EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT CONTROVERSY: TWO WORLDS IN CONFLICT

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TWENTY-FOUR words have triggered a debate in the United States between those who would persuade citizens to accept equality for women and those who desire to save traditional womanhood. The issue at stake is the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution, which was passed by Congress and is currently before the states for ratification. Three more states must approve the amendment by June 1982 if it is to become law. The refusal of many organizations to hold conventions in states that have not ratified the amendment and suits by Nevada and Missouri to end the convention boycotts illustrate the volatile nature of the issue and its impact on various segments of society.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Many rhetorical critics have attempted to understand the progress of the debate on the ERA through an argumentative perspective in which the various issues discussed in the controversy are examined—issues such as whether women will be drafted under the ERA, whether women actually face discrimination, and whether the ERA will nullify protective labor laws for women. But this argumentative approach does not explain the vehemence with which the debate is conducted and the emotional response elicited by the amendment, and it appears to ignore some rhetorical factors that affect the controversy and that perhaps are more significant than the arguments themselves. Blahna, who uses an argumentative analysis to examine the ERA, recognizes at the end of her study that nonargumentative factors do affect the debate and therefore need to be studied: "This history of the amendment's travel through Congress indicates that many factors other than the arguments played an important role in the amendment's progress. Except for a few years after the birth of the equal rights controversy these other factors outweighed the arguments in determining the fate of the amendment."1

One means of discovering and studying "these other factors" is through the perspective that the ERA involves a conflict between two world views that are created by the rhetoric generated by each side. That is, the discourse formulated and presented by proponents and opponents of the ERA may create perceptions that—whether they correspond to reality or not—are more influential than the arguments presented to the public. But the rationale for such a perspective lies not only in its focus on rhetorical elements beyond arguments. It also represents a rhetorical approach to the study of movements that has been

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called for by numerous rhetorical critics.  

A methodological approach for studying how rhetoric creates particular realities was suggested by Bormann and is based on the process of fantasizing that occurs in small groups. The concept of fantasy central to this approach is defined as the dramatization of a hypothetical or actual situation in the rhetoric generated by the group’s participants. A fantasy chain in a group is established when a participant communicates symbols that relate either to the group’s here-and-now problems or to the individual psychodynamics of the participants. Such communications—that cause the members of a group to empathize, to improvise on the same theme, or to respond emotionally—form fantasies that tend to be played out in a more and more complete way until they reflect the members’ common preoccupations and serve to make those commonalities public.

The concept of rhetorical vision, introduced by Bormann, extends the fantasy chain to the level of social movements. Rhetorical vision refers to the composite dramas which catch up large groups of people in a symbolic reality. Just as fantasy chains create a unique culture within a small group, so the fantasy themes of campaigns and movements chain out in public audiences to form rhetorical visions. When group 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 public audiences. The dramas of this public rhetoric draw in members of the audience, transporting them to the symbolic reality held by the smaller group. The audience members then take up the dramas in small groups of their acquaintances, and some of these dramas chain out as fantasy themes in the new groups. The process continues to reach a larger public audience until a rhetorical movement emerges.

If the rhetorical worlds or visions of the proponents and opponents of the ERA are to provide a clue to the essence or motivation inherent in the debate, the rhetoric produced by the two sides must be examined to determine the nature of their rhetorical worlds or, in Goffman’s term, their “frames” or ways in which they organize experience. A dramatistic approach will be used to examine these worlds, an approach which assumes, with Goffman, that the means speakers employ as they talk are intrinsically theatrical, that they undertake not so much to provide information to a recipient as to “present dramas to an audience.” Burke’s suggestion that a rounded statement about motives consists of an investigation of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose confirms the usefulness of the theatrical metaphor here since the attempt is to determine the nature and motivations of a rhetorical world with a particular setting in

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6 Ibid., p. 508.

which some action occurs, characters attempt to carry out the action, and other characters attempt to prevent its completion. This dramatistic approach is appropriate, too, for an examination of rhetorical worlds because both Burke and Bormann build their systems on a view of language and thought as primarily “modes of action.”

