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'STOP TAKING OUR PRIVILEGES'

Femininity as a Strategic Tool for Constructing Collective Identity in Conservative Social Movements

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation employs a discursive frame analysis to examine discourses of women in two conservative social movements; the STOP-ERA movement and the Tradwife movement. Through taking a cultural framing approach to social movements and drawing on the concepts of collective identity, movement and countermovement dynamics, and the discursive opportunity structure, this dissertation examines how femininity is used as a tool for constructing collective identity. It seeks to answer the following research question, 'How do discourses of women within conservative social movements use femininity as a strategic tool for building collective identity?'.

Through a mixed-method approach of frame analysis and Fairclough's three-tiered Critical Discourse Analysis, nineteen texts produced by prominent figures of the two movements were analysed. The findings reveal that through aligning with broader conservative political and religious discourses that prioritise traditional gender roles and the patriarchal family, the frames and discourses use femininity to construct a strong collective identity through presenting a traditional, Christian vision of womanhood. Through presenting feminism as the key diagnostic issue, paired with a fear of socioeconomic decline, the frames and discourses work together to create broader coalitions between other single-issue conservative movements. Upholding traditional gender roles is presented as the key prognosis. Various motivational frames are employed: (1) the suburban housewife, (2) biblical femininity, (3) gender essentialism, (4) privilege and (5) personal choice, which elevate the collective identity of the traditional, Christian woman. Finally, through articulating a collective 'we' as a prognostic cure to the diagnostic 'them', a collective identity is constructed that identifies a common ideological enemy – feminists.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s, thousands of white, suburban, middle-class American women mobilised in the STOP-ERA (Stop Taking Our Privileges) movement, a countermovement to the women's liberation movement that opposed the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

The movement was led by Phyllis Schlafly, a Catholic, conservative activist and mother of six children from Missouri, who was later nicknamed 'the sweetheart of the silent majority' (Felsenthal, 1981, p. 120). To counterattack the feminist rhetoric of equality and liberation, Schlafly positioned traditional gender roles and the patriarchal family as ideals of femininity at the forefront of the STOP-ERA movement, seeking to revalue the role of women as wives and mothers.

To contextualise the movement, an overview of its political background is required. The STOP-ERA movement began in 1972, the year that the ERA was initially passed by Congress, with a deadline for ratification by March 1979. The ERA promised that no US citizen, on account of sex, would be denied or abridged equality of rights under the law, including in terms of divorce, property and employment. The STOP-ERA movement must be understood within the rise of conservatism and the pro-family movement in the US in the 1970s, which can be tied to three phenomena –the rise of neoliberalism and the conservative mobilisation of big business, the rise of the religious right, and the revival of the Republican party.

The rise of neoliberalism, grounded in the belief that market forces had to be liberated from 'government regulatory controls that were stymieing growth, innovation and freedom' (Gerstle, 2022, p. 2), created a new rhetoric of American nationalism and patriotism through encouraging economic competition. The Christian Right, a coalition of conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists, emerged as a reaction to the civil rights and feminist movements in the 1960s and the 1973 landmark Supreme Court decision *Roe v Wade* (Blee and Creasap, 2010; Critchlow, 2005). Christian Right leaders positioned the traditional family, of a heterosexual married couple and their biological children, as the central unit of American society (Dowland, 2015). The shift in national politics to the right saw the revival of the Republican party, and an intensification of ideological debates over gender, abortion and cultural issues (Critchlow, 2005, p. 15).

In the 21st century, the Tradwife movement is a social media based subculture of women who follow ultra-traditional gender roles. The movement can be seen as part of the wider 'momosphere', a collection of parenting, relationship, cooking and crafting blogs and social media accounts (Proctor, 2022, p. 7). By repeatedly displaying content associated with a hyper-feminine identity, home and family, Tradwives construct a powerful narrative that promotes traditional gender roles and the patriarchal family. The Tradwife movement must be contextualised as a reaction to contemporary shifts in feminist thinking, specifically neoliberal feminist discourses, which advocate for women's career advancement, whilst also conforming to societal norms which emphasise familial responsibilities (Banet-Weiser et al, 2020; Rottenberg, 2014). These conversations inspire this research, as it seeks to examine in greater detail how conservative women construct a collective identity through rejecting feminist discourses.

In the 21st century, femininity has been solidified as an important trope within the US conservative movement. Concerned Women for America and Moms for Liberty are examples of conservative political organisations whose formation is based on the identity of their members as women. In mainstream politics, politicians such as Sarah Palin have brought femininity to the forefront of their electoral campaigns. In her 2008 vice-presidential campaign, she coined the term 'Mama Grizzlies' to emphasise her identity as a wife and mother. The centrality of female identity within US conservativism inspires this research, which seeks to explore further the presence of femininity within conservative social movements. The STOP-ERA movement and the contemporary Tradwife movement, with their distinct social, cultural, political and historical contexts, provide a rich point of comparison. Through a discursive frame analysis, this paper seeks to add to the limited literature addressing discourses of women and collective identity within conservative social movements. The paper begins with a theoretical chapter, which introduces concepts including women's activism, collective identity, and discourse and framing theory, followed by a conceptual framework and a statement of the research question. The methodology chapter offers a rationale for the chosen methods of Critical Discourse Analysis and frame analysis and explains the research design and sampling strategies. This is followed by the analysis and discussion chapter, which presents the findings of the discursive frame analysis. The concluding section draws upon the analytical findings and presents the scope for future research.

THEORETICAL CHAPTER

Literature Review

This paper is theoretically rooted in the constructivist intersections of collective identity and social movement scholarship that emphasises the role of the *discursive* in social activism (Benford and Snow, 2000; Melucci, 1996; Cammaerts, 2018). Movements are viewed as 'signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning' (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 613). As a network of informal interactions between individuals, groups and organisations, they engage in political or cultural conflict, based on a shared collective identity (Della Porto and Diani, 2006).

The chapter begins with a literature review, which is divided into six parts. The first part introduces feminist discourses on traditional femininity. The second part deals with gender-related social movements to contextualise women's activism. The third part introduces social movement scholarship on self-mediation and collective identities, followed by the fourth part which introduces the discursive opportunity structure. The fifth part provides an overview of discourse theory, and the sixth part provides an overview of framing theory. Following the literature review, the conceptual framework, research aims, and research question are outlined.

Feminist Discourses on Traditional Femininity

The feminist mobilisation and critique of traditional patterns of femininity can most prominently be linked to Betty Friedan, who critiques the domesticated ideals of womanhood that were cherished at the heart of American culture in the post-war period. Friedan (1963) coined the term 'the problem that has no name' to refer to the 'strange, stirring sense of dissatisfaction' among suburban housewives with the lack of fulfilment in their roles as wives and mothers, despite living in material and economic comfort (p. 15). Friedan's critique of traditional ideals for women marks the beginning of the feminist conversation surrounding the revaluing of the role of women in society, which had previously been confined to the domestic sphere.

In her comprehensive study, Welter (1966) provides a thorough analysis of the ideals for white, middle-class, northern, urban American women during the 19th century. Welter (1966) depicts four attributes of True Womanhood - 'piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity' (p. 152). This set of values reveals how women were confined to the domestic sphere through their roles as mothers,

daughters, sisters, and wives. Roberts (2002) revisits and extends Welter's analysis, suggesting that True Womanhood is 'an ideology that performed political and cultural work' (p. 151). Through emphasising traditional femininity as an active process, Roberts provides useful insight into the self-mediation techniques of women as they construct their identities. She shows that by conforming to traditional ideals of femininity, women perform 'ideological work'.

Building on Friedan's analysis, Dworkin (1983) questions why women conform to and promote traditional patterns of femininity that uphold their subordination. Dworkin (1983) positions the 'Right' as the political designation as having 'fixed and clear values' (p. 7) which defend 'authority, hierarchy, property and religion' (p. 10). The hierarchies of the Right, which include rich over poor, white over black, and man over woman, are articulated as God-given differences. According to Dworkin (1983), 'the Right offer a simple, fixed predetermined social, biological, and sexual order' (p. 22) that promises women safety and security to combat their fears of male violence.

