and revise the paradigm stories of the…communities in which they are embedded” (p.24).

As with other narratives of strong moral self-definition, counter-narratives are self-defining and capable of attending to difference, but they differ in that they are told for the specific purpose of resisting and undermining the dominant narrative. All dominant stories possess within themselves the possibility for their own undoing; “it is in the nature of a narrative never to close down completely the avenues for its own subversion” (p. 34). The counter-narrative’s author purposely uses their standpoint as “Other” to insert into the equilibrium certain details and moral concepts the dominant story may have ignored or underplayed, allowing for dissent to intensify from the interpretations and conclusions the dominant story invites (Nelson, 1995).

Counter-narratives, like dominant narratives, “offer a basis for group action that can have a lasting institutional effect” (Nelson, 1995, p. 35). The author of a counter-narrative “redescribes the dominant story, repudiates it for her- or himself, and sets a new course that commits her or him to certain values for the future” (Nelson, 1996, p. 98). Counter-narratives provide a method of alteration, or manipulation, of the dominant story in favor of the author or authors’ personal morality. If and when the dominant narrative fails to represent a community, the opportunity for a counter-narrative is presented; this also presents the opportunity for that community to try to adapt or attack the dominant narrative in order to replace it with the counter-narrative. Counter-narratives are able to “resist and undermine” the dominant narrative (Nelson, 1995, p. 35), by “evoking the established myths of the society,” absorbing elements from the initial movement’s ideology, and blending new
additions into societal myths, thus changing them, as Turner and Killian (1972) found in their research on countermovements (as quoted by Mottl, 1980, p. 628).

Counter-narrative theory has recently been adapted for use in political communication, Dionisopoulos (2009) discusses the Swift Boat drama of the 2004 Presidential election. In the article, Dionisopoulos (2009) examines how an organization – one matching the description of a countermovement – created a counter-narrative with “enough rhetorical force to stir controversy and ultimately damage Kerry’s campaign” (p. 488). Dionisopoulos (2009) applies Nelson’s (1995) research to the political arena, explaining that though the Swift Boat Veterans were not necessarily a marginalized group, they did create and publicize an alternate narrative – a counter-narrative – to the dominant content of the Kerry campaign. Through the examination of the Swift Boat drama, Dionisopoulos (2009) was able to “contribute specifically to our understanding of counter-narrative in politics and, more generally, to the discussion concerning negative political narratives” (p. 489).

**Implications**

If dominant narratives determine in a present moment what has previously been morally indeterminate, counter-narratives take what has been (temporarily) determined, undo it, and reconfigure it with a new moral significance (Nelson, 1995). “All dominant stories already contain within them the possibilities for this kind of undoing; it is the nature of narrative never to close down completely the avenues for its own subversion” (Nelson, 1995, p. 34). The construction, revision, and reinterpretation that are ongoing in dominant storytelling leave plenty of opportunities for counter-narratives to weave their way inside. STOP ERA took such an opportunity, and utilized the fertile ground of the dominant
narrative to nurture its own counter-narrative. This thesis postulates that, intrinsic to the function of a countermovement such as STOP ERA is the production of a counter-narrative, due to this inherent potential all movement narratives possess for their own undoing. The following chapter demonstrated the construction of a counter-narrative by a countermovement.
CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS

In *The Power of the Positive Woman* (1977), Phyllis Schlafly asks the question “is women’s lib truly liberating?” (book jacket). Schlafly, “credited with defeating the so-called Equal Rights Amendment in twenty states,” pronounces an emphatic No (Schlafly, 1977, book jacket). Rejecting the catchwords of the women’s movement – “liberation,” “sisterhood,” “Ms.,” “equal rights” – as frauds, Schlafly (1977) argues that these concepts and titles actually deprive women of their fulfillment and lead them down lonely paths of lost identity. The world and its opportunities belong not to the militant woman with her “strident demands for a gender-free society,” maintains Schlafly, but to the Positive Woman who achieves a sound perspective on life, then fixes her own personal priorities (Schlafly, 1977, p. 33). The Positive Woman is fully liberated from the “myths of the ‘liberation’ movement: the claim that there are no basic differences between the sexes, and the charge that American women have for two centuries been kept in serfdom by a conspiracy of male chauvinists” (Schlafly, 1977, book jacket).

Schlafly (1977) examines, and rejects, the radical objectives of the “libbers”: “their assault on the family, on education, on the English language, on the very integrity of womanhood” (Schlafly, 1977, book jacket). She explains the “false promises, the real aims, and the deconstructive potential of the Equal Rights Amendment” (Schlafly, 1977, book jacket). Schlafly (1977) composes “the manual that balanced women have been searching for”; a “handbook for fulfillment amid the maze of false dogmas and shifting values” (Schlafly, 1977, book jacket). In short, with her book and monthly reports Schlafly uses the
narrative of the proponents of the ERA to create a counter-narrative, explaining away the need for the ERA, and reinforcing the beliefs and values which are the foundation for her own story. Examining what this counter-narrative entails, exploring her arguments, and subsequently analyzing their function, will allow for a better understanding of the use of counter-narratives as a political and social strategy.

This chapter analyzes the rhetoric of Phyllis Schlafly and the STOP ERA countermovement to construct a counter-narrative. First, an analysis of the “Positive Woman” will be offered, assessing the position in society Schlafly (1977) deems appropriate for women. Secondly, I will examine the reasons STOP ERA provides for the rejection of the ERA, and Schlafly's interpretation of feminists' objectives as the foundation offered for that rejection. Lastly, an examination of the consequences of feminist goals and the passage of the ERA foretold by STOP ERA will be preformed, demonstrating the effect Schlafly believed these influences would have on the United States. This rhetoric was essential to the creation and promotion of STOP ERA, and helped account for the evolution of the countermovement. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the rhetoric of Schlafly’s counter-narrative, and to assess what it entailed.

**The Positive Woman**

In *The Power of the Positive Woman* (1977), Schlafly defines the purpose and function of an ideal Positive Woman. Like every human being born into this world, the Positive Woman has her share of sorrows and sufferings, of unfulfilled desires and bitter defeats. However, “she will never be crushed by life’s disappointments, because her positive mental attitude has built her an inner security that the actions of other people can never fracture” (Schlafly, 1977, book jacket). Rather than complaining and petitioning for social
change, the Positive Woman acquires power by first understanding the differences between men and women. Schlafly (1977) explains that the Positive Woman begins with the assumption that “the world is her oyster,” and “rejoices in the creative capability within her body and the powerful potential of her mind and spirit” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 11). She understands that men and women are different, and that those very differences provide the key to her success as a person and fulfillment as a woman. It is only when women begin to believe that they were somehow dealt a foul blow by being made female that it becomes necessary “to agitate and demonstrate and hurl demands on society in order to wrest from an oppressive male-dominated social structure the status that has been wrongfully denied to women through the centuries” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 11).

The Positive Woman, however, looks upon her femaleness and her femininity as part of her purpose, her potential, and her power. She rejoices that her body, as part of the plan of the Divine Architect, possesses a “capability for creativity that men can never have” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 13). Schlafly (1977) counsels that men and women must be partners rather than adversaries, each fulfilling their natural roles as designated by God. The Positive Woman understands that men were designed to provide protection and sustenance; while a woman’s body is designed to create and nurture, a man’s is designed for strength and support. Even science “has discovered that men and women are so innately different physically that their maleness or femaleness can be conclusively established by means of a simple skin test” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 14). The Positive Woman must remember the essential validity of the prayer “Lord, give me the strength to change what I can change, the serenity to accept what I cannot change, and the wisdom to discern the difference” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 14).
Schlafly (1977) bemoans that women’s liberationists expend their time and energy “erecting a make-believe world” in which they hypothesize that “if schooling were gender-free, and if the same money were spent on male and female sports programs, and if women were permitted to compete on equal terms, *then* they would prove themselves to be” the equals of men (Schlafly, 1977, p. 14, italics in original). Meanwhile, “the Positive Woman has put the ineradicable physical differences into her mental computer, programmed her plan of action, and is already on the way to personal achievement” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 14). While men may have a physical advantage, the Positive Woman knows that this does not doom her to a life of servility and subservience. The Positive Woman knows that she has a “complementary advantage which is at least as great – and, in the hands of a skillful woman, far greater” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 15). While a Positive Woman cannot defeat a man in a wrestling or boxing match, she can “motivate him, inspire him, encourage him, teach him, restrain him, reward him, and have power over him that he can never achieve over her with all his muscle” through the use of sex (Schlafly, 1977, p. 17). The Positive Woman recognizes the fact that, “when it comes to sex, women are simply not the equals of men”; they are, in fact, more powerful (Schlafly, 1977, p. 17). How or whether a Positive Woman exercises her power is determined solely by the way she alone defines her goals and develops her skills.