PROONENTS’ WORLD

Fundamental to the world that the proponents of the ERA have created through their rhetoric is a grassroots scene in which the common, undistinguished majority is supporting the ERA. References abound in the proponents’ rhetoric to “grass roots effort,” “grass roots education campaign,” and “grassroots people.” The grassroots scene is explained more fully in a publication of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs: “Because ERA will touch everyone, it is only natural that support for the Amendment is wide-ranging and comes from all segments of society.” This grassroots support for the ERA demands an accompanying tenet in the proponents’ world that demonstrates why this support is widespread: More people are realizing that women are excluded from full participation with men in the nation’s life. That is, many people are aware that women stand at, rather than within, the gates of the democracy.

Senator George McGovern sets such a scene: “The barrier that restricts a woman’s life is invisible, based on unspoken assumptions. It is like a glass wall.” The analogy of the closed door is prevalent in the proponents’ rhetoric, furthering this image: “An open society cannot close the doors of opportunity to half its citizens.”

If proponents view women as standing at the gates of democracy, they also hold a view of the nature of the world from which women are excluded. For the proponents, this world is the wide world of abundant opportunities outside of the home. Possibilities for women are limitless in this expanded sphere of experience. Gladys O’Donnell, president of the National Federation of Republican Women, explains: “We have expanded beyond the four walls and roof that once defined our province.” To support their view that woman’s place is in the outside world, proponents cite statistics about how much time women now spend outside of the home: “Today more than half of all women between 18 and 64 years of age are in the labor force, where they are making a substantial contribution to the Nation’s economy. Studies show that 9 out of 10 girls will work outside the home at some time in their lives.”

For the proponents, then, widespread support for the ERA results as more people come to believe that women are denied entrance to a limitless world that extends far beyond the confines of the

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8 Ibid., p. xxii.
home. The formulation of these scenes by the proponents enables them to establish sacred and profane spaces in their world. The sacred ground is the new, ready-to-be-explored world, a world which gives rise to the opening of gates to women and to grassroots support for participation in this world. The profane ground, of course, is the home, symbolic of entrapment and imprisonment. When reality for the proponents is created according to this system, the arguments employed by the proponents fall into place. Their arguments that women want to and should engage in all activities of the world, including military service for example, are consistent with the sacred setting of the world rather than the home.

Because they see women as excluded from a desirable world, the proponents build into their reality the notion that women are taking specific steps to gain entrance into this world. The proponents' rhetoric shows women struggling for their rights against discrimination, exemplified in a statement by Mary Jean Tully of the Legal Defense and Education Fund of the National Organization for Women: "But this is only one skirmish in a long war. The hard-fought gains which women have won for the right to control their own lives and for the chance to participate equally in American society are under attack from many directions. We must have the tools for this fight! ERA is one of them."17 According to this view, however, women are not content simply to struggle against injustice. They also are participating as much as possible in the world, often breaking sex-role stereotypes in the process by engaging in a wide variety of activities: "There has been a marked increase in the number of women seeking and getting credentials in previously all-male fields. Women . . . have departed from the traditional sex-related academic choices. A study of women political scientists in one region showed the younger women moving into more fields in the discipline and pursuing their careers ambitiously."18

The actions that the proponents see occurring in their world function to magnify the importance of the ERA controversy for the participants. The notion that women are struggling against discrimination enlarges the battle into a struggle of justice and equality against tyranny and oppression. When the proponents' cause thus is aligned with notions of justice and equality—democratic ideals—the participants can view themselves as sacrificing and working for a vital cause of freedom and liberty.