This demonstrates the socioeconomic advantages of the Right for women, as in response to fulfilling their female functions of sexual submission and childbearing, they are provided economic and emotional protection by their husbands. These feminist discourses on traditional femininity are important for this paper as they provide insight into the values and identity of conservative women. These discourses are part of the wider movement of mass feminist activism which emerged in the 1970s.

Gender-Related Social Movements

Throughout US history, women have united their activism efforts across diverse organisations and have long participated in social movement activism (McCammon et al, 2017, p. 1). In the 1970s, social movement scholars began to reconceptualise the relationship between gender and social movements, including how gender affects social movement structures and processes and vice versa (Chatillon and Taylor, 2021). Women's activism in the US can be viewed as a movement/ countermovement dynamic between the progressive feminist movement and the reactionary conservative movement. Both sides of the debate will now be explored.

The Feminist Movement

The trajectory of the feminist movement has evolved from the first wave in the mid-19th century which focused on achieving the vote for women, to the contemporary fourth wave which focuses on sexual abuse, sexual harassment, the objectification of women, and sexism in the workplace. The second wave, also known as the women's liberation movement, which began in the late 1960s, saw the focus shifting from the 'social to the personal', and was particularly concerned with equal pay and reproductive rights (Evans and Chamberlain, 2015, p. 399).

Contemporary feminist discourses, specifically 'post-feminism' and 'neoliberal feminism', focus on the shift in feminist thinking which prioritises individual professional and economic success for women (Banet-Weiser et al, 2020; Rottenberg, 2014). Coining the term 'post-feminism' as a *sensibility*, Banet-Weiser (2018) illustrates how it represents both a temporal shift 'after' feminism, as well as an emphasis on individualism, choice, and agency, and a 'renewed focus on the female body as a site of liberation' (p. 153). Neoliberal feminism reflects 'neoliberalism's entanglement with feminism' (Banet-Weiser et al, 2020, p. 4). Similarly to post-feminism, neoliberal feminism emphasises how contemporary feminism recasts social justice in personal, individualised terms (Rotternberg, 2014, p. 422). Whereas post-feminism is centred on personal consumer and economic choice, neoliberal feminism is focused on not just 'gendered entrepreneurialism, but on individual enterprise as well' (Banet-Weiser et al, 2020, p. 10). These discourses are insightful when analysing the Tradwife movement, which can be viewed as a reaction to modern feminism.

Within progressive women's activism, scholars have explored how gender shapes collective identity in critical ways which makes it essential for the success of movements (Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Taylor, 1999; Rupp and Taylor, 1999). Gender symbolism plays an integral role in the socially constructed solidarities that mobilise collective action (Taylor, 1999, p. 23). Scholars have emphasised the importance of discourses of *difference* within feminist movements. In their study of lesbian feminist activism, Taylor and Whittier (1992) focus on the construction of *boundaries* that establish *differences* between two groups. They determine that lesbian feminist communities sustain a collective identity by emphasising the differences between men and women. This increases movement mobilisation by encouraging women to engage in a wide range of social and political actions that challenge the dominant system (Taylor and Whittier, 1992, p. 105). Similarly, Rupp and Taylor (1999),

in their study of international feminist identities, found that women constructed a solidarity identity based on the fundamental ways that women differ from men.

As well as emphasising discourses of difference, the unique identity of women as wives and mothers has been shown to build collective identity. Motherhood, as a highly gendered, emotional and embodied experience, can be seen to build solidarity among women (Rich, 1977). Naples (1998) developed the broad concept of 'activist mothering' to recognise how mothers develop distinct collective identities surrounding motherhood. Reger (2001) has also examined the relationship between feminism and motherhood as it plays out in the construction of collective identities. Building on Naples' concept of 'activist mothering', she categorises the use of motherhood into two frames – as a 'social status with political ramifications' and as the 'act of caring and taking responsibility for relationships' (Reger, 2001, p. 85). These crucial works provide insight into the self-mediation techniques of activists to build collective identity.

The Anti-Feminist Movement

The anti-feminist movement is the countermovement to the feminist movement. A countermovement is a 'conscious, collective, organised attempt to resist or to reverse social change' (Mottl, 1980, p. 620). In this sense, the anti-feminist movement can be seen as an attempt to resist equality by preserving the status quo of patriarchy and traditional gender roles. During the second-wave feminist movement, the countermovement centred on opposition to the ERA and abortion (Himmelstein, 1986). In the present day, a key feature of anti-feminism is the belief that the work of the feminist movement has been achieved and feminism itself has become 'obsolete' (Anderson, 2014, p. 12).

Scholarship on the movement/ countermovement dynamic has predominantly treated them as interdependent. They can be seen to 'operate dialectically, shifting and parrying in a continuous effort to achieve dominance' (Steuter, 1992, p. 289). The pro-life/pro-choice abortion movements are an example of the dichotomy that exists in the beliefs of feminist and anti-feminist activists. Staggenborg and Skoczylas (2017) examine the movement/countermovement dynamic of the abortion debate and argue that 'as one side won a victory, the other side mobilised in response' (p. 217). The US conservative countermovement has also been found to mobilise in response to national policy changes (Banaszak and Ondercin, 2016).

Similar to the feminist movement, scholarship on the countermovement has found that motherhood is an important trope in building collective identity. In her study on far-right American women in the post-war era, Jeansonne (1996) depicts how women mobilised based on their identity as mothers, using maternalism as a strategy to build collective identity. Similarly, McRae (2018), in her study of women activists in the racial segregation movement between the 1920s-1970s, emphasises how activists linked the unique female experience including domestic and intimate matters of sex, marriage, childbirth, and childrearing to white supremacist politics. She particularly emphasises the role of 'everyday women', whose 'constant work was so interwoven into daily life that it remained unremarkable' (McRae, 2018, p. 10). Linking closely to Naples’ concept of 'activist mothering', this research suggests that feminine attributes linked to marriage and childbirth are important for the collective identity of women in conservative movements. Constructing a collective identity is achieved through the process of self-mediation, which will now be explored in greater detail.

Self-Mediation and Collective Identities: Constructing Identity Through Discourse

The construction of a movement’s collective identity is one of the most important goals of movement framing (Melucci, 1996; Polletta and Jasper, 2001). The current interest within social movement scholarship in culture and meaning is 'parallelled by a growing discussion on the topic of identity, both at the individual and collective level' (Melucci, 1996, p. 68). Melucci (1996) takes a constructivist approach to collective identity, referring to it as 'the process of ‘constructing’ an action system' (p. 70). Adhering to the view that social movements are 'solidarity networks entrusted with potent cultural meanings', Melucci (1995) emphasises that collective identity plays an important role in determining social movement membership (p. 4). This includes the standards by which members identify themselves and are identified, which creates group unity and cohesion. The 'relational dimension' emphasises the process through which movement members become independent by distinguishing themselves from others (Melucci, 1996, p. 73). Finally, Melucci (1996) emphasises that within the process of collective identity, 'integrating the past to produce new definitions' is particularly important for movements (p. 75). This idea is particularly insightful for this paper as it allows for an exploration into how discourses of the Tradwife movement may borrow tropes from the STOP-ERA movement.

Poletta and Jasper (2001) concur with Melucci that collective identity is important for the success of social movements, as it creates the potential for solidarity and belonging. Polletta and Jasper (2001)

locate collective identity within the individual, defining it as 'an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution' (p. 285). They point to four areas in which collective identity plays a particularly important role - the creation of collective claims, recruitment into movements, strategic and tactical decision-making, and movement outcomes (2001, p. 285). This emphasises the importance of activists' efforts to strategically construct identities to encourage collective action.