Schlafly (1977) believes that women are different from men, too, in how they deal with the fundamentals of life, Schlafly (1977) tells her reader: “men are philosophers, women are practical, and ‘twas ever thus” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 19). Men philosophize about how life began and where we are heading; women are concerned about feeding the kids today. According to Schlafly (1977), “women don’t take naturally to a search for the intangible and
the abstract” (p. 19). The Positive Woman knows whom she is and where she is going, and she will reach her goal because the longest journey starts with a very practical first step. Where men are “discursive, logical, abstract, or philosophical,” women tend to be “emotional, personal, practical, or mystical” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 20). Each set of qualities is vital and compliments the other; it is up to the Positive Woman to view her role as a choice and an opportunity, rather than some kind of punishment.

**Choosing Options and Opportunities**

According to Schlafly (1977), choosing to be a Positive woman opens the American woman up to a whole host of favorable options and opportunities which would otherwise be unavailable to her. The Positive Woman has always had power and influence that were the envy of men (Schlafly, 1977). But while, in the past, her achievements were often limited by law, by custom, or by the daily drudgery of “woman’s work,” the Positive Woman in America today “has a near-infinite opportunity to control her own destiny, to reach new heights of achievement, and to motivate and influence others” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 29).

According to Schlafly (1977), “the Positive Woman spends her time, ingenuity, and efforts seizing her opportunities – not whining about past injustices” (p. 30). The American woman today is “guaranteed entrée on the escalator to achievement by laws, by bureaucratic regulations, by court decisions, by the increased receptivity toward women in business and the professions, and by the reduced responsibilities of women in what has been traditionally known as women’s work” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 30). Schlafly’s (1977) vision of the American woman is a person of power, with little standing between herself and any opportunity before her.

According to Schlafly (1977), “American women are especially fortunate to be the
beneficiaries of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which accords a status to women unknown in the rest of the world” (p. 33). Our civilization has developed laws and customs that, since women must bear the physical consequences of the sex act, require men to assume other consequences (Schlafly, 1977). These laws and customs decree that a man must carry his share by physical protection and financial support of his wife and children, and also by “a code of behavior that benefits and protects both the woman and the children” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 33). Our respect for the family as the basic unit of society, which is firmly ingrained in the laws and customs of our Judeo-Christian civilization, is “the single greatest achievement in the entire history of women’s rights” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 33). According to Schlafly (1977), “it assures women the precious right to keep and care for her own baby and to be supported and protected in the enjoyment of watching her baby grow and develop” (p. 33; 1973f).

Rather than needing additional legal protections, Schlafly (1977) asserts, “American women are the beneficiaries of a tradition of special respect for women that flowered during the Christian age of chivalry” (p. 33; 1977). “The honor and respect paid to Mary, the Mother of Christ, resulted in a new gallantry of treatment of all women” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 33).

Choosing to assume this traditional role of wife and mother, then, must be viewed as an opportunity rather than a hindrance (Schlafly, 1977). Women now have the option of choosing this role, and as such the position deserves more honor now than ever before. Schlafly (1977) turns the pro-ERA narrative against itself, presenting what they deem an unsatisfactory life as a divine option.

Schlafly (1977) places emphasis on the privilege and reverence women are granted as a result of their role as wives and mothers. The respect women receive is not just lip service paid by politicians to “God, Motherhood, and the Flag”; it is not, “as some youthful agitators
seem to think,” just a matter of opening doors for women, seeing that they are seated first, carrying their bundles, and helping them in and out of vehicles (Schlafly, 1977, p. 33). These are merely the superficial trappings of a total attitude toward women which expresses itself in many more intangible ways, according to Schlafly (1977). While in other, less enlightened societies, “men strut around wearing feathers and beads and hunting and fishing,” leaving the women to do all of the “ tiresome, manual drudgery,” this is not the American way (Schlafly, 1977, p. 34). In America, “one of the first significant purchases a man makes is a ring for his bride, and the largest financial investment of his life is a home for her to live in” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 34). American husbands work hours of overtime to pay premiums on life insurance policies to provide for their wives’ comfort when they are widows – “benefits in which the husbands will never share” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 34). Men work to serve women in the America, and the traditional role of women affords an amount of esteem that could never be achieved by desecrating those established values. The choice to make is obvious, and Schlafly’s counter-narrative persuasively presents these time-tested roles in an utterly appealing and beneficial light, glossing over or negating any issues the pro-ERA narrative may have raised.

**Marriage and Motherhood**

Schlafly (1977) asserts that the career of marriage and motherhood is the ultimate goal for the Positive Woman. While the women’s liberation movement “paints marriage as slavery, the home as a prison, the husband as he oppressor, family as an anachronism no longer relevant to woman’s happiness, and children as the daily drudgery from which the modern woman must be freed,” Schlafly (1977) views the housewife as a “home executive: planning, organizing leading, coordinating, and controlling” (p. 46). She has the authority to
set her own schedule and standards, and has the freedom of choice to engage in everything from children to civic work, politics to gardening. “What man on a job can do that?” (Schlaflly, 1977, p. 46).

While marriage and motherhood may not be for every woman, before rejecting it out of hand young women should give it fair consideration as one of her available options (Schlaflly, 1977). A happy marriage is the perfect vehicle for the Positive Woman, Schlafly (1977) explains: “Marriage and motherhood give a woman new identity and the opportunity for all-round fulfillment as a woman” (Schlaflly, 1977, p.47). If you are looking for security – emotional, social, or financial – “marriage and motherhood are the most reliable security the world can offer” (p. 47). Searching for satisfaction in your career? “No career in the world offers this reward at such an early age as motherhood,” Schlafly (1977) asserts (p. 47). While it may take decades to achieve success in the business world, a mother reaps that reward within months of her labor when she proudly shows off her healthy and happy baby. “She can have the satisfaction of doing her job well – and being recognized for it,” quips Schlafly (1977, p. 47).

If you look upon your home as a cage, Schlafly (1977) asserts, you will find yourself just as imprisoned in an office or a factory: “The flight from the home is a flight from yourself, from responsibility, from the nature of woman, in pursuit of false hopes and fading illusions” (Schlaflly, 1977, p. 49). According to Schlafly (1977), “if you complain about servitude to a husband, servitude to a boss will be more intolerable” (p. 49). Everyone in the world has a boss of some kind, Schlaflly (1977) argues; “it is easier for most women to achieve a harmonious working relationship with a husband than with a foreman, supervisor, or office manager” (p. 49). Schafly’s (1977) counter-narrative illustrates the desirability of
the home over that of the workplace, though she neglects the fact that your boss rarely lives with you and shares your life the way a husband would.

The Positive Woman, Schlafly (1977) points out, “recognizes that there is a valid and enduring purpose behind the recognition of different roles for men and women” in the home, which is that “a family cannot be run by committee” (p. 50). The experience of the ages, she explains, has taught us that if a marriage is to be a successful institution it must have an ultimate decision maker, and that is the husband. Seen in this light, “the laws that give the husband the right to establish the domicile of the marriage and to give his surname to his children are good laws designed to keep the family together” (p. 50).