Characterizations of the types of people involved in the ERA battle—both the proponents and their opponents—are included in the world constructed by the proponents' rhetoric. The opponents are villains with a variety of negative traits. Primarily, they are persons or businesses in opposition to the ERA because its passage would harm their profits or influence. Proponents, for example, accuse Phyllis Schlafly, leader of the opposition, of receiving money from organizations such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Ku Klux Klan.19 They also charge that the insurance industry is a key funding source for the ERA opposition, since the ERA would prohibit insurance practices that discriminate against women and de-


crease insurance companies' profits. Schlafly often is accused of using the ERA simply to promote her own interests: "What is important to Phyllis Schlafly is the ERA, because she needs it for the national exposure she craves. Ever since she wrote her first book, she has needed national attention to feed her ego and ambition. For ten years she tried anti-communism and other ultra-conservative issues without much success."21

In addition to viewing their enemies as parties of self-motivated interests, proponents see them as right-wing radicals who are using the ERA as an organizing tool. Irwin Suall of B'nai Brith explains this theme: "The right is always looking for issues of this kind that have some popular appeal and that will bring them into contact with segments of opinion in the mainstream. Then, within that broad context, they try to press their own personal point of view on other issues. There is no doubt that the John Birch Society latched onto ERA because they sensed an issue they could exploit. . . . They saw it as an avenue to expand their influence."22

Those who oppose the ERA out of selfish interests are seen as oppressors. In this view, applied most often to male opponents, members of the opposition are tyrannical monsters who consciously and deliberately turn their backs on women and their rights. A statement by Florida state senator Lori Wilson exemplifies this characterization:

. . . the Good Ole Boys in the Southern legislatures traditionally do not consider people issues, like ERA, on their merit.

They consider only what it might do to their own manpower—their manliness, or their money.

The Good Ole Boys in Southern politics refused to give up their slaves . . . until the rest of the nation whipped them on the battlefields.

The Good Ole Boys refused to approve the 19th amendment, granting women the right to vote . . . until the rest of this nation whipped them in the courtrooms, and on the streets, and at the polls . . .

And now, on the last remaining issue of human rights, civil rights, people rights and equal rights, the Good Ole Boys are summoning all their remaining, but weakening power, for one last hurrah.

The Good Ole Boys are trying desperately to hold on to the power they have given each other, or taken from each other.23

Proponents often explain men's opposition to the ERA as the result of socialization processes. They believe that these men generally are not motivated by desires to be deliberately unjust or discriminatory. Rather, they always have enjoyed and have become accustomed to holding superior positions. Should women assume positions of equality, these men would feel threatened. Newspaper columnist Joan Beck presents such a picture of these male opponents: "Men who oppose E.R.A. aren't concerned about keeping women on pedestals—but in having women around to dust the pedestals they build for themselves. They want women in relationships dedicated to making them look good (cheerleader-football player, secretary-boss, homemaker wife-dominant husband, patient mistress-potent lover). The doll's house women who oppose E.R.A.—women who have yielded to the cultural brain-washing to be compliant and ego-massaging.

in every male-female relationship from bedroom to board room—provide just the excuse a male legislator needs to vote no.”

Intertwined with the theme that male opponents are insecure men who feel threatened by women is the more complimentary view that they are simply uninformed. Although these men presently oppose the ERA, they do so, this view suggests, because they are novices who are just starting down the road to an awareness of the rights that women deserve. This notion is exemplified in the rhetoric of Virginia V. Chanda of the National Organization for Women: “We believe that, while most of the opponents of ERA are sincere, they are sadly, even dangerously, misinformed.”

Jacqueline Gutwillig of the Citizen’s Advisory Council on the Status of Women agrees: “Men generally are not antiwomen—I say this hopefully—and may not consciously discriminate, but also may not be mindful of the effects on women of outmoded attitudes and pressures. The biggest obstacle to improvement in the status of women is lack of knowledge.”

Although proponents can excuse opponents for their lack of knowledge, they are less able to understand what they view as the opponents’ dirty and unfair campaign tactics. Columnist Ellen Goodman explains: “While the pro-ERA forces have been playing chess, their opposite numbers have been playing rugby.”