The importance of collective identity for movements in the digital age has been a point of contest for social movement scholars. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) have coined the term 'connective action' which refers to 'digitally mediated networked modes of organization' (p.36). In this sense, activists are loosely connected through digital networks, rather than forging a strong collective identity face-to-face. They refer to connective action as 'large-scale' personalised and digitally mediated political actions (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013, p. 57), concurring with Polletta and Jasper's (2001) individualised approach to collective identity. This debate is poignant for this paper which compares the collective identity of a movement from the pre-digital age and one from the digital age. Collective identities are constructed through self-mediation techniques and discursive practices, which will now be explored further through the discursive opportunity structure.

Discursive Opportunity Structure

From a structuralist perspective, the Mediated Opportunity Structure provides a nuanced understanding of power relations regarding social movements (Cammaerts, 2012). The opportunity structure illustrates how opportunities and constraints oscillate for movement actors in three areas: (1) media opportunity structure (mainstream media), (2) networked opportunity structure (technology) and (3) discursive opportunity structure (self-mediation) (Cammaerts, 2012, p. 120). As Cammaerts (2012) points out, the discursive opportunity structure focuses 'on strategies of self-mediation geared towards producing counter-narratives and disseminating them independently from the mainstream media organisations' (p. 122). This structure is therefore essential for understanding how activists self-mediate their collective identity as an active process. A further exploration into discourse theory is now required.

Discourse Theory

Discourse theory has emerged out of a shift from structuralism to post-structuralism and provides a way of understanding how power operates at the level of articulating meaning. Whereas structuralists view language as a 'well-defined, clearly demarcated structure containing symmetrical units of signifiers and signify', post-structuralists view language as 'a sprawling limitless web' in which there are endless interpretations to the meaning of language (Eagleton, 1983, p. 129).

The work of Derrida pioneered the importance of approaching language and texts as discourse, encouraging the discursive process of deconstructing texts to find hidden and alternative meanings. Derrida (1978) refers to 'dissemination', to explain a 'continual flickering, spilling, and defusing of meaning' (p. 39-44). Derrida’s view exemplifies the endless interpretation that can be applied to language, emphasising that there is no fixed meaning in discourse. Challenging the structuralist view, he employs the term ‘'the constitutive outside' (Derrida, 1978, p. 39-44) to refer to what is excluded from the text. This concept is particularly useful for studying collective identities as it emphasises how identities are formed through the creation of boundaries.

The post-structuralist work of Foucault is also important within discourse theory. Foucault (1981) focuses on the rules, rituals, and procedures of discourse formation, and not on linguistic or semantic practices. In his view, power, resistance, and struggle are central to discourse. Foucault (1981) writes that discourse, 'is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized' (p. 52-53). In this sense, there is a 'constitutive relationship between meaning and power in social practice' (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 674).

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) emphasise the constitutional role of discourse in social and political struggle, defining it as 'the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice' (p. 97). They suggest that collective identities are formed 'by their common reference to something external' (1985, p. 127). Their post-structuralist approach to discourse theory assumes that political identity formation requires the creation of ‘chains of equivalence’, which establishes strict boundaries between the self and other, thus creating a collective identity. This idea is useful as it pinpoints what a group identity consists of and emphasises what it differs from.

Fairclough (1992) suggests a linguistic and critical realist approach to discourse analysis. He offers a 'more systematic and detailed textual analysis', arguing that there lacks a practical element of how to conduct discourse analysis (p. 194). Fairclough (2001) focuses on how language is ideologically shaped by power relations in society. According to Fairclough (2001), discourse is a site where relations of power are exercised (p. 36). There is also power *behind* discourse, as social order and institutions are shaped and constituted by relations of power embedded in discourse (Fairclough, 2001, p. 36). Discourses 'constitute a form in which social struggles are acted out' (Fairclough, 2010, p. 7). In this sense, discourse is part of society, is a social process, and is a socially conditioned process.

Thus, discourse theory is valuable for the study of collective identity, because it is situated on the basis that language is a form of social practice. Discourse and collective identity are both constructed in an open, dynamic, and contested process (Melucci, 1996, p. 67). As Derrida writes, 'there is no final meaning, the text remains a field of possibilities' (Bertens, 2014, p.15). Therefore, within the discursive, framing theory is required to understand how actors sediment and fix the meaning created through discourse (Melucci, 1996, p. 67).

Framing Theory

Framing theory emerged from a distinct epistemology of anthropology, social psychology and sociology. Bateson (1972) first referred to psychological frames in the field of anthropology as a 'spatial and temporary bounding of a set of interactive messages', that operate as a form of metacommunication (p. 191). Metacommunication refers to a message which defines a frame or provides meaning as to what is included in the frame (Bateson, 2006, p. 323).

Frame analysis was first introduced to sociological research by Goffman, who located framing within social constructivism. Goffman (1974) conceptualised frames from a cognitive perspective, stating that they are mental orientations that are 'organisations of experience' (p. 11). In this sense, a frame organises and structures information and knowledge in a specific manner that influences its subsequent interpretation. Goffman identified primary frameworks which consist of:

1. Natural frameworks – 'Identify occurrences seen as undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided, 'purely physical'' (Goffman, 1974, p. 22).

2. Social frameworks – 'Provide background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being the human being' (Goffman, 1974, p. 22).

Framing theory has come to be regarded as a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 612). However, the relationship between framing and ideology is often ambiguous, leading to a gap in knowledge of why some frames may be more prevalent or successful than others (Steinberg, 1988, p. 847). Therefore, a discursive frame analysis is necessary for a richer and more productive study of collective identity construction. This will be discussed in greater detail in the methodology section.

Conceptual Framework

This paper seeks to explore the self-mediation of women in conservative social movements, to understand how femininity is used to discursively construct collective identity. It takes a cultural framing approach to social movement studies, which is concerned with the constructivist nature of collective identities through framing and discursive processes (Melucci, 1996; Benford and Snow, 2000). As this paper is concerned with the self-mediation of movement actors as they construct their identity, the concept of collective identity is integral. Approaching collective identity as a socially constructed, active process of meaning production allows for an investigation into the parallels between cultural analysis and identity formation (Melucci, 1995, p. 44). This approach will allow for an exploration into how movement actors create a 'we/us' as well as a 'they/them'. Through comparing collective identity construction in two social movements, one in the pre-digital age and one in the digital age, this paper seeks to shed light on the debate surrounding collective versus connective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013).

The literature review reveals that collective identity is particularly important for gender-related social movements (Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Rupp and Taylor, 1999). It reveals that motherhood as an identity is particularly prevalent within women's movements (Naples, 1998; Reger, 2001; Jeasonne, 1996; McRae, 2018). Therefore, close attention will be paid to the concept of 'activist mothering' (Naples, 1998), which positions tropes of motherhood as central to women's activism.

As this paper is concerned with *discourses* of women and the self-mediation of their identity, close attention is paid to the discursive opportunity structure (Cammaerts, 2012). This allows for a focus

on the strategies of self-mediation of movement actors. This paper is theoretically rooted in discourse theory, allowing for an exploration into how texts are 'shaped by relations of power and struggles of power' (Fairclough, 1995, p. 132). Texts are positioned as socially constructed sites of meaning production, allowing for an examination of how movement actors produce meaning to construct collective identities. Close attention will be paid to concepts such as the 'constitutive outside' and 'chain of equivalence' (Derrida, 1978; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), in order to examine how collective identity is formed in reference to its relational dimension (Melucci, 1996). This allows for a focus on how collective identity is formed through creating boundaries and jointly opposing an 'Other'.

The construction of collective identity and discourse are both viewed as dynamic and contested processes and therefore framing theory will be deployed to examine how movement actors organise and fix meaning (Melucci, 1996). This paper turns to framing theory which provides valuable insight into how movement actors create meaning and identity narratives (Goffman, 1974; Benford and Snow, 2000). Due to time constraints, as well as the historical context of the STOP-ERA movement, evaluating the success of collective identity construction is beyond the scope of this paper, as it would require in-person interaction in the form of interviews and focus groups.