According to Schlafly’s (1977) counter-narrative, if a woman does not want to live in her husband’s home, or doesn’t want to give up her maiden name, “she is not entitled to the legal rights of a wife” (p. 50). Those “equal rights” are simply incompatible with a happy lifetime marriage. While jobs outside the home may provide a woman with extra money or activities, Schlafly (1977) deems it “ludicrous to suggest that they are more self-fulfilling than the daily duties of a wife and mother in the home” (p. 51). Schlafly (1977) contends, “after twenty years of diapers and dishes, a mother can see the results of her own handiwork in the good citizen she has produced and trained. After twenty years of faithful work in the business world, you are lucky if you have a good watch to show for your efforts” (p. 52). Schlafly (1977) acknowledges the possible necessity of working outside the home, but reiterates over and over again the favorability of staying inside the home and choosing a career as a wife and mother instead.

A happy marriage is truly a pearl of great price, but it isn’t something to be discovered by searching in faraway places. Nor is it like a lucky strike for oil and gold. As
Schlaflly (1977) explains, “it is like a garden that yields a good crop when the seed is planted and the ground is cultivated regularly” (p. 54). According to Schlaflly (1977), for a woman to build a happy marriage, “she does not need beauty, a good figure, gorgeous gams, a high IQ, a dumb look, money or popularity with other men” (p. 54) While those qualities may make a man look around and notice her, they will not build or hold a lasting relationship. A wife must appreciate and admire her husband, Schlaflly (1977) explains: “Whereas a woman’s chief emotional need is active (i.e., to love), a man’s prime emotional need is passive (i.e., to be appreciated or admired)” (p. 54). The Positive Woman recognizes this fundamental difference and builds her male/female relationship accordingly. Schlaflly (1977) asserts, “she knows that this does not in any sense make her inferior, but that it is one key to personal fulfillment for both herself and her husband” (p. 54).

Schlaflly (1977) counsels us that in order to make a marriage work a wife must make her husband “feel like a man – and always remember that she is a woman” (p. 55). The counter-narrative is constructed in such a way so as to make the established roles of men and women those that will produce the most success, with no negative consequences. Asks Schlaflly (1977), “is this degrading to the wife? Humiliating? Subservient? Or any of the other extravagant liberationist adjectives? How ridiculous!” (p. 55). It is simply the application of the Golden Rule with a simple male/female variation. “A satisfying and rewarding relationship between a man and a woman can last through the years only if she is willing to give him the appreciation and the admiration his manhood craves” (p. 55). And if this is the case, the only logical option for a woman is to accept her place within the home, holding a child and caring for her husband. Schlaflly’s counter-narrative undercuts the liberationist ideals of independence and self-sufficiency, presenting a narrative which leaves
only the option for marriage and motherhood if one is to obtain happiness.

**FEMINIST OBJECTIVES**

According to Schlafly (1977), the women’s liberationist is imprisoned by her own negative view of herself and of her place in the world around her. Schlafly (1977) offers the example of an advertisement designed by the National Organization for Women (NOW), which was run in many newspapers and magazines and as a spot announcement on television. The advertisement showed a curly-headed baby girl, accompanied by the caption: “This healthy, normal baby has a handicap. She was born female” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 11). According to Schlafly (1977), this is the “self-articulated dog-in-the-manger, chip-on-the-shoulder, fundamental dogma” of the women’s liberation movement (p. 11). Someone – it is not clear who, perhaps God, perhaps the “Establishment,” perhaps a conspiracy of male chauvinist pigs – dealt women a foul blow by making them female (Schlafly, 1977; 1982c; 1982d). It is the very nature of the women’s liberation movement, therefore, to incite conflict situations – within the legislature, in the courts, in the schools, in industry – with man targeted as the enemy (Schlafly, 1974c; 1977; 1982c). According to Schlafly (1977), “confrontation replaces cooperation as the watchword of all relationships” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 12).

One of the most significant dogmas of the women’s liberationists is that, of all the injustices perpetrated upon women through the centuries, “the most oppressive is the cruel fact that women have babies and men do not” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 12; 1982c). Explains Schlafly (1977; 1982c; 1982d), within the confines of the women’s liberationist ideologies, the abolition of this overriding inequality of women becomes the primary goal. “This goal must be achieved at any and all costs” – to the woman herself, to the baby, to the family, and
to society (Schlafly, 1977, p. 12). Women must be made equal to men in their ability to not become pregnant, and not to be expected to care for babies they may bring into this world (Schlafly, 1973i; 1975e; 1975h; 1978b; 1982c). As Schlafly (1977) asserts, “this is why women’s liberationists are compulsively involved in the drive to make abortion and child-care centers for all women, regardless of religion or income, both socially acceptable and government-financed” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 12; 1974i; 1978b; 1982c).

If man is targeted as the enemy, Schlafly (1977) posits, and the ultimate goal of women’s liberation is independence from men and the avoidance of pregnancy and its consequences, “then lesbianism is logically the highest form in the ritual of women’s liberation” (p. 12). The Positive Woman will never travel that dead-end road; “it is self-evident to the Positive Woman that the female body with its baby-producing organs was not designed by a conspiracy of men but by the Divine Architect of the human race” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 12). Those who think it is unfair that women have babies, whereas men cannot, will have to take up their complaint with God, because “no other power is capable of changing that fundamental fact” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 12; 1973i; 1875h; 1979d). Another feature of the woman’s natural role is the obvious fact that women can breast-feed babies and men cannot, explains Schlafly (1977). This functional role was not imposed by conspiratorial males seeking to burden women with confining chores, but “must be recognized as part of the plan of the Divine Architect for the survival of the human race through the centuries and in the countries that know no pasteurization of milk or sterilization of bottles” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 13). According to Schlafly’s counter-narrative, it becomes obvious that the narrative espoused by the women’s liberation movement is counter to the natural and divine design of the human race, and its tenets are actually potentially harmful. These concerns are central to
the objectives of STOP ERA, and including them in the counter-narrative allows for others that share them to find a voice.

The Five Principles

Schlafly (1975g, 1977; 1982c) asserts that when the women’s liberationists enter the political arena to promote legislation and litigation in pursuit of their goals, their specific demands are based on five principles. First, they demand that a “gender-free” rule be applied to every federal and state law, bureaucratic regulation, educational institution, and expenditure of public funds (Schlafly, 1975g; 1977; 1982c). Based on their dogma that there is no real difference between men and women (except in sex organs), “they demand that males and females have identical treatment” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 21; 1979h). Thus, “if fathers are not expected to stay home and care for their infant children, then neither should the mothers be expected to do so” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 21). Therefore, it becomes the duty of the government to provide childcare centers to relieve mothers of that unfair and unequal burden (Schlafly, 1975h; 1977). The women’s lib dogma demands that the courts treat sex as a “suspect” classification – just as race is now treated – so that no difference of treatment or separation between the sexes will ever be permitted, “no matter how reasonable or how much it is desired by reasonable people” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 21; 1982c).

Schlafly (1977) argues that the “nonsense of these militant demands” was illustrated by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) ruling in July, 1976, that all public school “functions such as father-son or mother-daughter breakfasts” would be prohibited because this “would be subjecting students to separate treatment” (pp. 21-22; 1974f). It was announced that violations would lead to a cutoff of federal assistance or court action by the Justice Department (Schlafly, 1974f; 1977; 1981d; 1982b). NOW immediately
reinforced this decision, claims Schlafly (1977), declaring that such events as fashion shows, softball games, banquets, and breakfasts are sex-discriminatory and must be eliminated (Schlafly, 1975g; 1979b; 1981d). According to Schlafly (1977), it is clear that “a prohibition against your right to make any difference or separation between the sexes anytime anywhere is a primary goal of the women’s liberation” (p. 22). The goal of equality is ignored by Schlafly’s (1977) narrative; the only acknowledged aspiration is creating a neutered society.