In this characterization of the opponents, the proponents return once more to their view of the opponents as villains with no understandable motive for opposing the amendment. They point to the opponents’ attempts to link the ERA with abortion as one example of this type of campaign tactic. They accuse the opponents of distorting facts, of accepting pro-ERA contributions with no intention of supporting the ERA, and of resorting to “shabby legislative maneuvers to keep the issue of equal rights for women from full legislative consideration.”

Although opposition to the ERA among women themselves often has been a source of surprise for many ERA proponents, they do include in their rhetoric the notion that the women who oppose the amendment are a middle-class, white minority. This characterization is negative not only because it excludes large populations of women, but also because of unfavorable characteristics associated with these types of women. They are totally dependent on their husbands for support and the fulfillment of their needs and thus have no idea of the nature of life for a woman who must work to survive. They are not representative of the majority of women: “Phyllis Schlafly is a most eloquent spokesperson for the middle-class, infantile, white woman. The many prerogatives that she lists as the right of the American woman when she marries are unknown to the poor, the black, and the chicano—many of whom expect to work after marriage and do not, realistically, expect such an uxorious husband.”

In an attempt to understand and explain opposition to the ERA among women,

27 Ellen Goodman, “The Name of the (ERA)
proponents label them an unaware minority.

The proponents’ views of themselves differ drastically from their views of the opponents. The qualities they ascribe to themselves are positive; thus, they become the heroes of their world. Primarily, they see women who support the ERA as capable contributors—talented and willing to participate in the formulation of solutions to the nation’s problems: “Half of the brightest people in our country—half of the most talented people with the potential for the highest intellectual endeavor are women.”

ERA supporters are viewed as representing all women, a label summarized in a statement by Ms. magazine editor Gloria Steinem: “I hope this committee [Senate Subcommittee hearings on the ERA] will hear the personal, daily injustices suffered by many women—professionals and day laborers, women housebound by welfare as well as by suburbia. . . . We may appear before you as white radicals or the middleaged middleglass or black soul sisters, but we are all sisters in fighting against . . . outdated myths.” In their unity, the proponents become the majority. A pamphlet published by the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, for example, focuses on the margin by which the ERA passed Congress as evidence of this majority support: “The Equal Rights Amendment passed the 92nd Congress by an overwhelming margin.” ERA practitioners assert that this majority is evident not only in Congress, but also among the people: “The Harris poll shows that 65% of the American people want the Amendment ratified. Only 27% actually oppose it.” Along with a portrayal of the opponents as actively seeking to prevent women from attaining their rights, then, the proponents develop images that portray themselves as worthy of such rights and as a united majority working toward their attainment.

Consistency in their characterizations is a problem for the proponents. They are unable to develop a cohesive view of their opponents because of their diverse statures and sexes. Because the opponents include Congressional senators and representatives as well as housewives, and men as well as women, the proponents cannot characterize the opponents with one label. As a result, a focus on character does little to unify the proponents’ own forces or to damage the public’s view of the opposition. Thus, when ERA supporters suggest that their opponents are middle-class white women, the theme cannot unify supporters who are aware of opposition to the ERA by men in status positions. Similarly, if proponents characterize opponents as males who feel threatened or who deliberately are oppressing women, the theme cannot be applied to female opponents who are housewives.

Two major dramas operate in the world of the proponents as a result of their rhetoric. In one drama, women stand at the gates of democracy and struggle against oppression to win the equal rights of the world to which they are denied access. In this scenario, the act is the struggle against oppression, the scene is the total physical and psychological environment of exclusion from democratic practices and equal treatment, and the characters include all women regardless of class. In this

30 Stimpson, p. 125.
31 Ibid., p. 105.
33 ERAmerica, 200 Years is Long Enough . . . For Your Rights to be Denied, Washington, D.C., n.d., p. 4.
drama, the scene—an oppressive, limiting, unequal state—determines and in fact almost creates the other elements of the world. The scene is fertile ground from which a struggle against oppression might arise and demands characters who will struggle for full equality.