Research Question

After a critical review of the literature and an exploration of the conceptual framework, four speculations can be ascertained. First, collective identity, in its construction of how members identify themselves and are identified by others, is integral to the success of gender-related social movements. Second, within women's movements, gender differences, particularly rhetoric surrounding motherhood, are common tropes used by movement actors to build collective identity. Third, there is debate amongst scholars as to the importance of collective identity for movements in the digital age. Fourth, discourses of women in conservative social movements, particularly in the digital age, have been relatively unexplored. Therefore, there is scope for more research and analysis in this field.

Thus, this dissertation aims to answer the following research question:

RQ: 'How do discourses of women within conservative social movements use femininity as a strategic tool for building collective identity?'.

METHODOLOGY

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

As a broad methodological approach, discourse analysis explores how social meanings are formed and reproduced in language and texts, how social identities are shaped, and how social facts are determined (Caiani, 2023; Chouliaraki, 2008). For this paper, Fairclough's CDA stands out for its analytical focus on ideology, power and sociocultural change. Examining the power dynamics inherent in language and discourse, CDA reveals 'the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context' (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 464).

CDA is particularly useful for this paper because it recognises the significance of social, cultural, political and historical contexts, moving beyond linguistic analysis to understand discourse in relation to the specific context in which it was produced. It acknowledges that 'all social practices are tied to specific historical contexts' (Janks, 1997, p. 329). This makes it a particularly useful method for this paper which compares two case studies from distinct historical contexts.

Fairclough (2010) acknowledges three tiers of analysis: textual, discursive and societal. This structure will form the basis of this paper's research design. At the discursive level, CDA connects linguistic analysis with relevant forms of social analysis (Fairclough, 2010). Detailed linguistic analysis includes analysis of grammar, semantics, vocabulary, metaphors, and other semiotic features such as the visual aspects of texts. CDA's focus on linguistic implications offers a pivotal entry point in examining how identities are constructed through discourse, as representations of the self and others are co-constructed through language (Melucci, 1995; Melucci 1996; Janks, 1997; Zotzmann and O'Regan, 2016). Therefore, CDA's focus on the dialectical processes of discourses and power and their effects on social practices and structures is methodologically suitable for this paper's enquiry into how collective identities are discursively constructed. CDA is best suited to answer this research question because it is the only methodology that allows for an in-depth textual analysis. A quantitative content analysis approach would not provide insight into the meaning of the text, its social impact or its wider context (Hansen, 1998). As discourse analysis provides insight into the meaning-making process, framing analysis is also needed to understand how movement actors strategically sediment and stabilise meaning within the discourse (Melucci, 1996, p. 67).

Frame Analysis

Framing analysis provides a conceptualisation of the self-mediation processes of how movements actively construct ideas and meanings to build a collective identity (Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow and Benford, 1988). Collective action frames are 'action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organisations' (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 614). In this sense, collective action frames sediment and legitimise the discourses produced by movements. The strategic framing approach in social movement theory provides three core framing tasks:

1) **diagnostic frames**, which identify the problem that needs fixing,

2) **prognostic frames**, which aim to convince recruits of the goals and provide possible solutions to the problem that is articulated by the diagnostic frames,

3) **motivational frames**, which are aimed at mobilising recruits for action.

The four basic processes of 'frame alignment', which work to amplify and extend the effects of the frames, are frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 623-625). Frame bridging links two or more frames that are ideologically similar, frame amplification interlinks movement frames with existing beliefs or values, frame extension maximises resonance by connecting the movement to concerns and issues deemed to be important to supporters, and frame transformation generates new meanings for established old understandings.

Identity formations are an important feature of the framing process and motivational frames are particularly poignant for collective identity formation by facilitating the enlargement of personal identity within the movement (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 618). A key component of diagnostic frames are 'injustice frames', which are generated and adopted by movement actors who come to de fine the actions of authority as unjust (Gamson et al, 1982). As frames work to sediment meaning, a discursive frame analysis is fruitful for examining how identities are constructed through discourse and fixed in meaning by frames.

Discursive Approach to Framing

A mixed-method approach of a discursive frame analysis is required to examine how language constructs and shapes social reality, by analysing framing as a discursive process. A discursive approach to framing is beneficial as it brings attention to the 'role of ideology in social movement mobilisation and action', which is lacking in framing analysis alone (Steinberg, 1988, p. 863).

Taking a microfocus on discourse and a microanalysis on frames highlights the inextricable link between the two (Johnston, 1995, p. 219). Specifically, Johnston (1995) points out that an intensive discursive analysis reveals the mental structures of movement actors (p. 219). This is particularly useful for this study, which is concerned with collective identity construction, as 'it is through the intensive discursive analysis that the mental structures of social movements participants are best reconstructed' (Johnston, 1995, p. 219). Thus, a discursive frame analysis method is best suited to answer the research question.

Research Design

In summary, Benford and Snow’s three core framing tasks are followed to structure the frame analysis: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. Regarding discourse analysis, Fairclough’s (1995) three-tiered model of CDA is followed, considering the textual, discursive, and societal dimensions of each text.

(1) The textual level of analysis will analyse how linguistic elements represent movement actors and movement frames. Linguistic analysis provides insight into what collective identities are constructed and how (Koller, 2012, p. 27).

(2) At the discursive level, emphasis will be placed on text production, distribution and consumption. The discursive level focuses on who is involved in the discursive practices around the text, and in what role (Koller, 2012, p.27).

(3) The societal dimension will assert broader ideologies to link the textual analysis to the social, historical and political context.

Sampling

Given 'no evidence can be found concerning data collection requirements in the contribution of Fairclough' (Meyer and Wodak, 2001, p. 12), texts were shortlisted that were relevant, of sufficient length, and contextually and formally varied. In selecting texts, the strategy of purposeful sampling was employed, which picks information-rich cases that yield 'in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalisations' (Patton, 2002, p. 401). In line with purposeful sampling, the selected texts were produced by leading figures within the two movements.

STOP-ERA Movement

Eight copies of The Phyllis Schlafly Report, Phyllis Schlafly’s monthly newsletter published by the Eagle Forum between 1972 and 1981 were shortlisted. Newsletters published in this time frame were selected as this was during and just after the ERA ratification period and therefore when the movement was most active. Publications were distributed to movement members by post. The newsletters are therefore particularly fruitful for studying collective identity, as Schlafly controlled how the STOP-ERA movement’s identity was discursively constructed.

The following texts were analysed: ‘The right to be a woman’ (Text 1), ‘What’s wrong with ‘Equal Rights’ for women?’ (Text 2), ‘Changing social security to hurt the homemaker’ (Text 3), ‘ERA and homosexual 'marriages'’ (Text 4), ‘How ERA would change federal laws’ (Text 5), ‘The precious rights ERA will take away from wives’ (Text 6), ‘The fraud called the Equal Rights Amendment’ (Text 7), and ‘What really happened in Houston’ (Text 8).

One speech, ‘The power of the positive woman’ (Text 9), given by Schlafly to a Daughters of the American Revolution meeting in Cincinnati in 1977 was analysed. Speeches are valuable for conducting discursive frame analysis because a speech consists of a 'bounded episode of interaction' (Johnston, 1995, p. 222). This offers insight into the cultural and social roles within a movement. Thus, analysing one speech combined with the eight newsletters provides a broad and rich sample of the discursive practices of the STOP-ERA movement.

Tradwife Movement

Two of the most prominent Tradwife figures were chosen as case studies. Sampled texts were taken from between 2019-2024, the trajectory of the movement since it first gained popularity.

Estee Williams is an online influencer and a self-proclaimed Tradwife. She has 119k followers on Instagram, 194.5k on TikTok, and 62.9k subscribers on YouTube. She is a 26-year-old housewife who lives with her husband in Virginia. Five TikTok posts were analysed: 'How to become a traditional wife part 1' (Text 10), 'How to become a traditional wife part 2' (Text 11), 'The tradwife movement' (Text 12), 'What it means to be a tradwife' (Text 13), and '9 tips for high school girls who aspire to be a traditional wife in the future' (Text 14). Caitlin Huber aka Mrs Midwest, is an online influencer and self-proclaimed Tradwife. Huber is 29 years old and lives with her husband and children in Michigan. On her blog, 'Mrs Midwest', she writes on women's issues. She has 50.4k followers on Instagram and 204k subscribers on YouTube. Five blog posts were analysed: 'On submitting to Christ' (Text 15), 'Cultivating femininity: our character' (Text 16), '10 tips for traditionally minded women' (Text 17), 'Modern 'wholesome' living?' (Text 18), and 'Life-giving relationships: a thriving husband' (Text 19).