Second, Schlafly (1977) explains that the women’s lib legislative goals “seek an irrational mandate of equality at the expense of justice” (p. 23; 1975g; 1979). The fact, Schlafly (1977) counsels us, is that “equality cannot always be equated with justice, and may sometimes even be highly unjust” (p. 23). If we have absolutely equal treatment in regards to taxes, she explains, then everyone would pay the same income tax, or perhaps the same rate of income tax, regardless of the size of the income (Schlafly, 1977; 1981b; 1981e; 1981f). If we had absolutely equal treatment in regard to federal spending programs, we would have to eliminate welfare, low-income housing benefits, food stamps, government scholarships, and many other programs designed to benefit low-income citizens (Schlafly, 1973c; 1974a; 1977; 1981b). Were there absolutely equal treatment in regard to age, then seventeen-year-olds, or even ten-year-olds, would be permitted to vote, and we would have to eliminate Social Security unless all personas received the same benefits that only those over sixty-two receive now (Schlafly, 1974h; 1977; 1981e). Though these are not the goals of the women’s movement, that fact is not important to the construction of Schlafly’s (1977) counter-narrative. According to Schlafly (1977), “our legislators, our administrative departments, and our courts have always had – and still retain – the discretion to make reasonable differences in treatment based on age, income, or economic situation” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 23;
Schlaflly’s (1977) counter-narrative argues that “it makes no sense to deprive us of the ability to make reasonable distinctions based on sex that reasonable men and women want” (p. 23).

Third, Schlafly (1977) asserts, the women’s liberation movement demands that women be given the benefit of “reverse discrimination.” Schlafly (1975g; 1977) argues that this is mutually exclusive with the principle of equal opportunity for all. “Reverse discrimination is based on the theory that ‘group rights’ take precedence over individual rights, and that ‘reverse discrimination’ (variously called ‘preferential treatment,’ ‘remedial action,’ or ‘affirmative action’) should be imposed in order to compensate some women today for alleged past discriminations against other women,” Schlafly (1977) asserts (p. 23). While the word “quota” is avoided by women libbers, it amounts to the same thing (Schlafly, 1975g; 1981f).

While no one would argue that “because many years ago blacks and women were denied the right to vote, we should now compensate by giving them an extra vote or two, or by barring white men from voting at all” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 23). “But that is substantively what women’s liberationists are demanding”, argues Schlafly (1977, p. 23; 1975g) – and getting by federal court orders – in education, employment, and politics when they ask for “affirmative action” to remedy past discrimination. “The Positive Woman supports equal opportunity for individuals of both sexes, as well as of all faiths and races,” Schlafly (1977) contends (p. 24). She rejects the theories of reverse discrimination and “group rights.” “It does no good for the woman who may have been discriminated against twenty-five years ago to know that an unqualified woman today receives preferential treatment at the expense of a qualified man” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 24). Explains Schlafly (1977), “only the vindictive radical
would support such a policy of revenge” (p. 24).

Fourth, the women’s liberation movement is based on the unproven theory that uniformity should replace diversity – or, “in simpler language, the federalization of all remaining aspects of our life” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 24). “The militant women libbers demand that all educational institutions conform to federally determined rules about sex discrimination,” despite the fact that there is absolutely no evidence that HEW bureaucrats can do a better job of regulating our schools and colleges, Schlafly (1977, p. 24; 1973g; 1974f; 1976; 1978a; 1981d; 1982b) explains. Nor is there any evidence, Schlafly’s (1973g; 1974f; 1979e; 1981e; 1981f) counter-narrative asserts, “that individuals, or women, or society as a whole, would be better off under a uniform system enforced by the full power of the federal government than they would be under a free and competitive system, under local control, using diverse methods and regulations” (1977, p. 24). “It is hard to see why anyone would want to put more power into the hands of federal bureaucrats,” Schlafly (1977) bemoans, “who cannot cope with the problems they already have” (p. 24).

The militant women demand that HEW regulations enforce a strict gender-free uniformity on all schools and colleges (Schlafly, 1973g; 1975c; 1977; 1981d; 1982b). Everything from sports to glee clubs must be coed, regardless of local customs and wishes (Schlafly, 1975a; 1975d). The militants, Schlafly (1977; 1979h; 1982b; 1982c) exclaims, deplore the differences from state to state in the laws governing marriage and divorce. Yet, she asks, “does anyone think our nation would be improved if we were made subject to a national divorce law devised by HEW?” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 24). “The Positive Woman rejects the theory that Washington, D.C., is the fountainhead of all wisdom and professional skill,” Schlafly (1977) asserts (p. 24; 1978a; 1979e; 1979f; 1981e). Schlafly’s (1977)
counter-narrative “supports the principle of leaving all possible control and discretion in the hands of local school and college officials” (p. 24).

Fifth, “the women’s liberation movement pushes its proposals on the premise that everything must be neutral as between morality and immorality, and as between the institution of the family and alternate life styles” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 25; 1974g; 1974d; 1978b). For example, Schlafly (1974g; 1977; 1978b; 1982b; 1982c) shares, that homosexuals and lesbians should have just as much right to teach in the schools and to adopt children as anyone else, and that illegitimate babies and abortions by married or single mothers should be accepted as normal behavior for teachers – and funded by public money. Schlafly (1977) cites the HEW regulation on sex discrimination, which implements the Education Amendments of 1972, as “a good example of the rabid determination of the militant radicals to push every law and regulation to the far-out limit of moral neutrality” (p. 25). Although the federal statute simply prohibits sex discrimination, the HEW regulation additionally requires that:

1. Any medical benefit program administered by a school or college pay for abortions for married and unmarried students,
2. prohibits any school or college from refusing to employ or from firing an unmarried pregnant teacher or a woman who has had, or who plans to have, an abortion, and
3. prohibits any school or college from refusing admission to any student who has had, or plans to have, an abortion.

Abortion, Schlafly (1977) informs her audience, is referred to by the code words “termination of pregnancy” (p.25).

This HEW regulation is “illogical, immoral, and unauthorized by any reasonable reading of the 1972 Education Act” (Schlafly, 1977, p 25; 1974a; 1974f; 1974g; 1974i; 1978b). And yet the HEW regulation became federal law on July 18, 1975, after being signed by the President and accepted by Congress (Schlafly, 1977; 1981e). The Positive
Woman, according to Schlafly (1977), “believes that our educational institutions have not only the right, but the obligation, to set minimum standards of moral conduct at the local level” (p. 25). Schlafly (1977) proclaims that schools and colleges have no right to use our public money “to promote conduct that is offensive to the religious and moral values of parents and taxpayers” (p. 25). Her message is clear: if the feminists’ objectives are realized, our society will become a cesspool of neutered, immoral, and disenfranchised sinners. Making this concern public allows others to consider it and adopt it as their own, further strengthening the countermovement. Schlafly uses the words and deeds of the ERA proponents as the foundation for her counter-narrative, affirming Nelson’s (1995) conjecture that “all dominant stories already contain within them the possibilities for this kind of undoing” (p. 34). Though Schlafly (1977) fails to quote any of the supposed “women’s libbers” directly, she does offer quotations from those who disagree with the women’s movement, making her argument seem as though it is widely supported and credible without allowing her opposition a voice.

**THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE ERA**

Perhaps the most potent aspect of Schlafly’s (1977) counter-narrative is that the “fundamental error of the Equal Rights Amendment” is that it will mandate gender-free, rigid, absolute equality of treatment of men and women under every federal and state law, bureaucratic regulation, and court decision, and in every aspect of our lives (p. 68). This is what the militant women’s liberationists want and are working for with passionate and persistent determination: “total control over every facet of our lives, and the removal of all morality and righteousness from them” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 68; 1973a; 1973b; 1973d; 1979f; 1981e; 1981f). The Positive Woman, says Schlafly (1977), opposes the ERA because she
knows “it would be harmful to women, to men, to children, to the family, to local self
government, and to society as a whole” (p. 68). Pro-ERA speakers do little more than “recite
a tiresome litany of obsolete complaints about women not having the right to vote, not being
able to serve on juries, and not being admitted to medical schools” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 69).
All those past discriminations were remedied years ago, or decades ago, or even generations
ago; “they have no relevance to present-day America,” according to Schlafly (1977, p. 69).
Pro-ERA speakers paint a picture of American women in “serfdom,” treated like “chattel,”
and trampled on as “second-class citizens,” and then offer the Equal Rights Amendment as
the remedy for an alleged oppression that “exists only in their distorted minds” (Schlafly,
1977, p. 69).