In the second major drama developed in the world of the proponents, women are seen as capable contributors fully participating in the world to achieve self-fulfillment. In this drama, the act is full participation in activities and tasks, the scene is the world with its limitless opportunities, and the characters are capable contributors. Once again, the focus is on scene. The fact that the scene represents limitless and abundant activities as well as justice and knowledge requires that the characters live up to the fullness of the world and take advantage of its opportunities. A wide world in which to participate automatically allows for a wider degree of participation in that world. At the same time, the scene generates a particular type of character. Because the environment is viewed as the wide world, the personae must be capable of handling its possibilities and be able to contribute to that world in a meaningful way. This scene, then, demands competence from its participants.

OPPONENTS' WORLD

The world created by the rhetoric of the opponents of the ERA centers around the home and contrasts with the notion in the proponents' world that the domain of the ERA is not the home, but rather the world outside of it. Thomas G. Abernethy, Representative from Mississippi, provides an example of this scene in his statement that his wife instructed him to vote against the ERA "because she doesn't want to lose her home." Schlafly also contributes to the development of the home as a scene envisioned by the opponents: "The world has not devised . . . a better place to bring up children than the home. No more radical piece of legislation [than the ERA] could have been devised to force women outside of the home."

Women who remain in their proper sphere of the home and perform their wifely duties well are glorified by the opponents and are placed on pedestals. Statements that establish the pedestal as a scene in the world of the opponents include "I'll be darned if I appreciate a bunch of . . . malcontents badgering legislators into trading the lofty pedestal on which men have held me, and which I try to deserve, for mere equality!"

From the home and the pedestal settings, the opponents digress to predict a future world filled with horrors if the ERA is adopted. "Horrible places" encompasses this setting; in contrast to the seclusion and safety of the home and pedestal, it deals with the hardships and dangers to which women will be subjected under the ERA. The most common horrible place cited is the battlefield: There is the possibility that women could be drafted into military service under the ERA. Senator Sam J. Ervin, Jr., of North Carolina, provides an example of this scene. In Senate debate, he described a world in which women "will be slaughtered or maimed by the bayonets, the bombs, the bullets, the grenades, the mines, the napalm, the poison gas, or the shells of the enemy."

35 Thompson, p. 1.
In another version of this horrible places theme, women are shown in sweatshops and factories, driven to perilous labors on unending assembly lines and deprived of all protections. This scene develops in argumentation about the effect of the ERA on protective labor laws for women. Senator John C. Stennis, of Mississippi, for example, sets such a scene: "I have visited in countries where I saw gangs of women laborers out there in the street with pick and shovel, repairing the streets, with blacktop, hot, boiling, creosote material, laboring hour upon hour."38

Finally, opponents envision women in the desegregated public restroom as a result of the ERA. Bette Jean Jarboe, founder of the International Anti-Women’s Liberation League, focuses on this scene: "Do you know what kind of horrible things the loose wording of that amendment could produce? It could lead to such things as communal bathrooms."39

For the opponents, then, the sacred ground in their world is the home. As a result of the performance of women in the homemaker role, they are placed on pedestals and do not have to endure the horrors of the world as do men. Profane ground for the opponents, of course, is the man’s world outside of the home, including the battlefield and factories in which women work as hard and as long as men. The opponents’ reality depends on the home; thus, they employ tactics to oppose the ERA that can be engaged in while remaining in the home, including writing letters and baking pies to serve as symbols for their campaign.

The home and the pedestal are traditional settings for women; similarly, the opponents’ rhetoric creates a world in which actions are taken to preserve tradition. Opponents see themselves as attempting to maintain established and traditional social customs and institutions against the onslaught of reform. Newspaper columnist Patrick Buchanan, for example, asserts: "Yet, if embraced by 38 states, that innocuous-sounding amendment would trigger a social revolution in this country, sweeping away like so much debris state laws, local traditions, and national customs."40 ERA opponents specifically detail customs and institutions they are fighting to maintain: the family, marriage, financial support of women by men, chivalry, and religious practices that designate certain restricted roles for women.