A relatively small number of texts were chosen, due to the awareness of the need for rigour when conducting CDA (Breeze, 2011). Analysing different types of discourse, such as newsletters, speeches, blog posts and TikToks, allows for a broad and rich exploration into the variety of discursive practices of these prominent movement figures. These forms of self-mediation provide valuable insight into the power dynamics within collective identity construction, as they reveal how prominent figures have control over what is included in movement discourse. By comparing a movement from the pre-digital age and one from the digital age, this research seeks to add to the debate of whether collective identity is still as important for movements in the digital age (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013).

Methodological Limitations and Reflexivity

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the certain limitations of the methodology and engage in a reflexive consideration of certain constraints within the scope of the research. Scholars point out that discourse is a craft skill that can be difficult, is always labour-intensive and therefore requires academic rigour (Gill, 2000; Breeze, 2011). Specifically, it 'requires rigour to make analytical sense of texts in all their fragmented, contradictory messiness' (Gill, 2000, p. 11). Cases of misinterpretation can occur when movement subcultures are entered that are not familiar to the researcher (Johnston, 1995, p. 223). This emphasises the need for extensive reading and knowledge of the subject area, which is particularly poignant to this paper as two social movements with distinct contexts are analysed. This becomes a reminder to thoroughly understand the contexts of the texts, whilst also

noting potential limitations to one's knowledge, as well as paying close attention to textual and intertextual properties to conduct thorough linguistic analysis.

Furthermore, critiques of CDA's academic rigour point out that the choice of framework is entirely subject to the researcher's judgment (Breeze, 2011, p. 513-516). CDA's 'top-down' application is unsystematic 'circular augmentation' that generates results 'confirming the obvious' in line with the theoretical concepts and the researcher's own biases (Breeze, 2011, p. 513- 516). Additionally, CDA may be 'moved by personal whim rather than well-grounded scholarly principle' (Breeze, 2011, p. 498). This highlights how researchers conducting CDA often prioritise interpretations and explanations that are most of interest to them, demonstrating how owns own subjectivity can infl uence the analysis. Breeze (2011) also points out that CDA analysis can be seen as heavily conditioned by political choice, rather than by scientific criteria (p. 500). This acts as a reminder to mitigate one's own interpretational biases when conducting CDA.

A discursive approach to framing, compared to traditional frame analysis, enables the researcher to examine frames with a great deal more empirical grounding (Johnston, 1995, p. 229-241). However, a discursive approach to framing is highly labour-intensive and the method is not generalisable as the research can only be conducted on a small scale.

Ethics and Self-Reflexivity

CDA should be conducted not as a form of advocacy of a particular pre-determined political standpoint, but as a 'genuinely critical and open-minded endeavour (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2018, p. 170). As a well-educated, left-wing young woman who is a strong feminist, I am subject to interpretational biases against these movements that promote different social, cultural, and political beliefs to my own. To mitigate this, I have grounded my analysis in established scholarship and literature and justi fi ed the methodological decisions. Conclusions will be drawn from textual evidence via frame analysis and CDA's three-tiered model. All the texts used are from the public domain, therefore no ethical concerns regarding the research aims were detected prior to conducting this study. Approval to undertake the research was granted by my dissertation supervisor at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

To discern how discourses of women within conservative social movements use femininity as a strategic tool for building collective identity, this analytical section will be organised according to 'collective action frames'. Via CDA, two core discourses are revealed: (1) a promotion of traditional gender roles and (2) a rejection of feminism. Within these discourses, the STOP-ERA movement and the Tradwife movement have created a set of frames which construct and sediment collective identity by identifying the ideological enemy, in presenting the 'we' as the prognostic cure to a diagnostic 'them'.

Diagnostic: Feminism

In the discursive construction of collective identity, in every text, feminism is presented as the diagnosis. Whereas the STOP-ERA movement explicitly positions the women's liberation movement as the 'ideological enemy', the Tradwife movement identifies a more ambiguous modern feminism and 'modern society'. This highlights the movement/ countermovement dynamic of these conservative movements in opposition to feminism. It also emphasises the importance of the 'relational dimension' within collective identity formation, which highlights the importance for movement actors to distinguish between themselves and their environment (Melucci, 1995, p. 47).

The Women's Liberation Movement

Within STOP-ERA discourses, the women's liberation movement is presented as a radical group who are a threat to traditional American values, culture and morality. There are several dimensions to the enemy. First, Schlafly outlines their ideological position. The feminists are referred to as 'lesbians' and 'pro-lesbian' (Text 2, 4, 8, see Appendix A). This demonstrates how chains of equivalence are created between the STOP-ERA movement and the anti-gay rights movement. Second, the women's liberation movement is linked to pornography. Schlafly refers to the feminists as having 'too big a stake in an alliance with pornographers' (Text 8), and she refers to the lesbian pamphlets as 'just as pornographic as the smut peddled by pornography' (Text 8).

Schlafly sediments the feminists as the ideological enemy by presenting them as a dangerous and radical threat to the traditional family as the basic unit of society (Text 1, 2, 3, 8, 9). She writes, 'their

motive is totally radical. They hate men, marriage and children. They are out to destroy morality and the family' (Text 1). The words 'totally radical' suggest extremism and a dangerous departure from traditional norms. The fact that they 'hate' and are out to 'destroy' the three traditional pillars of family and society emphasises that feminists are a fundamental threat to these values. This emphasises Schlafly's attempt to create broader ties with conservative Americans, through emphasising commonalities in Judeo-Christian beliefs surrounding morality. Through taping into ideals of the Christian Right surrounding sexuality and morality, which support a fixed, pre-determined sexual order (Dworkin, 1983), Schlafly aligns the feminist movement with sexual promiscuity. This exemplifies the wider pro-family movement as a 'unifying movement' that joined single-issue conservative campaigns related to abortion, the ERA, education, and gay rights, into a common defence of the traditional family (Spruill, 2017, p. 260). The framing processes of frame amplification and frame extension are evident here, as Schlafly interlinks the frame with existing values and beliefs and connects to concerns and issues deemed to be important to supporters (Benford and Snow, 2000).

As well as highlighting issues of morality, Schlafly presents the women's movement as the antithesis of traditional femininity, as depicted by Welter's (1966) analysis of True Womanhood. Feminists are described as, 'aggressive females on television talk shows yapping about how mistreated American women are' and 'sharp-tongued', 'high pitched whining unmarried women' (Text 2). The hyperbolic and derogatory adjectives such as 'aggressive' and 'high pitched' present them in a highly negative way that is the antithesis of traditional patterns of femininity that emphasise piety and submission. Highlighting their marital status as 'unmarried women' emphasises a failure to comply with traditional gender roles. This questions their legitimacy to speak on women's issues by presenting them as unrepresentative of the American nation in which marriage and motherhood are highly valued. Furthermore, feminists are referred to as an example of how 'a tiny minority can cram its views down the throats of the majority' (Text 7). Thus, this exemplifies how Schlafly questions and seeks to undermine the strong grassroots support of the feminist movement. Thus, Schlafly creates strict boundaries for the individuals who are *not* included in the STOP-ERA movement due to their ideals of femininity. Schlafly distinguishes the movement from 'Others' and presents feminists as a marginalised group and the 'constitutive outside' (Derrida, 1978; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

21st Century ‘Modern Society’

Whereas Schlafly explicitly constructs the feminist movement as the ideological enemy, figures in the Tradwife movement present a more ambiguous ‘modern, liberal society’ and feminism as the diagnosis. This emphasises one of the key distinctions between the goals of the two movements. Whereas the STOP-ERA movement had one clear goal of preventing the ratification of the ERA, figures in the Tradwife movement do not explicitly promote political views. Instead, they present a traditional lifestyle that is embedded with conservative political and religious discourses.