Some pro-ERA speakers even claim that the United States Constitution does not treat
women as “persons” (Schlafly, 1977). Schlafly (1977) fails to quote these speakers directly
but continues based on her own conjecture and the vague statements of others in opposition
to the ERA. The facts are clear, asserts Schlafly (1977), that the United States Supreme
Court specifically declared in the 1875 case of Minor v. Happersett that women are
“persons” as well as “citizens” under the constitution, including the Fourteenth Amendment,
entitled to all the rights and privileges of persons and citizens except the right to vote – and
women received that right in 1920 under the Nineteenth Amendment, Schlafly (1977)
reminds us. It is too bad that some women believe such falsehoods; for this is the way the
women’s liberation movement “deliberately degrades the homemaker and hacks away at her
sense of self-worth and pride and pleasure in being female” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 69).
Schlafly’s counter-narrative presents the women’s liberation movement as being deceitful,
and cites specific examples of what she asserts are lies as an incentive to adopt her version of
As a function of counter-narrative, publicizing this apprehension allows for others who feel disenfranchised by the women’s liberation movement to join the effort to defeat it – thus creating and intensifying the countermovement.

**Effect on the Family**

Schlaflly (1977) continues her argument against the ERA by extolling the negative effects its passage would have on the American family. “Americans have the immense good fortune to live in a civilization that respects the family as the basic unit of society” (Schlaflly, 1977, p. 70; 1974a; 1978b). This respect is not merely the result of social custom, she explains; we have a great tradition of federal and state laws specifically designed to protect the institution of the family (Schlaflly, 1977). These laws are not for the purpose of giving one sex preference over the other, counsels Schlaflly (1977): “They were not born of oppression or discrimination, but of vision and enlightened judgment. They are designed to keep the family together and to assure the child a home in which to grow up” (Schlaflly, 1977, p. 70; 1978b).

These laws are highly beneficial to the wife (Schlaflly, 1977). Based on the fundamental fact of life that women have babies and men don’t – a fact, Schlaflly (1977) reminds us, which no legislation or agitation can erase – these laws make it the obligation of the husband to support his wife financially and provide her with a home. Since God ordained that women have babies, our laws “properly and realistically establish that men must provide financial support for their wives and children” (Schlaflly, 1977, p. 71). The women’s liberation movement has positioned itself in total opposition to the entire concept of “roles,” “but in doing so they are opposing Mother Nature herself,” warns Schlaflly (1977, p. 71; 1978b; 1979d). While there currently exists a network of laws giving wives the legal right to
be full-time wives and mothers, in their own homes, taking care of their own babies, “the ERA would invalidate all the state laws that require the husband to support his wife and family” (Schlaflly, 1977, p. 72). With the addition of the ERA, the Constitution would prohibit any law that imposes an obligation on one sex that it does not impose equally on the other (Schlaflly, 1973f; 1973i; 1977; 1979d). Thus, points out Schlaflly (1973i; 1977; 1979d), if the ERA were to ever become a part of the Constitution, all laws that say the husband must support the wife would immediately become unconstitutional. Schlaflly’s (1977) evidence of this assertion are a handful of state laws preemptively composed to comply with the ERA which do, in fact, remove the words “husband” and “wife” from their text. Instead, these laws require the more profitable or capable spouse to provide for the less-so, removing gender from the equation entirely.

In liberationist jargon, laws specifically protecting wives are “sexist,” argues Schlaflly (1977). However, the ERA would impose a constitutionally mandated legal equality in all matters, including family support. This would be grossly unfair to a woman, Schlaflly’s (1973f; 1973i; 1977; 1978b) counter-narrative argues, because it would impose on her the double burden of financial obligation plus motherhood and homemaking. “ERA proponents cannot dispute the fact that the ERA will require all marriage laws to impose equality of financial obligation on husband and wife,” contends Schlaflly (1977, p. 73). The only dispute is over how that equality will be interpreted.

The new equality rule may be a requirement that the husband and wife each contribute 50 percent of the income required to support the family, or that each spouse take a paying job for half of each week, or half of each month, or half of each year to provide the financial support of the family (Schlaflly, 1977). Schlaflly (1977) asserts, “some pro-ERA
lawyers have tried to argue that under the sex-neutral language required by the ERA the courts will hold that the *principal wage-earning spouse* must support the spouse that stays in the home” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 75; 1973f; 1973i; 1978b). But this would reduce the wife’s rights even further, proclaims Schlafly (1977). Taking the pro-ERA argument, this means that, “if the husband is lazy and wants to spend his time drinking and watching television, and the wife is a conscientious woman who takes a job to feed her hungry children, then she, as the ‘principal wage-earning spouse,’ would acquire the obligation to support her lazy husband,” and be subject to criminal penalties if she failed to support him and pay all of his debts (Schlafly, 1977, pp. 75-76). And while some ERA proponents argue that husbands support their wives out of love, and not because of the law, “a relationship that is based exclusively on love, or on sex compatibility, is not apt to survive all those years ‘for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death we do part’” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 76). The high divorce rate proves that many husbands have stopped loving their wives; “should a man have the legal right to stop supporting his faithful wife of twenty or thirty years by the simple expedient of saying, ‘I don’t love her anymore’?” asks Schlafly (1977, p. 76).

Duty is essential to the preservation of the family, asserts Schlafly (1977). “The moral, social, and legal evil of [the] ERA is that it proclaims as a constitutional mandate that the husband no longer has the primary duty to support his wife and children” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 76). If the ERA were passed men would no longer have the obligation of providing a home for their wives and families (Schlafly, 1973f; 1973i; 1977). Schlafly (1977) offers the example of a 1974 incident, when a husband ejected his wife from their home and replaced her with a Playboy bunny. The wife had no difficulty obtaining a court order requiring her
husband to remove the bunny and restore the wife to her rightful place in the home. While there may be husbands who would like the company of a Playboy bunny as a temporary diversion, “the law is on the side of the wife – so long as [the] ERA remains unratified” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 80). Additionally, if the ERA were ratified, the aged and faithful mother, who has made her family her lifetime career, would have no legal right to be supported in her senior years (Schlafly, 1973i; 1974a; 1974c; 1977). Under present state laws wives and widows have a long list of tangible superior property and financial rights that would be wiped out by the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (Schlafly, 1973f; 1973i; 1977; 1978b; 1979a). “If you think that the family is a social value to be cherished and encouraged,” cautions Schlafly (1977), “then the existing laws are good” – and the ERA is bad (p. 93). Schlafly’s fear is catching, and it is hard to defend against the panic her counter-narrative inspires. If you love your family and don’t want to lose it, the choice is clear – you must join the countermovement and fight against the ERA.

**Dangers to Public Safety**

In business, professional, intellectual, and academic pursuits, “women can compete equally with men because they are just as smart” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 112). In jobs that require physical labor, “women cannot compete equally with men because their physical strength is not equal” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 112; 1973e). In recognition of the physical differences between women and men – “which are self-evident to everyone except women’s liberationists” – our country has developed a fabric of protective labor legislation (Schlafly, 1977, p. 112). This consists of the network of state laws designed to give women employees particular benefits and protections not granted to men. Women and unions have worked hard over the course of several generation, Schlafly (1977) explains, “to achieve such legislation
to protect and benefit women who are required to join the labor force because of economic necessity, but who have no academic or professional qualifications” (p. 113). If the ERA is ever ratified, we are warned, all such protective labor laws will be wiped out in one stroke (Schlafly, 1973c; 1977).