Because the opponents assume that the old is better than the new and that tradition is a greater good than change, they include in their world the idea that the ERA is being passed hastily without sufficient consideration. Legislation such as the ERA, that would cause changes in the status quo, requires much more debate than the ERA is receiving, according to the opponents. This notion frequently appeared in the rhetoric of the opposition during congressional debate, as exemplified in the statement of William M. McCulloch, member of the House of Representatives from Ohio: "To adopt this constitutional amendment without adequate hearings and debate would raise more questions than it would answer, and would be a most irresponsible act by this great legislative body."41

When the ERA had passed in both houses of Congress, the idea of hasty

38 Ibid., p. 9318.
passage was applied to the passage of the ERA in individual states. Since the recision of ratification votes on the ERA in two states—Nebraska and Tennessee—opponents have delighted in pointing to the recisions as fulfillment of their warnings about passing the amendment too quickly. An editorial in the New Orleans Times-Picayune commented on Nebraska’s recision: “Symptomatic of the faddist approach to constitutional revision that many otherwise levelheaded lawmakers have taken, Nebraska ‘rushed the amendment through its unicameral legislature last March,’ notes The Associated Press, ‘in hopes of becoming the first state to approve the ERA.’ . . . This month the Nebraska legislature repented of that hasty action by a decisive 31-17 vote. . . . The Nebraska lesson could prove a pivotal influence for the rest of the states against a frivolous flip of the lid of that Pandora’s Box.”

As a result of the actions that they see themselves undertaking, the opponents are able to expand the world created by their rhetoric. For them, the battle against the ERA is not simply a battle against one particular amendment to the Constitution, but is instead a crucial battle in the war to save a great nation that is waver ing on the verge of destruction. Both of the opponents’ action themes contribute to this intensified view of the controversy since they show the opponents working to defend an old, superior tradition and trying to prevent the disastrous consequences that would result should this tradition be disregarded. In addition, the attempt to prevent hasty passage of the ERA is particularly effective in terms of its capacity for preventing the opponents from being viewed as anti-democratic. By maintain-

ing that the ERA is being passed without sufficient consideration, opponents can argue against the ERA without appearing to be opposed to the basic ideas of equality and justice.

The characters who act in the world created by the opposition are consistent with the opponents’ view of the traditional as good and the new or different as potentially evil. Opponents see supporters of the ERA, who deviate from the traditional woman’s role, as “libbers” who support the feminist movement. They often suggest that anyone who supports the ERA is a libber, as Schlafly does when she urges, “Don’t you boys give in to those libbers.”

Opponents ascribe a variety of negative characteristics to libbers. Proponents are portrayed as “straggly-haired” people engaged in “bra-burning and other freak antics,” “scolding, marching.” Some opponents accuse advocates of being masculine and homosexual. Others believe that they have personal problems that cause them to agitate for the ERA, although few of the opponents agree on the exact nature of these problems. Joyce Gage, an opponent from Illinois, wonders, “Why must nonfeminists suffer because some loud-mouth females wish they were born male?” Other opponents, feeling that housework must be frustrating these women, call them a “bunch of disgruntled eccentrics with a phobia about


46 Elsielee Trope, “But Women Are the Favored Sex,” Reader’s Digest, May 1972, p. 82.

dishpan hands.”48 Regardless of the nature of the problem ascribed to them, proponents are viewed by opponents as deviates from the traditional feminine woman.

According to the opponents, supporters of the ERA are different from the majority of women in yet another way: They are executive and professional women insensitive to the needs of housewives or factory workers. Emanuel Cellar of New York developed this theme in debate in the House of Representatives: “Some feminists casually say—We do not want protection, we want liberation. Will you tell that to the female factory worker and to the female farm-worker and get their reply?”49

Finally, ERA opponents portray supporters as proponents of un-American ideals. This theme generally begins with the idea that ERA supporters are against marriage, motherhood, and children—elements held by opponents to be essential ingredients of the American way of life. Schlafly, for instance, asserts that advocates are “antichildren, antimen and antifamily.”50 She elaborates on the connection between the ERA and un-American ideals: “Women’s libbers are promoting free sex instead of the ‘slavery of marriage.’ . . . They are promoting abortions instead of families.”51