Estee Williams refers to 'a world full of chaos' in which Tradwives are choosing to 'become resilient' and 'rebel' against the chaos that is happening (Text 10). There is no explanation as to what 'chaos' Williams is referring to, adding a sense of ambiguity for her audience to come to their own conclusion. She states that by more women joining the Tradwife movement, 'order is being restored in a chaotic world' (Text 12). The words 'order' and 'restored' imply a return to stability and control, suggesting Williams advocates for a 'fixed, predetermined, social order' that is central to the Christian Right (Dworkin, 1983, p. 22). Creating a movement narrative by looking to the past highlights the importance of integrating the past to produce new definitions for collective identity (Melucci, 1996, p. 75).

Similarly, Mrs Midwest critiques modern society and feminism by constructing a clear distinction between traditional, moral women, and 'Gen Z western women' (Text 18). This is evident in the following quotes:

> *‘They have bought into misinformation floating around about the wage gap, sexism, and workplace inequalities’ (Text 17).*

> *’Our modern world has stripped wholesomeness from our lives and replaced it with vulgarity, artificial happiness, and competition’ (Text 18).*

The words 'bought into' and 'floating around', suggest that feminists are naïve and misled for believing issues central to contemporary feminism about the wage gap, sexism and workplace inequalities. Furthermore, the hyperbolic verb 'stripped', and the emotive adjectives used to describe the modern world such as 'tragedy', 'pain', 'corruption', and 'evil' (Text 18), emphasise a strong fear

of the loss of moral standards in society. The emotive language reflects how building a sense of emotional investment helps to form a sense of common unity (Melucci, 1996, p. 71).

Furthermore, by linking 'Gen Z women' to partying, overusing alcohol and drugs, and seeking 'mindless pleasure' (Text 18), a dichotomy is created between modern women and those who follow traditional lifestyles and gender roles. This highlights the importance of constructing *boundaries* in the process of collective identity (Taylor and Whittier, 1992), as cohesion is formed through 'common reference to something external' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 59).

Diagnostic: Injustice Frame – Socioeconomic Decline

In every text, the fear of feminism is paired with a fear of socioeconomic decline. This can be viewed as an injustice frame (Gamson et al, 1982), as white, middle-class, suburban women are presented as having their rights and protection taken away from them by the feminist movement which seeks to restructure society through gender equality.

Schlafly positions traditional gender roles and the patriarchal family as socioeconomically advantageous to women. She places high value on the 'financial responsibility incurred by the marriage contract' (Text 6) and points out that the 'laws of every one of the 50 states now require the husband to support his wife and children – and to provide a home for them to live' (Text 1). Schlafly presents these arrangements as being threatened by the ERA. The high value that Schlafly places on marriage links to Dworkin's (1983) critique of traditional patterns of femininity, in which she states that right-wing women view marriage as protection from 'the caste-like economic exploitation of the marketplace' (p. 231). By focusing on the socioeconomic implications of the ERA, Schlafly widens the scope of movement actors to include establishment Republicans who are concerned with the economic prosperity of the US. This reveals how conservative political discourses are embedded within Schlafly's discursive efforts to build collective identity, reflecting how orders of discourse are shaped by power relations in society (Fairclough, 2001, p. 17).

Within the Tradwife movement, discourses of Estee Williams and Mrs Midwest reinstate the socioeconomic value of the role of women as homemakers. Williams creates fear surrounding the 'chaos' of the modern world (Text 12) and encourages her audience to embrace ultra-traditional gender roles to combat this decline. Similarly, Mrs Midwest describes the 'vulgarity and debauchery' of the modern world which is polluting wholesome, traditional society and community (Text 18).

This demonstrates how Tradwives present a nostalgia that celebrates the prosperity of the post-war period in which the traditional, nuclear family was central to American society. The growth of the suburbs in the post-war period revealed the

> *'deeply domestic aspirations' that were rooted in the postwar success ethic (Tyler May, 1988, p. 175). Again, this demonstrates the importance of integrating the past to build collective identity (Melucci, 1996, p. 75).*

Prognostic

In all the sampled texts, the main prognosis was preserving or restoring traditional gender roles. In the STOP-ERA movement, Schlafly positions the institution of the family as the 'basic unit of society which is ingrained in the laws and customs of our Judeo-Christian society' (Text 2). Referring to the family as 'the basic unit of society' is loaded with cultural and ideological significance. By asserting the family as 'ingrained' in laws and customs, Schlafly legitimises social structures that uphold traditional family values and position them as central to the foundations of American society. The use of the possessive pronoun 'our' emphasises the construction of a group based on shared traditional values.

Schlafly advises the reader to write to US Senators and Congressmen to urge them to vote against the ERA (Text 1, 2, 3, 5). This demonstrates her power as the movement leader to encourage the members to engage in political action, emphasising discourse as a site where power is exercised and enacted (Fairclough, 2001, p. 36). Schlafly encourages her audience to vote NO-ERA to preserve traditional gender roles, which she argues provide the homemaker economic integrity and security. She states that the current laws 'protect a woman's right to be a full-time wife and mother' (Text 1), and the family 'gives a woman the physical, financial and emotional security of the home – for all her life' (Text 2). This aligns with Dworkin's (1983) critique of traditional femininity that right-wing women submit because they are offered 'the best economic security as the economic dependants of men who must provide' (p. 234). The protection of a woman's right to be a wife and mother links to the conformist discourse that dominated American society in the post-war era, which saw an upsurge in young Americans getting married, having children, and conforming to traditional gender roles (Tyler May, 1988). In this sense, the socioeconomic consensus of the nuclear family emerged as an emotional safeguard and traditional values were revived. Additionally, Schlafly celebrates the 'American free

enterprise system' (Text 2) for liberating women and bringing the nation prosperity, reflecting the Republican ideology of limits on taxation and non-essential government spending.

The Tradwife movement encourages embracing traditional gender roles and upholding the patriarchal family as a solution to the moral decline of modern society Estee Williams establishes the centrality of traditional gender roles for the Tradwife movement. This is evident in the quote:

> *The man, he is the provider, the main breadwinner and he goes out of the house and works. The woman, the wife, she is the homemaker, she takes care of the home, she takes care of herself, and she does the cooking and cleaning (Text 10).*

The clear separation of the roles of men and women emphasises the binary division of labour and female responsibility within the domestic sphere. When discussing further education, she encourages her audience to 'not feel like you need to become independent and live on your own' (Text 14) and instead focus on cultivating skills within the home. The use of the pronoun 'you' acts as a direct address to the audience, which can be seen as an attempt to remedy increasing impersonality within discourse (Fairclough, 2001, p. 106-107). This can be seen as a rejection of neoliberal feminism which places women 'not just as entrepreneurial subjects but also as individual enterprises' (Banet-Weiser et al, 2020, p. 8).

The TikTok is viewed by not just Williams' followers and supporters, but also by those who may not be knowledgeable about the Tradwife lifestyle. The wider audience of the Tradwife movement reflects the influence of open technologies which allow for personalised communication and a wider network of individuals to engage with (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013, p. 56). Thus, the TikTok can be viewed as a clear explanation and direction for how to follow traditional gender roles, an example of the power in discourse of powerful participants 'controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants' (Fairclough, 2001, p. 46).

Similarly, Mrs Midwest promotes strict gender roles. She writes, 'everyone pushes young women to be intense and to 'reach for the stars', but sometimes, it's okay to admit that our biggest dream is to be married' (Text 17). The verb 'pushes' suggests that there is a societal pressure placed on women to pursue ambitious careers. This highlights the movement's broader tensions with contemporary feminism, namely neoliberal feminism and post-feminism, as she positions the domestic sphere as the most important place for women. Thus, the frames deployed by women within conservative social

movements surrounding femininity are closely tied to political and religious conservative discourses which emphasise strict gender roles and the identity of women as wives and mothers.