There may be some dispute about what equality means in some of the domestic labor fields, but there is no dispute about what it means in relation to the draft and the military (Schlafly, 1973b; 1977; 1979c; 1979g; 1980a; 1980b; 1980c; 1980d; 1980e; 1980f; 1982c; 1982a). The ERA would “positively make women subject to the draft and to all military assignments on an equal basis with men,” because everything to do with the military is a matter of federal law or regulation, and the ERA would prohibit any difference of treatment (Schlafly, 1977, p. 96). Such a radical change would be “contrary to present laws, to our customs and mores, and to the wishes of the overwhelming majority of American citizens” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 96; 1973b; 1979c; 1980a; 1980b; 1980c; 1980d; 1980e; 1980f; 1982c; 1982a). This topic has more issues of *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* dedicated to it than any other, for it is crucial to the construction of Schlafly’s counter-narrative. “The whole argument [in favor of the ERA] is ridiculous on its face,” Schlafly (1977) proclaims (p. 98). The ERA is presented as a constitutional amendment that will benefit women – but “one has to be kidding to call it a step up for women to make them subject to involuntary military conscription and assignment to combat duty” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 98). According to Schlafly (1977), those militant feminists who speak so enthusiastically in favor of the ERA are “always either over draft age, or have no daughters, or are too young to know what war is all about, or concede that they personally will be contentious objectors” (p. 98; 1973bl; 1979c; 1980a; 1980c; 1982a). She asserts that while they will exercise their freedom of choice to
avoid military service, they are all too willing to inflict involuntary military duty on all other eighteen-year-old girls.

When ERA proponents plead their case before women’s groups or in the press – “where they are not subject to vigorous cross-examination” – they sing an entirely different tune (Schlafly, 1977, p. 98). “By sheer hypocrisy of argument,” ERA proponents have been able to line up many uninformed women in support of such radical proposals (Schlafly, 1977, p. 98; 1973b; 1979c; 1980a). Schlafly (1977) breaks down several of the “foolish and deceitful” arguments made by ERA proponents attempting to persuade the general public, labeling them “false arguments,” and explaining what the reality is; at least in terms of her counter-narrative (p. 98-99). First, Schlafly (1977) asserts, the ERA proponents argue that “Congress now has the power to draft women” (p. 99). This is a prime example, Schlafly (1977) claims, of the “word-chicanery” practiced by ERA proponents. While it is true that Congress now has the power to exempt women (Schlafly, 1973b; 1977; 1980a; 1980b). This is the way the overwhelming majority of American men and women want it (Schlafly, 1977). If the ERA is ratified, however, Congress will no longer have the option. Congress will be constitutionally compelled to draft women on an absolutely equal basis with men whenever conscription is reinstated (Schlafly, 1977; 1980f; 1982a).

Another deception, explains Schlafly (1977), is the claim that “there is no draft; we have a volunteer Army” (p. 99). This shows the naiveté of the ERA proponents who “blithely assume that we have now achieved a utopia in which we will have no more wars and no more conscription” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 99). According to Schlafly (1977), “logic, history, and common sense teach us otherwise” (p. 99; 1979c; 1980c). During most of the 33
years that we drafted young men in this century, politicians were promising peace (Schlafly, 1977). In the years prior to Vietnam, no one could have predicted that we would fight that war with conscripts for eight long years (Schlafly, 1977). “It is only reasonable to assume that we will have future wars and conscription despite all promises and protestations to the contrary,” asserts Schlafly (1977, p. 99).

“All women will not be drafted; mothers will be exempt” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 99). Of all arguments used by ERA proponents, “this is the most hypocritical” (Schlafly, 1997, p. 99). “No one ever claimed that ‘all’ women would be drafted,” argues Schlafly (1977, p. 99). If you are over draft age, or if you have only one eye or one leg, of course you will not be drafted (Schlafly, 1973b; 1977; 1982a). But girls of the proper age and in good physical condition will be drafted and sent into combat exactly like men (Schlafly, 1973b; 1977; 1980b; 1982a). The extent of exemptions varies with the national emergency (Schlafly, 1977). According to Schlafly (1977), “when the emergency calls for drafting fathers up through age thirty-five – as was done during World War II – the ERA will require mothers to be drafted on exactly the same basis” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 99).

Schlafly (1977) rejects the feminists’ claim that “we need [the] ERA so women in the military can get GI benefits equal to those given men” (p. 99). Women who serve in the military now have the best of both worlds, claims Schlafly (1977). They have the same pay, the same ranks, the same educational benefits, the same housing loans, and the same fringe benefits as men (Schlafly, 1973b; 1977; 1980f; 1982a). Schlafly (1977) claims that “in 1975 the United States Supreme Court even upheld promotion rights for women that are superior to those of men” (p. 99). At the same time, women are protected against being sent into combat and from assignment to some of the more high-risk and unpleasant tasks (Schlafly,
Schlafly (1977) goes on to challenge the claim that “only one percent of men are placed in combat” (p. 100). “This is like saying that only 55,000 American servicemen were killed in Vietnam, or there were only 1,000 POWs” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 100). No matter how many there are, “it is no step forward to require that half of our casualties be women” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 100). The fact is that millions of young men were drafted for service in Vietnam, and Pentagon figures show that 22 percent served in combat.

A further deception, claims Schlafly (1977), is the assertion that “other countries draft women, so drafting women should be acceptable in America” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 101). The only non-communist country that drafts women is Israel, and Israel’s national emergency is entirely different from any we have ever had (Schlafly, 1977). A little country whose national survival is in immediate and acute danger, Israel is forced to use all available manpower and womanpower. Even so, “Israel would never tolerate anything so demeaning to women as the Equal Rights Amendment,” according to Schlafly (1977, p. 101). Israeli women serve in the armed forces only about half as long as men, and have automatic exemption if they marry or have a baby (Schlafly, 1977). They are not put into combat or into integrated barracks with men. Schlafly (1977) contends, “the women of Israel are willing to do what is necessary for national survival, but even now the second generation of Israeli women are trading their rifles for aprons” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 101). These women want to assume their normal roles – looking after their children and their husbands – and revive the tradition of housewifery (Schlafly, 1977).

Schlafly (1977) argues that feminists claim that “young college women support [the] ERA and are willing to accept the risks and responsibilities of the military draft just like men,” (p. 102). Yet, when pressed in debate, “nine out of ten of those who blithely make
such statements” indicate that they would become contentious objectors or flee to Canada rather than accept induction (Schlafly, 1977, p. 102). To the sincere ones, Schlafly’s (1977) answer is simple: “Run, don’t walk, to the nearest recruiting office and volunteer” (p. 102). The armed services are looking for good women, and it is an honorable career and we wish you well. You have your freedom of choice and Schlafly (1977) urges you to exercise it. “But please don’t take from other women their freedom to choose a different career” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 102; 1973b; 1979c; 1980a; 1980c; 1980e; 1981c).

According to Schlafly (1977), “all evidence indicates that women who do choose a military job do not want complete equality of treatment and job assignment” (p. 102). In May, 1976, the United States comptroller general issued a General Accounting Office (GAO) report to Congress on “Job Opportunities for Women in the Military: Progress and Problems,” which concluded that women are not strong enough to do much of the work required in the physical jobs and generally prefer administrative and medical jobs (Schlafly, 1977; 1979c; 1979g; 1980a; 1980b; 1980d). In the Navy, Schlafly (1977) shares, women simply cannot lift 100-pound sandbags, 94-pound paint cans, and boat lines that weigh up to 7 pounds a foot. In the Marines, women could be trained to climb telephone poles, but not carry fifty pounds of equipment up with them (Schlafly, 1977; 1979c). The Air Force surgeon general concluded that an average woman has only 60 percent of the strength of the average man (Schlafly, 1977). The obvious message of the counter-narrative is that allowing women to assume the same positions as men in the military would not only put those women in danger, but would endanger us all.

The GAO report shows the injustice of opening up all military jobs to women: “Men must perform a disproportionate share of the work” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 103). “Equality in the
military is unfair to everyone,” claims Schlafly (1977), “the servicemen, the servicewomen, and the American people who are paying the costs” (p. 103). If the future brings a more dire national emergency than that of World War II, and such an unforeseen circumstance requires the military services of women, there is no present constitutional bar to using women in any capacity and in any numbers (Schlafly, 1977). “We now have the flexibility to deal with any future circumstances both in the draft and in job assignment. But, if we ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, we forfeit our options,” warns Schlafly (1977, p. 103). “We would be constitutionally prohibited from sending men and fathers into combat unless we likewise send women and mothers into combat” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 103). “This,” Schlafly’s (1977) counter-narrative declares, “is not what the American people want” (p. 103). Schlafly presents the American public with her fears about the ERA, and invites them to commiserate with her. Without this invitation, it is possible many American’s would have never considered these consequences; but once Schlafly presents her counternarrative they are forced to address these possibilities as real and threatening.