A variation of the image of ERA advocates as un-American is the association of the ERA with Communism. Despite the fact that the Communist Party of the United States opposes the ERA, many opponents claim that the amend-

48 Thrope, p. 82.
52 Ibid., p. 50.
able to take care of themselves."\textsuperscript{54} Intertwined with the opponents' view of themselves as homemakers who have had little experience in the outside world, then, is the view of themselves as incapable of autonomy and independence outside of the home. The possible negative effects of the incorporation of this self-denigrating theme in the opponents' world is mitigated by the strength of their descriptions of the proponents as abnormal and almost evil—feminist, deviant, and un-American.

As wives and mothers who prefer to remain in the home, the opponents see themselves representing the majority of women. Schlafly claims that opponents represent "about 95 per cent of Illinois voters,"\textsuperscript{55} and Happiness of Womanhood claims to represent 97 percent of American women—"all those not represented by Women's Lib."\textsuperscript{56} The opponents become, as a \textit{New Orleans Times-Picayune} editorial points out, a "Silent Majority."\textsuperscript{57}

Opponents have the advantage over the supporters of the ERA in that all of their character themes unite around the common persona of the ERA supporter as a deviate of some type. Proponents are radical, militant libbers (rather than feminine women); professional and executive women (rather than wives and mothers); masculine, aggressive women with personal problems (rather than feminine women who are content with their roles); and represent un-American values such as Communism and a hatred of children (rather than freedom and a love of children). Although men also are ERA supporters, opponents can dismiss their support for the amendment by further continuing the characterization: They, too, are deviates because they do not prefer feminine, protected females as their mothers, girl friends, wives, or daughters. This singular characterization of ERA supporters can not only unify opponents, but can also effectively discourage legislators and members of the public audience from joining the supporters. For when ERA proponents and those who join them are labeled weird or abnormal, the focus of the conflict shifts so that the supporters must defend themselves as legitimate persons rather than concentrate on issues directly relevant to the battle over the ERA.

The world of the opponents, however, includes one major inconsistency in the development of its characterizations. Schlafly, the leader of the opponents, is not herself a true representative of the woman that ERA opponents claim women are and should be. Although she dresses and acts like the opponents' "lady," is married, and has six children, her activities are not limited to those of a homemaker. She worked her way through college as a gunner and ballistics technician at an ammunition plant and graduated from Radcliffe with a master's degree in political science. She co-authored four books, ran unsuccessfully for Congress three times, started her own newspaper, and founded a conservative women's group called The Eagles Are Flying. She admits the inconsistency between her actual activities and her image and explains: "It's obvious that I'm fully liberated. And that irritates some people. . . . If a woman can work and still make her husband think he's the greatest . . . and be able to keep

the kids happy, then it's OK. It's fine. But I believe the most fulfilling role for a woman is that of wife and mother."58

Although some proponents do not find this explanation of the inconsistency totally satisfactory, opponents can incorporate Schlafly's image and activities into their characterization of themselves by viewing her as a martyr. She is sacrificing herself and the fulfillment she could receive from the traditional female role to fight to preserve this type of womanhood for other women: "We are busy with our homes and families, but she has taken her time and efforts and given us a voice."59

The opponents, like the proponents, develop two major dramas in their rhetorical world, but each one is motivated by a different element. The opponents' major scenario is one in which individuals seek to defend tradition in order to maintain the lifestyle they now enjoy. The women remain in the home, dependent on men for support; thus, they deserve positions on pedestals. In this drama, the act is the defense of tradition, the scene is the home and the pedestal, and the characters are dependent, real women. The primary motivating force in this drama appears to come from the nature of the characters involved. The women participating are seen as dependent, helpless, weak, and centered in the home. Thus, they must act to ensure that they be allowed to remain in the home, leading lives that are consistent with the traditional feminine nature.