Motivational

Motivational frames 'suggest not merely something that can be done, but that we do something' (Gamson, 1992, p. 7). Collective identity is formed through the construction of the 'we', which denotes the 'process through which a collective becomes a collective' (Melucci, 1996, p. 70). In this sense, differences can be 'combined together' or 'balanced out' to achieve a common identity underlying them all (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 113). In articulating a 'we', the STOP-ERA and Tradwife movement elevate the role of women as wives and mothers and emphasise traditional patterns of femininity as the core of their collective identity.

The Suburban Housewife

In every text, discourses of women construct a strong collective identity of the suburban housewife. Through the rhetoric of maternal instinct, movement discourses regulate 'an

entire system of cultural practices' which include 'the sexual division of labour' (Roberts, 2002, p. 151). As a devoted mother of six children who was married to a wealthy, Harvard-trained lawyer, Schlafly personified the ideal traditional woman. She states, 'homemaking is a great career for women' (Text 9) and 'most women want to be a wife, mother and homemaker – and are happy in that role' (Text 2). These lines imply that it is common and normative that women have a natural inclination for marriage and motherhood. The use of the dash creates a pause in the sentence to emphasise that women are in fact satisfied with their role within traditional gender ideals. In comparison to the women's liberation movement which Schlafly proclaims view 'the home as a prison, and the wife and mother as a slave' (Text 2), the STOP-ERA movement celebrates domestic roles for women.

Tradwives construct an idealised femininity that represents the pure nation, tradition and family (Tebaldi, 2023, p. 15). Williams states that 'women are proudly stating that they don't want a career, and they want to be a full-time wife and mother' (Text 12). The use of the present continuous tense in the words 'are proudly stating', emphasises that this is a clear and deliberate attempt by women, and it is a current and ongoing trend. Williams instructs her audience with tips on how to become a traditional wife, including encouraging them to 'learn to cook, clean and host to create a family-

centred environment' (Text 10) and to make the home 'his sanctuary' (Text 11). Whereas in Text 13, Williams does not refer to the Tradwife movement as a movement, in Text 12 which was posted a year later, she explains that she takes it back as now she can see that it is much more like a movement. This exemplifies that collective identity is an active process that is consolidated over time. Similarly, Huber tells her audience to 'stick to tradition, showcase your nurturing femininity, and sweet character' to ensure they will be a housewife in future (Text 17). This reflects how unity and cohesion are created amongst movement actors as they share common attributes (Melucci, 1996, p. 72).

Thus, the ‘suburban housewife’ is a socially constructed identity that is used as a frame to reaffirm traditional patterns of femininity and gender roles that are rooted in conservative political and religious discourses and ideologies. This closely relates to McRae’s (2018) assertion that 'everyday women' play an important role in conservative movements. As domestic ideals are so central to traditional American culture and society, the activism of conservative women largely goes unrecognised, as their identity is seen as passive, positive, and unthreatening.

Biblical Femininity

As well as emphasising the identity of women as suburban housewives, discourses also focus on biblical femininity as a means for constructing collective identity. In all the texts, notions of biblical femininity, which emphasise a woman’s pious, purity, submissiveness and nurturing nature, are celebrated. Schlafly positions Christian femininity at the centre of her vision of traditional womanhood. She celebrates the Christian Age of Chivalry for creating traditions that mean that women are 'put on a pedestal' (Text 2) and argues that women should fulfil their role as wives and mothers because 'it’s simply the way that God made us' (Text 2). This frame is significant as 98 percent of anti-ERA activists were members of a church (Burris, 1983, p. 309), emphasising its potential reach and influence.

Within the Tradwife movement, Huber encourages her audience to lean into their 'naturally feminine traits and instincts to further cultivate femininity' (Text 16). She states that through choosing to live in 'the moral way', women will live 'effective, successful and beautiful lives' (Text 16). The use of the word 'we' in the lines 'the best thing we can do as Christian women is to walk by faith and not by sight' and 'we must take our teachings on how to be a wife, mother, friend, and daughter, straight from the Word of God…' (Text 15), emphasises the attempt to consolidate the collective of Christian

women. Through celebrating the superior position that women hold within traditional gender roles, feminism, which seeks to reconstruct societal gender roles, is presented as inconceivable in a world rooted in Judeo-Christian values. Thus, this reflects how the frame creates broader ties with conservative religious rhetoric which seeks to reinstate the US as a Christian nation.

Gender Essentialism

Gender essentialism is another key motivational frame that is evident in every text. Gender essentialists argue that the differences between men and women are of 'an intrinsic nature, closely associated with physical, psychological, and/or spiritual differences' (Crompton and Lynoette, 2005, p. 601). The essentialist argument, consisting of restricting women to their procreative potential, 'stemmed from the precepts of the Church, which underlined God’s intervention in the arrangement of gender roles' (Ribieras, 2021, p. 40). This relates to the point that women of the Right had a 'deeply rooted ideological sensibility' that combined 'a faith in traditional values and divine moral authority' (Critchlow, 2005, p. 8). By projecting the STOP-ERA movement as protecting the US as a Christian nation, Schlafly mobilised large numbers of women who had not previously been engaged in political activism (Spruill, 2017, p. 75). This concurs with McRae’s (2018) observation of the importance of the participation of 'everyday women' in conservative women’s movements.

Within the STOP-ERA movement, the physical differences between men and women are utilised in the case built against the ERA. Schlafly argues that 'there are two basic differences between men and women' (Text 9) – women have babies and men don’t, and women do not have the same physical strength as men. This is particularly evident in the argument that the ERA would subject women to the military draft (Text 1, 2, 5, 7 and 9). This demonstrates how Schlafly engages with Judeo-Christian discourses to question the core of feminist ideology – women’s emancipation from patriarchy, to broader the coalition by aligning with conservative religious views.

Gender essentialist discourses are similarly used by Tradwives to build a strong collective identity by promoting traditional ideals of femininity. Williams promotes the idea that ‘'Tradwives believe they should submit to their husbands and serve their husbands and family' (Text 13). The verb 'submit' has connotations of Biblical submission. This trope is clearly reflected in Genesis (3:16) of the Bible - 'To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you' (King James

Bible, 1982, Gen 3:16). The feminine identity portrayed by the Tradwives once again links back to Welter’s (1966) depiction of True Womanhood, which positions Biblical submission as 'the most feminine virtue expected of women' (p. 158). Estee Williams encourages her audience to marry a 'healthy, protective, masculine, and faith-centred man who appreciates the divide of gender roles' (Text 10). Similarly, Mrs Midwest advises her audience to marry a man who is equally driven to follow strict gender roles, and that they should 'allow Him to Lead, Provide, and Protect' (Text 20). As the audience are likely to be religious and hold conservative values, the discourse acts to reaffirm their beliefs and appeals to their sense of traditional identity and cultural values.

Privilege

The privilege frame is evident in discourses of women in both the STOP-ERA movement and the Tradwife movement. The frame elevates and adds empowerment to the traditional, Christian vision of womanhood that is constructed. The use of the privilege frame surrounding motherhood and maternalism links to Naples’ (1998) concept of 'activist mothering', whereby the identity of motherhood is prioritised by women activists. Schlafly refers to the 'unique status' of women and argues that 'the American woman is the most privileged. We have the most rights and rewards, and the fewest duties' (Text 2). Here, the term 'American women' can be seen to create a cohesive group of white, middle-class, married women. This demonstrates how collective identity is constructed through the use of 'we', which creates a distinction between white, middle-class, religious, married STOP-ERA women and the rest of society.