The Federal Grab for Power

Schlafly (1977) shares a story, which serves as a metaphor for the Equal Rights Amendment. The story is about a salmon swimming off the coast, who sees a succulent piece of fish floating toward it. The salmon says to itself, “High protein content; what’s wrong with that? Delicious aroma; what’s wrong with that? Just the right size; I can take it in one mouthful. What’s wrong with that?” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 130). What’s wrong with it, of course, is that there’s a hook in it, explains Schlafly (1977). The metaphorical hook in the ERA is Section 2, which reads: “Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 130). Any area Congress has the
power to legislate on, the federal agencies have the power to administer and execute, and the
federal courts have the power to adjudicate (Schlaflly, 1973d; 1977; 1979e; 1981e; 1981f).
Section 2, Schlaflly (1973d; 1977; 1979e; 1981e; 1981f) warns, is a big grab for vast new federal power.

According to Schlaflly (1977), ERA proponents often say, “Isn’t it terrible that the various states have different laws pertaining to women? We should have uniform rules for women’s rights all over the country” (p. 130). However, according to Schlaflly (1977), this only proves that “ERA supporters simply don’t understand the system of government we have in the United States, which divides governmental powers between federal and state governments” (p. 130). It is our system to allow state legislatures to establish different taxes, different property laws, and differences in criminal codes (Schlaflly, 1973c; 1977; 1979f). This diversity is one of the principal reasons why we have kept our freedom, Schlaflly (1977) proclaims. “All states don’t have to levy the same taxes as New York does, or permit wide-open gambling as Nevada does, or become Meccas for quickie divorces as some states have done” (Schlaflly, 1977, p. 131).

According to Schlaflly (1977) “the militant women who are determined to erase all differences of treatment between the sexes in order to force us to conform to a gender free society are not willing to compete fairly in the market place of ideas” (p. 134; 1974b; 1975f; 1976; 1979h). The record proves that, “in any fair contest, their radical notions cannot attract the support of any significant percentage or persons” (Schlaflly, 1977, p. 134; 1976). As a result, these radicals have worked tirelessly to acquire public monies in order to cram their programs down our throats whether we like them or not (Schlaflly, 1974b; 1975f; 1977; 1978a). For many years, Schlaflly (1974b; 1977; 1978a) claims, they have been doing this to
the tune of tens of thousands of taxpayers’ dollars through the various federal and state commissions on the status of women. “Despite all the public money the women’s liberationists spent to promote the Equal Rights Amendment and other lib objectives, the ERA was defeated in nineteen out of twenty states during 1975 and not ratified in a single state in 1976” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 134). Schlafly (1977) attributes this failure to the fact that “American women recognize [the] ERA as a fraud” (p. 137). Schlafly’s (1974b; 1977) disgust at potentially funding propaganda that violates the values and virtues she holds so dear is palpable. The counter-narrative fosters this sense of aversion, and encourages the reflexive rejection the repugnance triggers. It also reinforces the awareness that Schlafly believes these militant women to be intentionally deceiving the public with their narrative, and keeping us from understanding the true dangers that lurk within the Amendment.

According to Schlafly (1977), the ERA would prevent the American public from making reasonable differences between men and women based on “factual differences in childbearing and physical strength” (p. 133). The ERA will force upon us “the rigid, unisex, gender-free mandate demanded by the women’s liberation movement,” and it will transfer the power to apply this mandate to the federal government and the federal courts, “where average citizens have no control” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 133; 1973d; 1979e; 1981e; 1981f). Schlafly’s counter-narrative takes on a panicked pitch; this loss of states’ rights is clearly a horrifying prospect to her. It is impossible to know, Schlafly (1977) bemoans, what the Supreme Court will do with the ERA. Argues Schlafly (1977), “the United States Supreme Court has rendered all sorts of unpredictable decisions in the areas of crime, education, busing, security risks, pornography, abortion, and states’ rights” (p. 132). The clause in the ERA that gives Congress the “power to enforce” means that the ERA “will swallow the
states’ present primary authority in everything that involves the rights of women” (Schlafly, 1977, p. 132; 1973c; 1979f). If you share this concern, implores Schlafly (1977), you must join the effort to protect against it. Joining the efforts of STOP ERA provides a convenient and effective way to combat these threats to personal and national safety, and is the logical conclusion of Schlafly’s counter-narrative.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

This essay has illustrated the creation and promotion of a countermovement’s counter-narrative. STOP ERA is a prime example of a successful countermovement; the efforts of Phyllis Schlafly and her organization are widely credited with the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (Davis, 1991; Schlafly, 1977; Solomon, 1979, 1983; Thom, 1991; Tillson, 1996). STOP ERA’s rhetoric is an inimitable example of a counter-narrative. The argument of this paper, therefore, is that countermovements and counter-narratives are indivisible; a counter-narrative is an indispensible aspect of a countermovement.

DISCUSSION OF ANALYSIS

Nelson’s (1995) original definition of a counter-narrative was “a story that contributes to the moral self-definition of its teller by undermining a dominant story, undoing it and retelling it in such a way as to invite new interpretations and conclusions” (p. 23). Counter-narrative, therefore, originates as nothing more than a restructuring of the dominant narrative in order to agree with the storyteller’s perspective. This definition coincides with the definition Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) offer for countermovements: “networks of individuals and organizations that share many of the same objects of concern” (p. 1632). Counter-narratives allow the teller to “challenge and revise the paradigm” in which they are told; to reconfigure dominant stories which may have excluded or oppressed others within the community (Nelson, 1995, p. 24). Countermovements are simply a group of these disenfranchised members of society, who gather together to create a new narrative which
represents their needs, wants, and morality. The members of STOP ERA were not
disenfranchised by society, they were simply attempting to maintain the status quo. It was,
contrary to current countermovement theory, the narrative of the social movement in favor of
the ERA which drove STOP ERA to organize their countermovement, rather than specific
actions ostracizing them from society.

Nelson (1995) emphasizes that all dominant stories contain within them the
possibilities for their own undoing; “it is the nature of narrative never to close down
completely the avenues for its own subversion” (p. 34). The construction, revision, and
reinterpretation that are ongoing in dominant storytelling leave opportunities for counter-
narratives to weave their way inside. Zald and Useem (1987) claim that movements create
their own opposition; “movements of any visibility and impact create the conditions for the
mobilization of countermovements” (p. 247). Both of these theories claim that opposition
originates from within, and that it is the original movement which plants the seeds for its own
sedition. When the similarities between these two theories are examined, it becomes plain
that the two processes go hand in hand; as a countermovement develops it creates a counter-
narrative, and as a counter-narrative is scripted a countermovement is formed by those to
whom it speaks.

So then why do all counter-narratives not incite countermovements? For example,
Nelson’s (1995, 1996) research examines counter-narratives in small communities, focused
on feminist objectives. Counter-narratives are formed within families, by coworkers, and by
“found” feminists communities (Nelson, 1995; 1996). None of these elicited the types of
responses associated with countermovements such as STOP ERA. However, this can be
explained by Meyer and Staggenborg’s (1996) research on the formation and success of
countermovements. As was discussed in Chapter Two, Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) argue that there are three conditions which promote the rise of countermovements: first, that the movement shows signs of success; second, that the interests of some population are threatened by movement goals; and third, that political allies are available to aid oppositional mobilization. While a counter-narrative can exist without meeting these qualifications – Nelson’s (1995, 1996) definition only requires one person to feel disenfranchised for a counter-narrative to come into being – a countermovement cannot. Countermovements require support from the community and/or elites, and it must appeal to a wide enough audience to become a viable alternative to the existing social movement. This study suggests that this creates a fourth condition for Meyer and Staggenborg’s (1996) list; a counter-narrative built on the weaknesses of the social movement’s dominant narrative is necessary for the promotion and success of a countermovement.