In their second drama, the opponents attempt to keep the ERA from being passed hastily in order to prevent catastrophic consequences. In this drama, the act becomes the blocking of the hasty passage of the ERA, the scene is the composite of horrible places in which women could find themselves under the ERA, and the characters are individuals who believe in traditional womanhood. In this drama, the focus is on the act itself. In the very act of blocking the passage of the ERA, the consequences of passage must be considered. This process leads to an envisioning of horrible scenes in which women may be involved if the ERA is adopted.

**Conclusion**

Different elements motivate the proponents and opponents to create their particular worlds. For the proponents, the scene is of primary importance as the persons, events, and ideas that exist in the characters' environment combine to create a scene of oppression. The opponents, however, depend on the agent, or a particular view of women, as their primary motivation. From the debate on the ERA, then, emerges a conflict in motivation between oppressive conditions and a particular view of womanhood.

The differences between the motives of the two sides can be seen further in the philosophical distinctions implied by the two motives.60 For the proponents, with scene as a primary motivation, the corresponding philosophic terminology is materialism,61 in which the physical universe or the natural order is the context in which concepts are formed. Proponents see the natural order as a free state in which all people are able to develop fully their own potentials.

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60 Burke, p. 128.
61 Materialism is the philosophic system that regards all facts and reality as explainable in terms of matter and motion or physical laws. It is represented by philosophers such as Hobbes, Spencer, and Marx.
uninhibited by synthetic restraints. But some kind of social organization is needed to maintain harmony and prevent chaos. Proponents acknowledge this fact by willingly participating in the social and political systems, but they urge that these be changed to accord with the ideal natural order.

In their emphasis upon the agent, the opponents adhere to the framework of idealism. This terminology establishes two major demands on the opponents. First, because the universal essence is defined as personal—composed of the same stuff as the self—opponents attribute to the world their own particular view of reality. Because they view the essential role of woman as wife, mother, and homemaker, they must extend this individual perception to the larger world and all women, believing that this role is the natural and proper one for them. The concept of agent or woman thus is universalized. As Burke explains: "We can say that such a way of seeing is not the property of just your understanding or my understanding but of 'the understanding' in general." Second, because the individual is viewed as a part and not the whole of reality, opponents view each individual as entitled to a proper share or portion of the universe. To dispute or complain about the portion one has been given is to refuse to conform to the ways of the cosmos, which operates for the welfare of the whole. A particular role for women, the opponents believe, best enables all individuals within the society to operate in harmony, and the limitations imposed on individuals merely maintain an order that is consistent with reality.

Horror at an oppressive scene and a glorification of the nature of woman serve functions other than to motivate each side in the controversy. These motivating forces are used as a rationale to keep the participants of each group from being influenced by or being forced to pay attention to the arguments and themes presented by its opposition. By focusing on the scene, the proponents deflect attention from the criticism of personal motives on their part. Because they derive their acts and attitudes from the nature of the situation rather than from the agents, they can ignore the criticism by the opponents that they are unfeminine, that they do not measure up to the criteria established by society for acceptable behavior by women, and that they are deviant and abnormal. Similarly, by situating the motives for their acts in the agent, the opponents can deflect attention from scenic matters—from the conditions of unequal treatment and oppression of women—and can focus their attention on the nature of womanhood alone.

The creation of two conflicting rhetorical worlds by the proponents and opponents of the ERA leaves little or no common ground on which argumentation can occur or through which an understanding of the opposing viewpoint can be reached. Each side's rhetoric is not only a threat to the other's way of making sense of the world, but also is a reason to defend strongly their particular world. Once the two sides in a controversy have developed worlds that are in total conflict—with different notions of the settings, characters, and acts in these worlds—the traditional modes of argumentation and persuasion are not likely to be effective in dissuading participants from their worlds.

62 Idealism is the philosophic system that views the mind or spirit as each person experiences it as fundamentally real. The totality of the universe is believed to be mind or spirit in its essence. Kant, Hegel, and Berkeley are regarded as idealistic philosophers.

63 Burke, p. 187.