Similarly, Estee Williams states that 'there is no higher calling than being a wife and a mother for a woman', and that 'being a wife and mother should be your top priority always' (Text 10). Here, Williams elevates traditional female roles to a divine and noble status, implying that women have a moral imperative to be wives and mothers. Mrs Midwest tells her audience that they will live 'effective, successful, and beautiful lives' (Text 16) if they cultivate their maternal instincts. Thus, the privilege frame reflects broader discourses of traditional gender roles, implicitly critiquing feminist ideals for women by elevating motherhood as the most valuable identity for women.

Personal Choice

Discourses of women in both movements present conforming to traditional gender roles as a *personal choice*. This exemplifies how tropes are borrowed from the feminist rhetoric of the women's liberation movement that states that women should have the freedom to choose whether they want to have a family or a career. Schlafly emphasises 'freedom of choice for women to be housewives' (Text 1). Similarly, Williams emphasises that being a Tradwife is a 'personal choice', that she does not 'bash any woman who wants a career' (Text 10), and that 'it is 2022 and women should have the choice to be homemakers or not without being judged' (Text 13). Disregarding the fact that many women need to work to financially support themselves and their families, the personal choice frame can be seen as a deliberate attempt to legitimise the strict gender roles promoted by both movements. This frame also highlights the transgression of Schlafly, Estee Williams and Mrs Midwest from their own ideological viewpoint that endorses female submission. These three prominent figures advocate that the most important career for a woman is to be a wife and mother, yet they have their own work outside of the home – Schlafly is a political activist, and the Tradwives are social media creators and influencers. Yet, through frames and discourse, they construct a strong collective identity for women that is centred on traditional, Christian values and ideals of femininity.

CONCLUSION

This paper sought to critically deconstruct the discursive framing strategies of women in the STOP-ERA movement and the Tradwife movement, to investigate how femininity is used as a strategic tool for building collective identity. As such, it hopes to add to the literature on the self-mediation of women in conservative social movements and the discursive construction of collective identity.

Through a mixed methodology of framing analysis and CDA, this paper has argued that the discourses of women in the STOP-ERA movement and Tradwife movement align with collective action frames of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational. Via CDA, two core discourses were revealed that were relevant throughout the collective action frames: (1) a promotion of traditional gender roles and (2) a rejection of feminism. Through aligning with broader conservative political and religious discourses that prioritise traditional gender roles and the patriarchal family, broader coalitions were created between other single-issue conservative movements.

Traditional ideals of femininity, that encapsulate the four cardinal values - 'piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity' (Welter, 1966, p. 152), were revealed as central to the construction of collective identity. Through the diagnosis frame, both movements present feminism and progressive society as a threat to traditional values, morals and the patriarchal family. A collective ‘we’ is constructed vis-à-vis the ‘constitutive outside’ and ‘them’, positioning feminists as the ideological enemy. Thus, upholding traditional gender roles is presented as the prognosis. To consolidate and elevate the collective identity of traditional, Christian womanhood and ideals of femininity, motivational frames are deployed to sediment and elevate the collective identity. The motivational frames of the suburban housewife and biblical femininity are of particular significance, as they sediment the wider discourses of traditional gender roles and anti-feminism. Evaluating the success of collective identity construction is beyond the scope of this paper, as it would require in-person research methods which were not possible with the time constraints as well as the historical context of the STOP-ERA movement.

These findings are consistent with previous literature which emphasises the significance of motherhood as a framing strategy used to create boundaries through emphasising differences. Furthermore, by comparing two movements, one in the pre-digital age and one in the digital age, these findings add to the debate surrounding collective identity in the digital age. The findings show that collective identity is extremely important for both movements. It is evident that figures in the Tradwife movement use similar framing and discursive strategies as the STOP-ERA movement, exemplifying the importance of integrating the past to produce new definitions for collective identity (Melucci, 1996, p. 75). This paper has focused on the self-mediation techniques of women activists, paying close attention to the discursive opportunity structure to explore how activists construct their collective identity. As the mediation opportunity structure shows, the mainstream media representation of protest is equally important for the success of social movements (Cammaerts, 2012). Therefore, it would be informative as a next step to conduct a discursive frame analysis on the movement’s representation in the mainstream media, to provide a rich point of comparison. Finally, this paper has analysed femininity within the discourses of women. In further research, conducting a visual discourse analysis would be particularly fruitful, as it would allow for an exploration into how women physically present their femininity in the construction of their collective identity.

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APPENDIX: ANNOTATED TEXTS (THE FIRST PAGE OF TEXT 2)

The Phyllis Schlafly Report

VOL. 5, NO. 7 | Box 618, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 | FEBRUARY, 1972

What's Wrong With "Equal Rights" for Women?

Privilege frame-motivational as it encourages women to view motherhood as a superior position.

Of all the classes of people who ever lived, the American woman is the most privileged. We have the most rights and rewards, and the fewest duties. Our unique status is the result of a fortunate combination of circumstances.

1. We have the immense good fortune to live in a civilization which respects the family as the basic unit of society. This respect is part and parcel of our laws and our customs. It is based on the fact of life -- which no legislation or agitation can erase -- that women have babies and men don't.

Broader conservative discourses of the nucleur family

If you don't like this fundamental difference, you will have to take up your complaint with God because He created us this way. The fact that women, not men, have babies is not the fault of selfish and domineering men, or of the establishment, or of any clique of conspirators who want to oppress women. It's simply the way God made us.

"Laws and customs" suggests Christian values are at the core of American society and culture.

Our Judeo-Christian civilization has developed the law and custom that, since women must bear the physical consequences of the sex act, men must be required to bear the *other* consequences and pay in other ways. These laws and customs decree that a man must carry his share by physical protection and financial support of his children and of the woman who bears his children, and also by a code of behavior which benefits and protects both the woman and the children.

The Greatest Achievement of Women's Rights

Conserative values of the nucleur family as representing the heart of American culture.

This is accomplished by the institution of the family. Our respect for the family as the basic unit of society, which is ingrained in the laws and customs of our Judeo-Christian civilization, is the greatest single achievement in the entire history of women's rights. It assures a woman the most precious and important right of all -- the right to keep her own baby and to be supported and protected in the enjoyment of watching her baby grow and develop.

The institution of the family is advantageous for women for many reasons. After all, what do we want out of life? To love and be loved? Mankind has not discovered a better nest for a lifetime of reciprocal love. A sense of achievement? A man may search 30 to 40 years for accomplishment in his profession. A woman can enjoy real achievement when she is young -- by having a baby. She can have the satisfaction of doing a job well -- and being recognized for it.

Links to Judeo-Christian ideals of traditional gender roles.

Do we want financial security? We are fortunate to have the great legacy of Moses, the Ten Commandments, especially this one: "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land." Children are a woman's best social security—her best guarantee of social benefits such as old age pension, unemployment compensation, workman's compensation, and sick leave. The family gives a woman the physical, financial and emotional security of the home—for all her life.

Broader conservative discourses of the family as the basic unit of society.

The Financial Benefits of Chivalry

2. The second reason why American women are a privileged group is that we are the beneficiaries of a tradition of special respect for women which dates from the Christian Age of Chivalry. The honor and respect paid to Mary, the Mother of Christ, resulted in all women, in effect, being put on a pedestal.

Privilege frame evident again.

This respect for women is not just the lip service that politicians pay 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 automobiles. Such good manners are merely the superficial evidences of a total attitude toward women which expresses itself in many more tangible ways, such as money.

Motherhood as a form of collective identity -- motivational frame.

In other civilizations, such as the African and the American Indian, the men strut around wearing feathers and beads and hunting and fishing (great sport for men!), while the women do all the hard, tiresome drudgery including the tilling of the soil (if any is done), the hewing of wood, the making of fires, the carrying of water, as well as the cooking, sewing and caring for babies.

"American way" "American husbands" - putting white, middle-class identity at the core of her beliefs

This is not the American way because we were lucky enough to inherit the traditions of the Age of Chivalry. In America, a man's first significant purchase is a diamond for his bride, and the largest financial investment of his life is a home for her to live in. American husbands work hours of overtime to buy a fur piece or other finery to keep their wives in fashion, and to pay premiums on their life insurance policies to provide for her comfort when she is a widow (benefits