STOP ERA began as little more than a group of disenfranchised women discussing their concerns about a proposed amendment to the Constitution, but it grew to become one of the most successful countermovements in history. As the ERA began to gain momentum, it became more of a threat to the way of life so treasured by that faction of society, and elicited the response predicted by Meyer and Staggenborg (1996). Schlafly stepped to the forefront, becoming the voice of STOP ERA and the narrator of its message. Though the ERA was widely believed to be well on the way to ratification, it had not yet achieved success; there was still hope for those who believed in so-called traditional values. As Meyer (1993) asserted, a social movement must display that it is powerful enough to threaten the interests of the disenfranchised, but must also appear vulnerable enough to succumb to the efforts of the counter-movement. The movement in favor of the ERA was popular and well supported;
it had endorsements from all levels of government, and was only a few votes shy of ratification when STOP ERA came onto the national stage (Davis, 1991; Thom, 1991; Tillson, 1996). However, it had not yet been ratified, and there were several very prominent figures speaking out against it (Thom, 1991; Tillson, 1996). STOP ERA met the three requirements set forth by Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) for countermovement success, and their counter-narrative quickly gained attention and enthusiastic support by those who related to its message.

STOP ERA originated as a counter-narrative, but as the Equal Rights Amendment gained support, more and more Americans began to feel threatened by its potential consequences. Encouraged by this, and the support of powerful elites, the counter-narrative of STOP ERA blossomed into a national counter-movement. STOP ERA was particularly successful due to the preconceived assumptions of its audience. Schlafly (1977) rarely if ever provided hard evidence for her counter-narrative’s claims, yet STOP ERA was hugely successful. Schlafly’s (1977) counter-narrative was effective because it tapped into a common sentiment in its audience; Schlafly (1977) did not need evidence because her audience already believed what she was saying. The beliefs Schlafly (1977) espouses allowed many Americans to support opinions they likely already possessed, but which were politically incorrect to admit to. Without the rousing cheer of STOP ERA’s counter-narrative, these feelings may have remained dormant and unexpressed in the American public. However, by expressing these shared assumptions about the importance of hearth, home, and family, Schlafly (1977) was able to create a particularly effective counter-narrative and countermovement.

Additionally, this paper explores the elements which make counter-narratives
appealing to the general public, and the reasons they thrive. A counter-narrative must offer something, some common reasoning or cause, in order to attract a substantial enough audience to create and sustain a counter movement. Schlafly’s (1977) counter-narrative offered appeals to shared beliefs about the position of women in American society, and thinly veiled threats to that position if the Equal Rights Amendment were passed. Through the repetition of those appeals and threats, and the provision of everyday – though unsupported – examples of their relatability, Schlafly (1977) was able to offer a unifying message to those members of society prone to agree with her. Therefore, it can be presumed that counter-narratives work best when they appeal to a faction of society substantial enough to make a difference which already holds the requisite beliefs. If and when this is the case, evidence isn’t necessarily required; an appeal to shared assumptions will satisfy the targeted audience.

Schlafly herself is an apt example of this: as a Positive Woman herself she shouldn’t have needed the fulfillment of a public life to sustain her, however she possessed a law degree and worked outside of her home promoting the efforts of STOP ERA. The examples she provides of the Positive Woman’s role do not reflect her own experience; rather they appeal to the beliefs with which her audience was most likely to agree. Schlafly’s arguments seemed easily dismissed and silly to her opposition, however they resonated with a substantial enough number of American citizens. Her countermovement was successful as a result; the proponents of STOP ERA dismissed Schlafly’s (1922) counter-narrative, and without a resulting and persuasive counter-counter-narrative (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996) their arguments failed to overcome the shared assumptions on which STOP ERA capitalized.

**CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD OF COMMUNICATION**

This paper has analyzed STOP ERA’s counter-narrative to illustrate the inherent
connection between counter-narrative and countermovement. While it may seem somewhat elementary to claim that countermovements create counter-narratives, what this paper is proposing goes deeper than that. Rather than creating counter-narrative, I postulate that countermovements are created by counter-narrative, and that the “predictable and reactive” countermovement rhetoric Roberts (2009) describes is actually the development of a counter-narrative. This analysis is important to the field of communication because it illustrates the value of rhetoric in the creation of a countermovement. Countermovements are an essential part of modern American social and political processes, and understanding their development and function is an important goal for political communication scholars. The realization that counter-narrative theory and countermovement theory are connected is one which has not been previously proposed, and exploring its implications may change the way we examine both of these phenomena in the future.

Understanding that countermovements originate from counter-narrative allows for a better understanding of their formation, and the methods by which they gain support. Furthermore, understanding that the rhetoric of countermovements is simply an iteration of the underlying counter-narrative has the potential to open new avenues of rhetorical criticism and analysis. No longer can countermovement rhetoric be simply examined for its devices and techniques (Tilly, 1984); it should be examined as an example of counter-narrative, and assessed in relation to the dominant narrative, as it is from within the dominant narrative that the origins of counter-narrative develop. Countermovement rhetoric must be examined in relation to the rhetoric of the social movement. Though previous scholars have proposed that countermovement rhetoric is “reactive” in nature, this study illustrates what it is reacting against (Roberts, 2009); it has never been proposed that it both establishes and sustains the
countermovement as a function of counter-narrative. Though Nelson’s (1995, 1996) original research did not expand so far as to include this type of communication, its application in the field of political and social activism is promising.

As Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) discussed, countermovements have been used to combat social movements in favor of abortion, gay rights, animal rights, cigarette smoking, gun control, marijuana use, busing, racism, pornography, language rights, nuclear power, and school textbooks. According to the argument presented by this essay, each of the countermovements that arose to oppose these social movements should have originated with a counter-narrative that is, itself, grounded in the social movement’s narrative. Nelson’s (1995) findings proposed that those who create counter-narrative must have a defined space in which to do it. Dionisopoulos (2009) expanded this idea, and hypothesizing that counter-narratives required a physical space in which to be created; literally, that the authors must be able to meet together in a safe location to create their story. This essay proposes that counter-narratives can be produced in an ethereal space; space created by the dominant narrative itself. As a result of the flaws or shortcomings perceived in the social movement, an opportunity arises for members of society to engage in a meeting of minds. The space need not be literal or physical, simply by affording people the opportunity to express their feelings the social movement inspires the counter-narrative. The findings in this essay have the potential to further the study of these counter-movements, and those which have yet to form.

It is my hope that this proposition sheds further light onto the study of political communication, and the examination of countermovements as rhetorical constructs. Since the 1960s, countermovements have been a major force in the construction of public policy in
America. When an organization pushes for social change, it is nearly inevitable that a countermovement will develop to oppose that change. Understanding that these countermovements begin with counter-narrative – that they are, in fact, generated by the discussion of individuals’ dissatisfaction with the social movement’s narrative – may contribute to the comprehension of movement culture. The purpose and execution of countermovements may not significantly change, but the methods by which scholars examine and analyze their rhetoric may.

This thesis provides an insight into the formation of countermovements by examining the rhetoric that is their catalyst. Countermovements can’t exist without a counter-narrative first being constructed; counter-narrative is the proverbial egg to countermovement’s chicken. Until the threatened members of a society gather and discuss their concerns, there is no movement. Without those beginning threads of counter-narrative, there is no way for the disgruntled and disenfranchised to recognize one another and collect as one cohesive movement. Though there is still a long way to go until equal rights for all people are fully realized, being cognizant of the methods of oppression and opposition to change are the first step in fighting that battle. Countermovement rhetoric must be intoxicating and persuasive in order to succeed; it paints an alluring picture for the public, which becomes easily adopted and made mainstream. By understanding the process in which countermovements are developed, it is possible to counteract its effects more effectively. Because counter-narrative is created from the seeds of the dominant narrative, social movements must be conscious of the arguments against their own cause, and cognizant of their opposition’s position and opinion. Had the pro-ERA movement simply taken STOP ERA’s arguments more seriously from the beginning they might have been able to address and counter them. Instead, they
were ignored until it was too late and a massive countermovement was assembled.
REFERENCES


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